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David Zuercher's **Brass Player Report**

Dedicated to the Promotion of Fine Brass Musicianship with Special Emphasis on the Creation of Magnificent Sound

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Issue 1

Take a moment to consider...

AIRFLOW VS AIR PRESSURE

Thanks for taking a moment to explore with me the concept of "airflow" as it pertains to tone production. I have determined that the perception of how air should travel across the lips is one of the most misunderstood and therefore frustrating factors in attempting to make music with these brass tubes.

Before we get into the specifics of this topic let us make sure we are on the same page regarding tone production by mulling over a few simple (Q)uestions and (A)nswers. (Q) What is job one? What is the most important obligation of the brass player? What is your audience expecting to come into contact with by investing time at your performance? (A) Great Sound! (Q) If great sound production is the primary objective of each brass musician, what must be present before any sound can be produced? (A) A vibration. (Q) What vibrates and enables a brass instrument to resonate a sound? (A) The lips. (Q) What enables the lips to vibrate? (A) Air. (Q) Does it then stand to reason that more air

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(quantity) could produce more vibration and therefore more potential sound? (A) Yes. But, this is the point where many musicians get into trouble: the notion of "more air".

What do we mean by more air? I know many players who believe they "blow their head off" (they literally do!) and yet are quite dissatisfied with their resulting sounds. How can this be? One word: **airflow**.

At the outset let us acknowledge that all air taken into the lungs is under some degree of pressure. This is a requirement of our physical makeup. The muscles and tissues surrounding the lungs "stretch" as our lungs inflate. The tissues and muscles want to relax or return to a less-stretched state. There is "pressure" for this relaxation to occur. Even with the buildup of internal pressurized air **it is possible** to relieve that pressure by eliminating the air with as much flow as feasible. How do we enable the inspired air to flow freely to the lips? By reducing the restrictions on the air as it travels from the lungs to the ✪lips. Restriction creates pressure (a firmly placed thumb over the end of a hose transforms free flowing water into a spray). What should we be thinking about to get rid of any restrictions to our air? Remember my first Q&A question: What is job one? If great sound is our objective, **on what object do you suppose our minds should be entirely focused?** An open and resonant sound, of course! Not worrying

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about the upcoming high notes, or who may be in the audience, or what to eat for lunch, etc.

"Please describe an open resonant sound", you may be asking. In my line of work (symphony orchestra) I try to recreate an impressive operatic vocalized sound. Compare this ideal with a slighter pop vocalist's sound. In my way of thinking the difference may be described as "**OH!**" VS "eh?". Here, the punctuation indicators are very important. Try saying the syllables. What did you concentrate on to vocalize the syllables? Their sound. How did the physical components of your body respond to vocalizing the sounds? Concentrating on "**OH!**" produced a sound with the absence of restriction, while thinking "eh?" closed the throat and lifted the tongue (to name only a few complications). Again, the less restrictions placed on inspired air allows for more airflow to the ✪lips and therefore more potential sound. Incidentally, "**OH!**" may be used to create either loud or soft sound.

Of course to receive the most favorable benefits of flowing air ✪the lips must be as relaxed as possible to allow for optimum

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vibration. We will cover that thought in an upcoming **Report**.

Application: Think about a medium range pitch with an "**OH!**" syllable. While continuing to concentrate on the pitch take in a large quantity of air and inflate your face with the lips closed so as not to release any air. At this point your face should resemble an inflated puffer fish that is mentalizing an incredible sounding note! Hold this pose for a few moments. Okay, relax. Now, while playing (blowing air across the lips), recreate this same sensation (an open and inflated face as a result of taking in a large quantity of air and concentrating on an "**OH!**"-sounding pitch). Note: more air must constantly be supplied to the lips than is being released across the lips in order for the oral cavity to remain in an inflated (open) state. You

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will probably think that you are inspiring and expiring more air than normal. Good! Lucky for us our air supply (fuel) is free. Waste it!

Summary: Yes, producing music on a brass instrument really should be a **simple** activity. Notice I did not say it was **easy**. Simple and easy are two *very* different concepts. The command for a new armed forces recruit in basic training to move a large pile of dirt from area A to area B ten feet away is a **simple** order. Carrying out the job is not at all **easy**. It requires effort, time, patience, etc. Fortunately for our listeners and us the rewards of *simply* playing big, beautiful and resonant brass music is worth all the *effort!*

Subscribers' suggestions for upcoming reports are encouraged and welcome.