

# Trumpet Talk for Teachers by Clifford P. Lillya

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*[Editor's Note: The following article is a transcription by Steve Jones of the lecture presented by Mr. Lillya at the 1979 ITG Conference.]*

It has been said (I think with some truth) that watching somebody teach is about as exciting as watching paint dry. It has also been said that if there is anything less exciting than watching paint dry, it is listening to somebody talk about teaching.

Nevertheless, I am pleased to have been invited to participate in the ITG Conference and to have this opportunity to chat with you informally about trumpet teaching. I shall try to speak right to the point, hoping to codify briefly my thoughts on teaching in a way which might help others, especially those who are starting to teach in environments similar to ours.

Short demonstrations by my friend and colleague, Terry Sawchuk, professor of trumpet at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, will spice up our proceedings.

Inevitably, opinions and impressions that I shall share with you have been partly shaped by my experience at the University of Michigan. As many of you know, I shall retire from the University in August, 1979. In one sense I regret retiring, because I keep catching on to more and more interesting things relating to trumpet teaching and trumpet people, but on the other hand, when one of my students recently asked, "How well did you know J.B. Arban?" I guessed maybe it was about time!

In teaching, I place great emphasis on what I consider to be fundamentals. Underlying these are the notions that it is fun to play music, that your instrument is your friend, that tone production is a pleasure.

In order to play well, a performer must get around on his instrument with ease, so that his imagination and musicality can function freely. Number one on our list of fundamentals, therefore, is tone production.

## Tone Production

To trumpeters, producing a beautiful sound on the trumpet is an almost mystical experience, the secret thrill of which only trumpet players know and understand. A trumpet player speaks of his lip, but actually he plays mainly on his morale! A player with excellent tone production may be compared to an umbrella in extended position. One tension balances another so there is no undue strain anywhere. If, however, one of the components is malfunctioning, the strain is distributed unevenly and the structure may collapse. As he progresses from beginner, to intermediate, to advanced, to professional levels, the inner picture of what happens as he plays the trumpet develops with his ego. Indeed, the two are inseparable, and any serious dislocation of one will be reflected in the other. The individual's image of what happens as he plays is really more important to him than knowing, in scientific terms, what actually does happen. A physicist, learned though he may be in the behavior of sound waves, cannot by reason of this knowledge alone, play the trumpet.

The fascinating enigma of tone production has inspired many theories, systems, experiments and dialectics. Obviously many of these work very well. Rather than trying to apply a ready-made rationale, I try to lead the student to the brink of discovery. Gradually he develops his own image and rationale. When he comes in for his lesson and says, "Hey, you know what I found out?", or when I ask him to do a lip trill and he says, "Gee, I didn't know I could do that!", I know I am making progress.

Perhaps seventy-five percent of tone production is psychological. Above all else, a player needs something to believe in.

I seldom use the word "embouchure", preferring the more inclusive term tone production. The embouchure is but the mouth of the river. If I feel the need of visually checking a student's embouchure, I find an angle from which I can see it in the mirror on my wall. Every statement about embouchure has its exceptions, but generally speaking, that embouchure is best which leaves the lips looking as nearly as possible as they do when in repose.

## Moving From One Tone to Another

The next fundamental is moving from one tone to another. I shall ask Terry to play a series of slurred fifths. Then a series of slurred octaves. To the eye the octave represents a greater distance than the fifth, but the time lapse needed to traverse the distance is the same. ZERO! As a violinist gently touches the string to produce a harmonic, so we gently touch the air. A student must practice this, learning to recognize when it is right and try to duplicate the feeling every time. The teacher may help with demonstrations and analogies (it should sound like a falsetto, a yodel, an oboe when the octave key is used, etc.). With many repetitions, images like this become woven into the fabric of the player's musical style.

### Demonstration:

Lillya: *Trumpet Technic* (Balquhidder Music)  
(BQ-13)

lip trills, pedal notes  
feeling of balancing a pole, not rigid.  
keep the bow on the string.  
tone bending



If the student ticks the C-sharp on the way to E, have him practice Exercise 6A and B on page 7, *Trumpet Technic*.



Cultivating the slippery feelings on these exercises is good preparation for slurring the octaves and fifths.

After mastering the slurring of fifths and octaves with the upper tone softer than the lower, practice the same intervals with the upper tone louder than the lower one. The methodology does not change, but it is easier to identify the proper interval technique when playing the lower tone loud and letting it break gently to the softer upper tone.

## Sustaining the Long Sound

I like to use the exercise at the top of page 5 in Schlossberg, *Daily Drills and Technical Studies* (M. Baron Co.) for focusing the student's attention on the importance of sustaining the long sound. Sometimes in studio classes we play a game to see who can do these

lines the slowest. (Met. = 48 is excellent). But the important point is what occurs (or does not occur) at the instant of pitch change. If we compare the sound to a ribbon ( a silk ribbon, mind you), we want it to remain the same width and texture throughout the line. No hiccups or dry spots when changing pitch, no thin or threadbare spots anywhere! Dramatize the slowness of the air's progress from mouthpiece to bell. When a tone is being played, the air comes out of the bell slowly. The trumpet bell does not spray air, it projects sound!

## Articulating While Sustaining the Sound

This is simply a matter of tonguing while blowing continuously. "Let not thy wind know what thy tongue doeth."

### Demonstration:

*Trumpet Technic*, p. 7 (one pitch)  
*Trumpet Technic*, p. 18 (scales)  
Strauss - *Ein Heldenleben* - 1st B-flat part  
"Keep the paper on the wall while tonguing."

## Blowing Through the Valve Changes

"Let not thy wind know what thy fingers doeth." This seems too simple to need mentioning. But often young players have involuntary and unconscious throat tensions each time they move a valve. Give the student the feeling of blowing through the valve change by moving the valve for him while he blows. Not knowing when the valve is going to move, he cannot make the concomitant throat constriction and he feels the freedom immediately.

### Demonstration:

Clarke, *Book II*, pp. 8 & 9  
Strauss - *Don Juan*

## Single Tongue Delivery (♩ = 112)

In this kind of delivery the tones should seem to move along on a conveyor belt. If a miniature person were standing by the trumpet bell he would see a parade of tones moving out with no tone stepping on the heels of the one in front of it. Although the listener hears the tones as detached, the player feels the effort as continuous. The first note is "from scratch." No other note is like that. Each one is related to the one that precedes it and the one that follows it. Always start the next note from where you left off! Comparing the tones to beads on a string is helpful. Also comparing the tones to a flat stone skipping on the water is useful.

Some students have a tendency to make a new and separate impulse for each tone. This, of course, is not what we want. The wind is the string and the tones are the beads - let's not break the string!

Small vocal sounds in the throat each time a tone is played is another common, though undesirable, occurrence. This indicates a tightness in the throat, often of emotional origin. Many people play well in spite of it, but it is better if this tension is relaxed.

**Demonstration:**

a half stop between tones

*Clodomir No. 1*

*Vingt Etudes de Mecanisme (Leduc)*

Slur a measure

Tongue a measure } blowing does not change

For teaching purposes trumpet playing may be reduced to these basic elements. We do not learn these the first time once and for all; we keep coming back to them, again and again.

We fan out from this core to the various styles indicated in the graphic below. A student entering the university often does not know what an endless number of opportunities are open to him. It is our job to help him find out, and to help him go as far as his capacities will take him.

My teaching plan consists essentially of a long series of projects, each of which is attended by supportive material. In carrying out this plan the student climbs a sort of spiral stairway rather than a ladder. We do go round and round touching basic points over and over, each time on a slightly higher level. Insights develop into how these ideas relate to each other and to the performance of music. In most environments, learning and teaching trumpet cannot be programmed into neat and orderly packages to be dispensed to the student according to a pre-ordained schedule. Sometimes projects are not of your choosing. Students are involved with playing jobs, curricular ensemble commitments, etc. Aid and abet these projects, use them for motivation and application of fundamentals. Integrate these experiences into the continuum of each student's progress. A clear view of the ultimate destination and the route to travel lies in the teacher's mind. Circumstances will necessitate detours, but the teacher must never lose sight of the main road. You must always come back!

A junior high school trumpet player might come away from a great performance of the Haydn Concerto having been impressed only by the absence of missed notes. Later, having ascended the spiral stairway to a higher level, he will see far beyond this and realize the true greatness of both the music and the artist.

Symphony Band  
Marching Band  
Bb Cornets & Trumpets

Wind Ensembles  
Trumpets in all keys  
as needed

Jazz Bands  
Lab Bands  
Bb Trumpets  
Flügelhorns

Instrumental Music  
Teaching in Schools  
Bb Cornet & Trumpet  
College or University  
Teaching  
Trumpets in all keys

# FUNDAMENTALS

Symphony Orchestras  
Chamber Orchestras  
Trumpets in all keys

Chamber Music  
(Brass Ensembles)  
(Ensembles of Mixed  
Instrumentation)  
Trumpets in all keys

Baroque Music  
F-G Trumpets  
D Trumpets  
Piccols in A & Bb  
Natural Trumpets

Contemporary Music  
Ensembles  
Trumpets in all keys  
as needed

Projects should always be chosen purposefully, but special care should be exercised in early (beginning) stages. We want the student to establish the habit of success! Often, even to the advanced player, the only difference between his getting a note or missing it is whether or not he expects to get it.

A student in a 5th grade instruction class can tell what he learns each day. This is because he deals consciously with factual and elementary material. However, more importantly, he is unconsciously forming basic attitudes that will probably stay with him all of his life. Trumpet teachers dealing with students at this level should be mindful of the knowledge gained from Pavlov's famous experiment (conditioned response).

A few more words about intermediate trumpet instruction are in order, because habits and attitudes formed at this level have such a strong bearing on the student's success or failure at the college level.

Early instruction should be in a low key, both figuratively and literally. Perhaps the most effective teaching at any level is that which a student is unaware of. If you admonish a young student in stern and strident tones to "hold that note steady or I'm going to move you down three chairs," he sees the other side of the coin. If he has to hold the tone steady, the tone must have a natural and inherent tendency to waver. His effort to comply with your directive will fill his body and mind with tension, thus forcibly straightening out the sound.

This method gets quick results, but teaches much that the student will have to un-learn later. How much better to patiently let the tone find its point of comfortable resonance! Let the pendulum swing a little until it comes to rest. This may seem to take longer, but in the long run, it is quicker.

On advanced levels improvement often comes slowly and imperceptibly, being affected by intangible qualities such as maturity and experience. Students deal with concepts, points of view, ways of thinking and feeling about trumpet playing, projection, style, expression, and a host of other amorphous items. At every level teach only things that need to be taught.

A talented student intuitively does many things correctly. Would you teach a fish how to swim? If a student's tone production is natural and easy, don't dissect and analyze it. It might actually be harmful to do so. The player should not be preoccupied with analysis.

Indirection can often be used effectively. For example, when beginning on C trumpet, let the student read an exercise written in C but have him play it down a step in B-flat concert, thus focusing his mind on the transposition, letting the C trumpet tonal placement develop without self-consciousness.

Throughout our effort to give the student clues which will lead him to a freeway instead of a blind alley, we talk in a jargon made up mainly of figures of speech. A student and teacher must learn to understand each other's language before much communication can take place.

If during his first lessons a student seems mystified by my particular vocabulary of examples, I suggest that he think of each idea as a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. "Just put it in your pocket and save it. Next time you'll get another. Soon two of these will fit together and in time a picture will begin to take form."

\* \* \*

In the previous paragraphs I have tried to tell you how I see some of the problems of teaching in a large and wonderful university, and how I have tried to cope with them.

In concluding, my recommendations are simple. Choose talented students, provide them with a climate in which they can grow, select challenging projects, work intensively and relentlessly on fundamentals.

Nurture the student's inherent urge to play music. It is the fuel that makes the car go! Trumpet players should be cheerful gamblers! Urge them to go for it.

Emphasize the satisfactions of trumpet playing. I'm sure nobody in this audience would ask "What are the satisfactions of trumpet playing?" but just in case someone did, I would fall back on Louis Armstrong's famous bit of elemental wisdom. "Man, if you got to ask what they are, you'll never get to know."

*I wish to thank the program committee for having invited me to participate in this ITG Conference. I also wish to thank the many talented students and talented friends who through the years have so richly contributed to my knowledge and enjoyment. (Clifford P. Lillya, Earl V. Moore Professor of Music (Trumpet), the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109)*