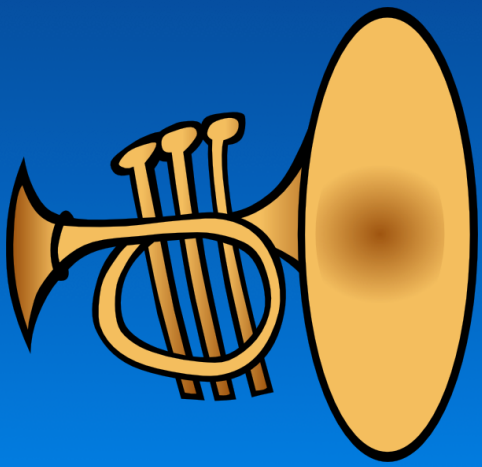
Trumpeting 4 Fun



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Introduction

This book hopes to unlock some of the mysteries of trumpet playing for prospective players, their parents, and also teachers of recreational players.

Chapters 1 - 4. Basic information on acoustics and how the situation of the recreational player differs from that of the student professional.

Chapters 5 - 8. First principles of playing

Chapters 9 - 14. Continuing lessons, dealing with difficult musical passages and difficult students.

Chapters 15 - 18. Accepting our limitations, playing musically rather than robotically.

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1. Explaining Brass Instruments

Brass instruments are members of the Aerophone family. Wikipedia tells us:

> *An **aerophone** is a musical instrument that produces sound primarily by causing a body of air to vibrate, without the use of strings or membranes, and without the vibration of the instrument itself adding considerably to the sound.*

Brass instruments consist of a length of tubing. One end of the tube goes on the player's lips (the mouthpiece), the other end is flared out (the bell). The player activates the body of air inside the tubing so that it vibrates in resonance with the tubing length. The longer the length of tubing, the lower the note. This is why a tuba produces lower notes than a trumpet.

Here is a list of brass instruments in order of tubing length.

Piccolo Trumpet	28 inches
Bb Trumpet	56 inches
Trombone/Baritone Horn	112 inches
French Horn	168 inches
Bb Tuba	224 inches

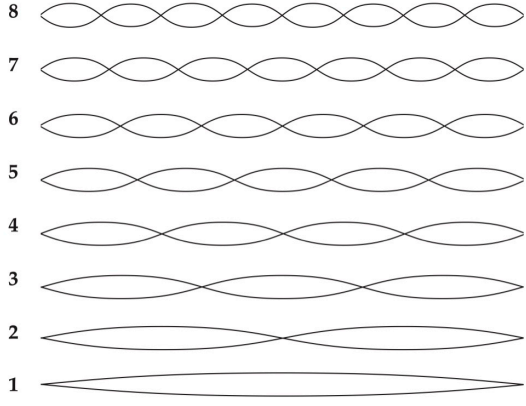
Brass instruments are descending instruments. They have a basic note dependent on their tubing length (more on this in later articles). Then, by adding extra lengths of tubing they are able to play down the scale. These extra lengths of tubing are added by either extending telescopic tubes (like a trombone) or adding fixed lengths of tubing by way of switches (valves).

Most brass instruments are made from one, or a mixture, of the common brass alloys; bronze, red brass, yellow brass, white brass (nickel silver). After the instrument is manufactured, it is polished and then either left uncoated, coated with lacquer, or electroplated in nickel, silver, or gold.

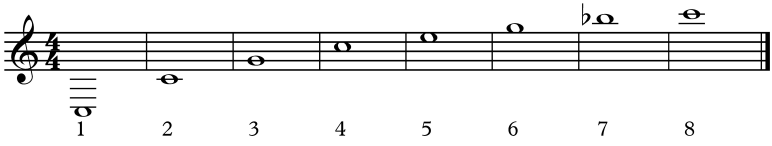
2. The Notes

The frequencies that the tubing will resonate at are determined by the Harmonic Series. The lowest one (the Fundamental or 1st Harmonic) is the note whose wavelength is double the length of the instrument's tubing.

This illustration shows the modes of resonance up to the eighth harmonic.



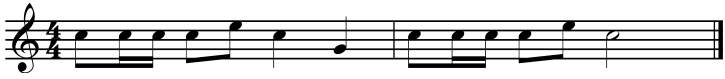
Here are the notes (based on a fundamental of C) that these modes of resonance represent.These notes are the only notes available to the Bugle and other non-valved “Natural” brass instruments.



The 1st harmonic is not usable on Trumpet. The first note for a beginner will normally be either the 2nd or 3rd harmonic. Recreational players will be satisfied with playing up to the 8th harmonic C. Skilled players will play up to the 12th harmonic G. Maynard Ferguson often played to the 16th harmonic C. The French Horn regularly plays up to its 16th harmonic.

3. More Notes

The notes of the Harmonic series are fine for bugle calls and trumpet calls:

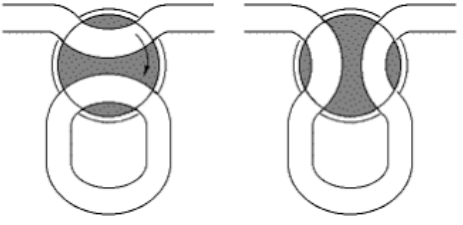


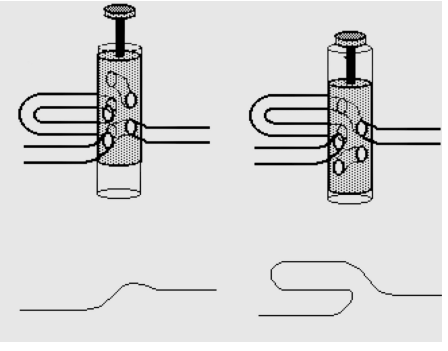
However playing melody requires access to all the notes in between. For this we need to find ways of playing the additional notes to fill in the gap between the Harmonics. Brass instruments create lower pitches by adding additional lengths of tubing.

If we consider the gap from Harmonic 2 to Harmonic 3 we notice that we need 7 half steps to play all the notes between these. (Harmonic 1 is not usable on the trumpet although it is usable on the larger brass instruments.)

The basic design of the modern brass instrument adds three different loops of tubing: half step, whole

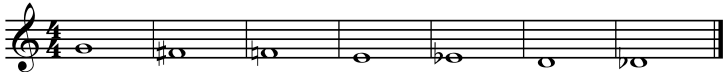
step, and one and a half steps. The loops are switched in and out by valves.





These valves, which are operated by the player's fingers, are employed singly, or together, to give all the

musical intervals from a minor second to an augmented fourth (seven half steps lower); a full chromatic scale between Harmonic 2 and Harmonic 3.



Lower brass instruments are often fitted with four or more valves to gain access to the full octave between Harmonic 1 and Harmonic 2. The trombone has a telescoping slide with infinitely variable additional lengths from zero to augmented fourth.

The additional length can be applied to each harmonic; when a player changes from one harmonic to another there is a discernible "pop" as the mode of resonance changes.

4. Recreational Players

There are several differences between the situation of the recreational player and that of the student professional.

One major difference is the availability of time to practice. A recreational player may have 10 - 30 minutes playing time each day, whereas the student professional should be devoting several hours each day for practice. Indeed, the recreational player cannot afford to spend an hour on a warm-up!

Also the recreational player will have different expectations as far as repertoire to those of the student professional. This allows us to adopt quite different strategies for the recreational player, and we can develop two quite different streams of pedagogy:

The traditional stream is the Achievement Model – in which the teacher sets a predetermined course of studies. This Achievement Model is what is most often taught around the world in Conservatoires and other formal settings. Because it aims for very specific results from a limited, and often prescribed, range of study materials, it is more straightforward (but certainly not easier) to teach. Unfortunately it is quite possible for the Achievement Model pupil to fail.

Teaching recreational players requires a quite different strategy which we shall call the Recreational Model. The Recreational Model calls for the student to drive the lesson (with considerable input from the teacher). This model requires a deeper understanding of music and repertoire by the teacher, and thus can be a much more demanding method to teach. However, the Recreational student cannot fail.

Failure may be well and good for the student professional. After all, they will probably get a lot of setbacks from failed auditions and the like. So they need to get used to feeling bad. But the recreational player does not need this.

Instead of having students focus on what they can't play, the teacher of the recreational player should work with what they can play. Let them play music. Of course any issues arising from the music they want to play can be dealt with by working through selected studies, although I prefer to stay with the music and help students work through these difficulties by systematically addressing the fundamentals such as singing, slowing down, and fingering. Above all, please remember that your ultimate goal as a teacher is to enable your students to: PLAY THE MUSIC!

5. Basic Skills

Here are the only instructions necessary to play the trumpet or any other brass instrument.

Breathe - Lips Together - Blow

When helping both beginner and advanced students to overcome difficulties in their playing, these are often the only issues that need to be addressed. Let us consider them one by one:

Breathe

I'm sure that everybody believes that they are able to breathe. We are alive, aren't we? But do this simple check. While monitoring your breathing (standing up) bend slightly forward, then bend slightly back. Notice how much easier it is to breathe when you are forward than when you are back.

Now repeat the same process, this time starting off by exhaling completely. Avoid gulping in huge amounts of air; this is not necessary. Just breathe in and out.

Lips Together

The letter "M" is crucial. I suggest players silently say the syllable "Ome" (as in home), or "Mum", or "Dim". This gives them a good example of having their lips together. They should avoid letting go of this lip-setting until the mouthpiece is firmly settled on their lips.

Blow

Strange to say, many people have difficulty blowing. They do a lot of work, you can see them working very hard. But they are often working against themselves, doing the Valsalva Maneuver (like straining themselves hard inside to go red in the face). I liken this to the isometric exercises that body builders have used, pushing one muscle in their body against another, to develop muscle tone.

So, for blowing we must remind ourselves of what the experience feels like. Blow out through your lips as

if you are to blow out a candle. Blow the spitball (described later in this book). And then work towards recreating the same sensation as you blow through your instrument. At this time do not tongue or spit the notes, just blow or huff them. Play the notes as a group, join them together, slur them. It is very important to maintain the feeling of a constant gentle airstream. Unfortunately, early introduction of tonguing can cause playing difficulties: not only does tonguing often encourage the student to close the back of their throat - "Tick, Tick, Tick" instead of "Ti, Ti, Ti", but also the explosion from a tongued note can open up the lips rather than letting them remain firmly together.

6. Breathing is Binary

Just like in digital circuitry, breathing has two states: inhalation and exhalation – In and Out.

There is often lot of discussion on breathing technique for musicians and athletes, but this discussion and teaching inevitably concentrates on inhaling, and managing the ensuing exhalation. Concepts like "support the airstream" and "follow through with the air" address the situation of already having inhaled. But what about the preparation for this first breath?

Do this and see if it helps....

Add an action to just before you start your current mental/breathing preparation to your task whether it is singing, running or whatever:

Before you breathe for this, blow out all the (stale) air in your lungs. Then proceed with breathing in and playing etc. Hopefully the start of your note will coincide with the apogee of the in-breath, there should be no delay or holding the breath before you start.

REMEMBER, BREATHE OUT FIRST.

7. Spitball

The best exercise I know for helping students experience the ease of playing trumpet is to take a drinking straw, hold it between their lips —not teeth — and blow out feeling themselves collapsing like a balloon. Blow as if blowing a spitball at the teacher.

Then transfer this sensation to playing something simple like my warmup called "Reflections." Concentrate on the air, not the note. Let the note sound or not sound depending on how easily the air moves. Do not stop to correct missed notes.

8. Your First (and Only) Lesson

Remember the advertisements:

"Learn to Play the ..... in Three Easy Lessons?"

Well, this is "Learn to Play the Trumpet in One Easy Lesson!"

The first thing you need to do is to make yourself comfortable with blowing out freely. I suggest that you yawn a few times and try to notice where the cold air is hitting the back of your throat. Then see if you are able to move that spot downwards, i.e. have the cold air hitting further down your throat.

It may seem obvious, but always remember to breathe out before you breathe in! When you inhale,

imagine that the air is coming into your body and filling up right from the ground.

Then take a sheet of paper and hold it at the top at arm's length in front of your mouth. Blow towards it to move the bottom of the paper forward. Repeat this a few times.

Perform the spitball exercise mentioned earlier.

You now need advice and a physical demonstration of the appropriate way to hold your trumpet.

Put your mouthpiece into your trumpet, remove the main tuning slide, and, with your lips around the thinnest part of the mouthpiece (cup inside your mouth), blow through the tube. Notice that there is a little more resistance to your blowing.

Next you are going to play a note (still with the tuning slide removed). Try a few times breathing in, holding your lips together as if you are saying “OME” then blowing through your lips. Now do the same, putting the mouthpiece on the outside of your lips. A sound will come rather like the sound of a sick cow. Play this note a few times and then start experimenting with different blowing speeds.

You will notice that when you blow faster the pitch goes higher, when you blow slower the pitch goes lower. This is the basis of all brass playing.

Now put your main tuning slide back in, blow a spitball (or two) through the complete trumpet, and then play your trumpet note. You have now started to play the trumpet.

It is possible to play several notes with the same valves depressed. To choose which one will sound, you decide how fast you will blow the air. The notes in between are played by changing which valves are depressed. These valves alter the total tubing length, rather like the extending of a trombone slide.

Here is a suggestion that has helped some students. Beginners often struggle with attaining a decent range. I am not talking double high anything, I am referring to the difficulty in achieving the (trumpet) D and E at the top of the staff, and so on. When I suggest that they imagine that they are whistling as they play, the higher notes come out much stronger and with much less effort. Their tongue arch is being employed.

The simple analogy: big instrument for bass sounds, and small instrument for treble sounds holds true (compare the size of the piccolo with the size of the double bass). To lower the note we add length, and we shorten the tube for high notes. To learn which valves to depress for particular notes, you only need to consult a fingering chart.

I spend some time helping students to find their most effective way of relaxed breathing, and showing them how to hold their instrument. Also we may discuss different ways of starting and ending notes. But there is nothing else required to know before you are able to start playing tunes appropriate to your level. The more you play, the more your expertise increases.

Now, off you go and enjoy your playing!

9. Continuing Lessons

We need to be very clear about why we are playing the trumpet. We are certainly not striving to be the next Maurice André, Maynard Ferguson or Miles Davis. The world is full of those who had such aspirations but did not pass the exam or audition or agent interview. Or they were regarded as not a worthy social or drinking companion by their peers.

We are playing the trumpet as an active meditation, to improve the quality of our and others' lives. Does this require us to be able to play the "double high C" or to rip off the "Flight of the Bumble Bee"? Of course not! In fact, we only need to be able to play one note.

Playing this one note can have very powerful meditative qualities and this playing is to be highly encouraged. There is also great benefit in playing more than one note, especially in the playing of American

popular music from the first half of the twentieth century. So let us aim towards playing this music on our trumpets. We will thus require a playing range of about one and a half octaves, as this is more than adequate for those songs which were written to be sung by ordinary people around the home. One and a half octaves is a fairly comfortable singing range for most untrained singers, which, after all, is what ordinary people are.

I can give all the information required to play the trumpet to this level in one lesson! Breathing, Posture, Lips Together, Air Velocity, Fingers. In fact this is the only information required for all levels of trumpet playing. The trumpet is a very simple instrument to play. Learning it is not like, for example, learning mathematics. In mathematics you learn about addition before you address multiplication. With the trumpet, one lesson can set you up with everything you need to know about playing the trumpet. There is no difference in playing technique between playing an "E" and playing an "F". Or in playing any other note. The principles are always the same. And in fact are the same ones as are needed for playing that "double high C" and the "Flight of the Bumble Bee".

So what on earth should I do with students who attend their lessons week after week, month after month, year after year? And what of the other teachers doing the same? Are we all charlatans? Please have some sympathy for us, then, for ours would be a very boring job, wouldn't it? We would be like the most disadvantaged of process workers, but working in the field to which our love of music initially drew us. If we did not already hate music by the time we started teaching, this senseless repetition would certainly guarantee that we soon would.

Of course, the information needs to be repeated. And repeated. And re-phrased. And new examples need to be given. And different mental images need to be evoked. But can't this be done by students themselves?

Are they not able to write these instructions on a sign and hang it on the wall? For looking at posture, you only need a couple of mirrors.

The teacher is there to encourage and inspire. To have the student believe, "Wow, my trumpet can sound like that". Sure, there are times when the basic message needs to be reinforced. But to give life to the student's

playing, to have the student's self-worth raised at every lesson, for the student to really want to play his trumpet — this is the true role of the trumpet teacher.

10. Method Books

If you have a good look through any of the starter tutor books available for trumpet, you will notice that the actual information contained in these that actually applies to the technique of playing the trumpet fits on about two pages. The rest of the book is taken up with instructions on reading the sheet music. And they are full of mindless exercises and scales.

No matter how much we try to kid ourselves, nobody likes playing scales and exercises. Even when I put together a book with my minimalist first lesson page, and used one particular exercise of mine called "Reflections", which had words so that it could be sung, students reacted negatively to it. They did not really believe that my contrived set of words to this exercise was a piece of music. They were not fooled!

They realized it was an exercise designed to have them "play better."

When the student looks through tutor books and starts playing the exercises, they are immediately thinking of "playing better" and "my teacher expects me to get it right." This self-judgment and compulsive rectitude makes it almost impossible for the student to retain their love of music.

Even if there are a lot of very helpful tunes in the method book, the fact that it is essentially an instructional publication inhibits its benefits. Students believe that each tune is put in the book solely for pedagogy . Whilst it is undeniably essential for the student professional to have worked through all the available method books and studies, striving to gain the appropriate muscle memory, the recreational player need not do this.

Technical exercises consist of technically difficult passages being repeated in various permutations. They have no musical merit, and are purely for mindless repetition. Over the course of the last two centuries,

teachers have isolated some of these challenging sections and created various combinations and permutations in key, speed, interval etc in order to have the student focus on that particular technique. By design, these are not immediately playable by the student. If they were, they would not need to be set! What is the obvious result of directing a player to play something beyond their abilities? THEY FEEL BAD!

This may be well and good for the student professional. After all, they will probably get a lot of setbacks from failed auditions and the like. So they need to get used to feeling bad. But the recreational player does not need this. Our experience is that an instrumentalist may find technically challenging sections in written pieces of (normal) music; working through these pieces is all that is required for them to develop appropriate skills.

It would be better to have our instructions in a separate self-contained booklet, and then offer a collection of attractive pieces which students will enjoy playing.

11. Buzz System

For as long as I have been playing brass instruments and for longer than that, there has been the argument between the "Buzz System" exponents and their detractors.

The "Buzz System" stipulates that the player must buzz the notes and the instruments amplify them, rather like a sound source being coupled with an amplifying speaker. These "buzz people" spend hours buzzing tunes with their lips or onto the mouthpiece.

The "non-buzzers" point out that when you play the regular note on the instrument and then take the instrument away, leaving the mouthpiece on your lips there is no sound until the instrument is re-attached to the mouthpiece and the initial note sounds again.

Both sets of players normally answer that they do not particularly feel their lips vibrating when they play.

Let's question both beliefs. Are the "buzzers" able to buzz their entire playing range from lowest note to highest note? The answer is typically "no". Are the "non-buzzers" able to remember the tingling feeling in their lips the first times that they played a brass instrument? Normally "yes."

Doesn't this imply that the "buzzers" themselves do not buzz, but the "non-buzzers" (and of course the "buzzers") can recollect a buzzing feeling in their initial playing moments? So what is really happening?

Do the following experiment:

Whilst playing an easy middle or low range note, hold a piece of paper over the bell. See and feel how it vibrates. Scientists describe this as "Sympathetic Vibration."

The air inside the trumpet is vibrating, and is able to give this vibrating force to anything it encounters. For example the trumpet can set a snare drum or a guitar ringing.

If the air vibrating can make something at one end vibrate in sympathy, surely it can do the same to the other end. It can set our lips vibrating in sympathy if

we allow our lips to do this. Unfortunately, during our learning of the instrument we are encouraged to turn off this sensation, to deaden our lips. We need to retrain and *allow our lips to vibrate*.

Then we are able to let the whole instrument vibrate. Feel it coming alive in your hands!

12. Embouchure

Let's not think about heady subjects like Embouchure. In fact, let's delete words like that from our lexicon.

Brass playing does involve a pneumatic system that obeys all laws of hydraulics/pneumatics. When I talk of the three basics: Breathe, Lips Together, Blow, and say to blow faster for the high notes and slower for the low ones, I am saying that because that is all you need to concentrate on.

Of course, when you blow faster you will blow more air and consequently the sound will tend to be louder. And when you think of the idea of playing louder, you would imagine that the air will flow faster. These are inviolate rules if the rest of the blowing system remains constant.

What happens in practice is that our bodies automatically adjust the other variables like the orifice

between our lips, to give us the air velocity (pitch) and the air volume (loudness) we require. The important thing is that we do those adjustments subconsciously. We do not need to think of them.

Rather like the way that we are able to modulate the pitch and volume of our voice: we imagine the outcome, think of the syllable we want to utter, and our bodies do the rest automatically.

13. The Ten Second Rule

Often when students have been playing a piece, or when they have been working on a section of a piece of music, they will say something as soon as they take the instrument off their lips. They only ever say negative things at this time. They will always be criticizing their sound, or the notes, or the timing.

There is enough opportunity for the teacher to make this type of comment without it coming from the student, and it would be just as inappropriate for that to happen. But for it to be coming from the student is quite a statement on how judgmental they are, and it takes the initiative of the lesson away from the teacher.

For these overly critical students I have devised a special code of behavior. First of all they need to rejoice in the successes they are having. They need to regard

the cup as being half-full not half-empty. I instigate the "Ten Second Rule."

The "Ten Second Rule" bans the student from making any comment or any vocal or physical action for at least ten seconds after they have finished playing. It causes them to allow the sound to float in the air. They are able to rest and observe the results of their playing.

Whenever I have done this, the dynamic of the lesson changes greatly. For no longer do I, as the teacher, have to react to a judgment made by the student. I am now able to regain control of the situation without the student's morale being destroyed by their own perception of how things are progressing.

14. Think System

All of my playing life I have been conscious of hearing music in my mind and fingering/tonguing it as well. In other words, I had been doing everything about playing the music except for having the mouthpiece on my lips and actually making the sounds. As I cycled to and from school (about 40 minutes each way) I would be singing through new pieces, and fingering them (unfortunately I did sometimes crash into the back of a parked car!).

When I began to think more about this, I realized that it was a very powerful learning tool. We can solve all the technical aspects of a new piece one by one and have complete mastery of it before we have ever attempted to play it. Just think of the increased confidence we will now have in performing the music. It will be quite possible for us to have always played

the piece fluently, without hesitation. If we think of a success rate and a self-confidence based upon that success rate, just imagine:

Using the "old way" we may have attempted to play the piece 20 times and got it right the last 10 times. This gives us a success rate of 50%, so we might begin a performance knowing that there will be a 50% chance of doing it right. And a 50% chance of failure.

However, if we have worked through the piece in our head, taking note of such things as rhythm, key signature, time signature, fingerings, tonguings, slurring, melody, it is possible for us to play it right the first time, giving us a 100% success rate. And a 0% frustration rate.

As I began explaining this idea to my colleagues over the years, I was reminded of the Broadway show "The Music Man" by Meredith Wilson. The hero is a confidence trickster who travelled from small town to small town, inciting the local inhabitants to give him money that he could send away for band instruments and start a local band. Needless to say, he would abscond before the never-ordered instruments would arrive. He used to drill the children at their band

practice in his "Think System" whereby they were singing their parts. The denouement of the show is that the Music Man falls in love with Marian the Librarian of River City; he ends up ordering the instruments, and the children were in fact able to play them — using the Think System!

From my own playing and teaching, I can attest that this system works (although not to the remarkable level as in the Broadway Show — we need to be realistic about our expectations!). What in fact we are doing is that we are addressing one mental input at a time; when we are comfortable with that we address the next one. This avoids possible chaos caused by having to deal with too many mental inputs at one time.

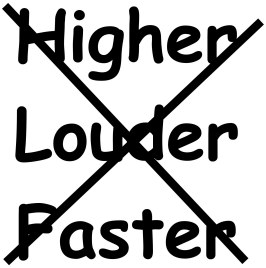
We are able to effectively play any music within our level the very first time we attempt it. My students typically are playing a simple song at their first lesson.

Add this to the need for only one lesson and you can see that this is all pretty easy stuff.

15. Trumpet Athletics

Playing music is not like doing the high jump, nor like setting out to run the four-minute mile.

Playing music is not about seeing if you are able to play higher, louder, or faster.



There is no scale of musical worthiness that is in any way related to how technically difficult the piece is to play.

Playing music is not an endeavor which is to be ranked in some kind of order of difficulty. There is no truth to the idea that the more technically demanding a piece is, the more worthy it is to be played.

It is true that some pieces of printed music available at the local music store do have a grading of difficulty marked on them. But this is only to help the player to judge whether the piece may be within his capability at that time.

16. Why Set That Piece for Study?

One of my students told me that he always likes to try to guess why I would suggest particular pieces for him to play. What technical aspect of his playing was I hoping would be helped? He said he could not find a reason for the one I had just suggested, so he asked me why I recommended it.

Was it to increase range?
Was it to improve articulation?
Was it to increase speed?

My answer:

I recommended you play this piece because it's great music!

17. Wrong Notes

One of the most common tasks of the music teacher is to correct students' wrong notes. To a musically alert listener, a wrong note sticks out like a sore thumb.

But why? After all, in the case of C major, we are typically only talking about errors with B (B flat) and F (F sharp). Yes they sound wrong, and indeed are wrong, but have you every wondered why?

In a C major melodic line, the introduction of a B flat suggests a key change to F. Similarly the introduction of an F sharp suggests a key change to G. It is this ambush that we object to, even in a single line melody. Seduced by an obviously tonal melody, we are shocked to be suddenly sent to another key. Our melody has delineated the tonality, even without additional simultaneous melody lines to describe harmony.

Melody is the Root of all Harmony.

18. Play the Melody

Whilst sitting in the trumpet section of a symphonic wind band last summer, I realized that not a single player in this whole ensemble was playing chords!

Every player, and there were over 100 of them, was playing a single line, a melody. Yes, some of them were playing the same notes as others, playing in unison, but single line melody, nonetheless. After further thought, I realized that the same situation applies in every major musical ensemble; symphony orchestra, chamber orchestra, chamber group.

Nobody plays harmony - everybody plays melody. The same occurs in vocal groups. Nobody, apart from Tibetan Chant Singers, sings chords. Everybody sings (their own) melody.

Yes, of course ensemble music contains harmony and tonality. But harmony and tonality are the result of the simultaneous playing of different melodies.

Rather than regarding accompaniment parts as being driven by the underlying harmony, let us think about how it is the note selection in accompanying melodies that defines the harmony. The notes of one melody put pressure on (dissonance) the notes of another simultaneous one to force that other melody to move towards a release of pressure (consonance).

There was a distinct change in the development of music at the beginning of the twentieth century. Music changed from being melody dominant to harmony dominant. Neither twentieth century classical music, with its emphasis on harmonic structure, nor post swing-era jazz music based heavily on chord sequences, have the intrinsic beauty of the extended melodic line found in both Romantic music and "Tin Pan Alley".

This change could have been be the reason for the upsurge of ersatz classical themes; the rise in popularity of the mainly British style of "light" orchestral music especially between 1920-1960. This music has, in turn, strongly influenced the development of incidental and theme music for radio and television programs, and, of course, movie themes and soundtracks.

When we encourage alto singers to sing their often very boring, monotonous part as if it were the melody, they feel more empowered and the choir sounds much more alive. As trumpet players, single line instrumentalists, we can do the same, and help raise the music to a much higher level.

19. Beams are a Great Help

Musical notation is, at best, an approximate indicator of how a piece of music should be played. Listening to a synthesized playback from musical notation software will certainly demonstrate this.

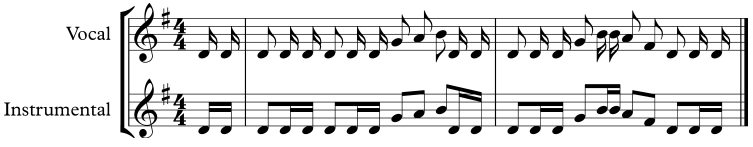
I am a very accomplished sight-reader of music. This ability held me in good stead when I was a first call studio player all those years ago in New Zealand. Even now, my typical first reading of any part will be error free. But I have a lot of difficulty when I am presented with an aria to sing.

What is the difference?

Beams! Those lines that join notes in groups of three, or four, or whatever the rhythm suggests. Beams exist in vocal music only between notes on the same syllable, whereas they are always there in instrumental music to hold together the notes contained within the current rhythmic unit (beat or half beat etc.).

The first glance of an instrumental part will show the rhythmic patterns very clearly outlined by the beams. We see a group of two, or three, or four, as being a collection of notes following the first.

Consider this example:



My difficulty with vocal music is that whatever beams there are do not relate to the rhythmic structure of the melody. This makes the lines more difficult to sight-read.

20. But Beams Can be Confusing

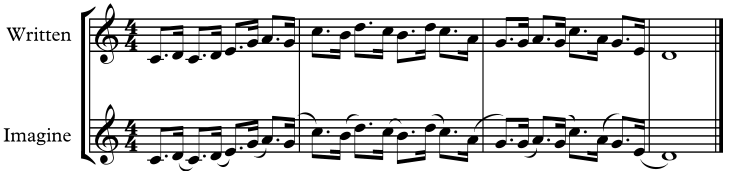
Another difficulty with musical notation is that often the visual grouping of notes does not match the aural grouping. Take the case of the dotted eighth – sixteenth rhythm:

Conventional notation pairs the sixteenth to the previous longer note, whereas aurally it belongs to the following note (as a rule of thumb "Short notes move forward to long ones"). Consider the following musical extract of dotted eighths and sixteenths. Although our eyes see the sixteenth as belonging to the dotted eighth, if we play the figure that way it can become disjointed. It would be better to imagine the sixteenth note as almost slurred to the following note like the example on the next page.

With our system of notation, measures need to be filled up with sound (and silence) time units, and these

units need to comply with our conventions concerning the number of beats in a bar.

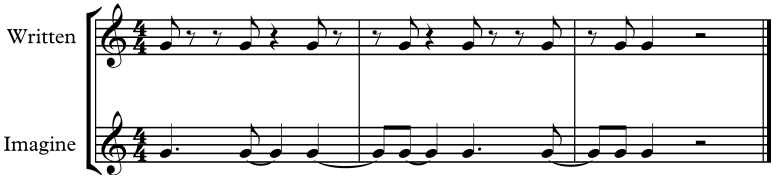
Unfortunately we are inclined to think that notes within a beat and notes within a bar belong together. Bar-lines and beats are very handy references, but we must give preference to the musical/rhythmical phrase.



21. Play the Notes - Not the Rests

There is yet another drawback of written musical notation: the rests are often more visually predominant than the notes. One note might be followed by many rest symbols before the next note appears. Players often attach such importance to the rests that they play the following note(s) out of time.

My suggestion to overcome this is to imagine the notes to be full length up to the next one. This will keep all the notes within their correct rhythmic framework. Once this is comfortable, shorten the notes to comply with their designated note values and play the passage in the correct rhythm. The rests will take care of themselves, they are only there to fill in the gaps.


Written
Imagine

22. Key Preferences

Have you ever wondered about the different key preferences of string and wind players?

It is common knowledge that string players prefer playing in sharp keys, and wind players prefer flat ones. On one occasion when I was writing a simple ensemble arrangement to include a beginner cello player, that player expressed deep terror at the idea of playing a B flat! I changed it to A sharp and he was happy.

When I was working for a company that rented orchestral as well as band instruments I took some lessons in playing violin. I wanted to get an idea of how to hold the bow and how to get the first sounds. When I took this new knowledge and started to pick out some simple tunes I realized that the way of thinking in playing a string instrument is totally different to playing a wind instrument:

To play a note on a wind instrument, one selects the closest open, or non-fingered note **above** the one you want to play, then you lengthen the tube (by pressing down valves, keys, or lengthening a slide) down to the note you want.

Wind instruments are **descending** Instruments.

To play a note on a string instrument, one selects the closest open string **below** the one you want to play, then you shorten the string with the finger onto a fret or press the string onto the fingerboard up to the note you want.

String instruments are **ascending** Instruments.

The very technique of wind instrument playing revolves around flattening notes, whereas the technique for string instruments revolves around sharpening the notes.

When we also factor in that string instruments tend to be tuned to sharp key notes like G, D, A, B, and E, but wind instruments typically have "natural" keys like Bb and Eb, there is little wonder that string players are more comfortable with sharps and wind players more comfortable with flats.

23. Why do scales go up?

When you ask someone to sing or play a scale why do they always perform an ascending scale? I do this experiment often and very seldom does anyone descend.

Why is it so easy to recognize "Do-Re-Mi" from The Sound of Music as a scale even though it is very broken up, but not so easy to recognize that the theme of the Nutcracker "Pas de Deux" is a straightforward descending major scale?

Could it be that the period of early concert music, early music pedagogy and early musicology was when string instruments dominated? String instruments are, by their nature, ascending instruments and ascending scales are amongst the very first things played after open strings?

If you ask someone why they play ascending they will often reply that they were taught that way. But why were they taught that way?

We will never know the answer, but it's an interesting question, isn't it?

24. Interface

To get the most benefit from brass playing, the player must feel their lips buzzing. This is not the buzzing often associated with initially creating the note on the lips and using the instrument as a mechanical amplifier, but it is the lips vibrating as the air bounces back and forth to the bottom of the mouthpiece cup before then proceeding through the instrument.

Unfortunately, many people who have been playing brass for a long time and especially professional players have switched off this feeling of the lip vibration. Their lips, in this sense are quite insensitive. There are various ways of re-sensitizing lips. One way is to rub a cayenne mixture on them.

Another problem is that many players choose mouthpieces that are too small, in the mistaken belief that this will assist their high register playing. These small mouthpieces hinder the vibration of their lips;

not enough lip is inside the mouthpiece so not enough lip is able to vibrate.

25. Sound Quality

Your sound is your greatest asset.

If you have a good sound, people will want to listen to you – No matter what you play.

If you do not have a good sound, nobody will want to listen to you – No matter what you play!

26. A Bad Trumpet Day

When we are having an off day on our trumpet, we are having an off day in our life.

Trumpet playing is a barometer of our mood state. Our swings of mood are more apparent to us in our trumpet playing than in a lot of other activities. So we can choose to cover it up, which is what professional performers must do in order to perform consistently; or we can look to see what it is that has so affected us to have a negative impact on our trumpet playing.

Did we just have an argument with our partner? Or, worse still, did we bite our tongue instead of letting it out? Or did someone smash into our car? Or did the supermarket want to overcharge? Or…?

Any of the above, or even just the thought of any of the above can be enough to send us into a bad trumpet day.

To turn it into a Good Trumpet Day we need only to turn our thoughts to others, and what we can do to make others' lives better. Change our focus from Ego to Alter. Live in altruism.

I wrote above that we can choose to cover it up to maintain our professionalism. But is it professional to broadcast to our audience what is causing us to have this bad trumpet day? Is it moral to do this?

If we wholeheartedly choose an altruistic approach, then all of a sudden we will start to have a Good Trumpet Day!

Ivan Hunter

Ivan Hunter has been actively involved in music since 1956

He started his musical career in Auckland, New Zealand, singing in the Friendly Road Choir which presented weekly radio broadcasts and regular concerts. He was cornet soloist in the NZ National Youth Brass Band, and later principal trumpet in the National Youth Orchestra. Appointed to the NZ National Brass Band in 1967, he was a solo cornet in the World Championship winning band in 1970. His early teachers included W L (Les) Francis and Lloyd Thorne.

He trained in electronics, toolmaking and metallurgy at the NZ Naval Research Laboratory then went to Auckland University where he studied composition and conducting, and was a member of the University of Auckland singers. After his studies he

was appointed principal trumpet of the Symphonia of Auckland where he remained for 7 years. Leaving that orchestra he continued a busy free-lance playing career in New Zealand, Australia, Europe and USA.

Moving to New York in 2000, Ivan chose to return to avocational music and to use his extensive experience in both playing and teaching to assist community music ensembles. He has been writing about issues specific to recreational players for over 25 years.

During this time in NY, Ivan revived his skills in engineering and physics to collaborate with Dr John Diamond in designing the Jaeger Trumpet, which he has since expanded into a unique range of models. Also, drawing on his vast musical knowledge and his passion for preserving and playing great music, Ivan compiled "Music 4 Fun", a collection of over 300 treble clef melodies dating from the year 1250 to the present day.

Ivan loves every opportunity to pass on his knowledge, whether by formal lessons or by osmosis, participating in musical ensembles. He regards his mission as "helping people turn notes into music".