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THE KRZYSZTOF
PENDERECKI
ACADEMY
OF MUSIC
IN KRAKOW

Educational materials
for horn students
participating in

Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP)

in the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Krakow

during the 58th International Horn Symposium
“Horn in the City of Kings”

Kraków, 7-12 July 2026

INTERNATIONAL
HORN
SOCIETY

Foreword

It is a great pleasure to present this collection of educational materials prepared for students participating in the Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), held at the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Krakow as part of the 58th International Horn Symposium, *Horn in the City of Kings*, from 7 to 12 July 2026.

As Artistic and Organisational Director of the Symposium, I had the privilege and responsibility of overseeing a project that brought together outstanding horn players, distinguished pedagogues, students, and music professionals from across the world. Hosting the International Horn Symposium in Poland for the first time was both a significant honour and an opportunity to strengthen international cooperation, encourage the exchange of artistic ideas, and create new perspectives for the next generation of horn players.

The educational dimension of this project was central to its purpose. The combination of the Erasmus+ programme and the International Horn Symposium created a unique environment in which students could learn directly from internationally recognised artists, encounter diverse approaches to performance and pedagogy, and reflect on their own artistic development. The materials collected in this volume extend that experience beyond the symposium itself, offering students an opportunity to revisit the knowledge, insights, and practical guidance shared by the contributing musicians.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the artists and pedagogues who generously contributed their expertise, experience, and time to this publication. Their willingness to share individual perspectives reflects one of the most valuable principles of musical education: that artistic growth is enriched through openness, dialogue, curiosity, and the exchange of experience across generations and cultures.

My thanks also go to the Krzysztof Penderecki Academy of Music in Krakow, the International Horn Society, and everyone whose commitment and work helped make this ambitious international undertaking possible.

I hope that these materials will serve not only as a valuable educational resource, but also as an invitation to continue exploring the many dimensions of horn playing and musical artistry. May they inspire students to develop their technical abilities, broaden their musical horizons, cultivate their own artistic voices, and remain open to lifelong learning.

Dr hab. Wojciech Kamionka, Professor AMKP
Artistic and Organisational Director
58th International Horn Symposium Kraków 2026
Horn in the City of Kings

Anneke Scott

Christoph Ess

Fergus McWilliam

James Boldin

John Humphries

Piotr Pożakowski

Saar Berger

Takeshi Hidaka

Tommi Hyytinen

Anneke Scott

The right (or left) hand

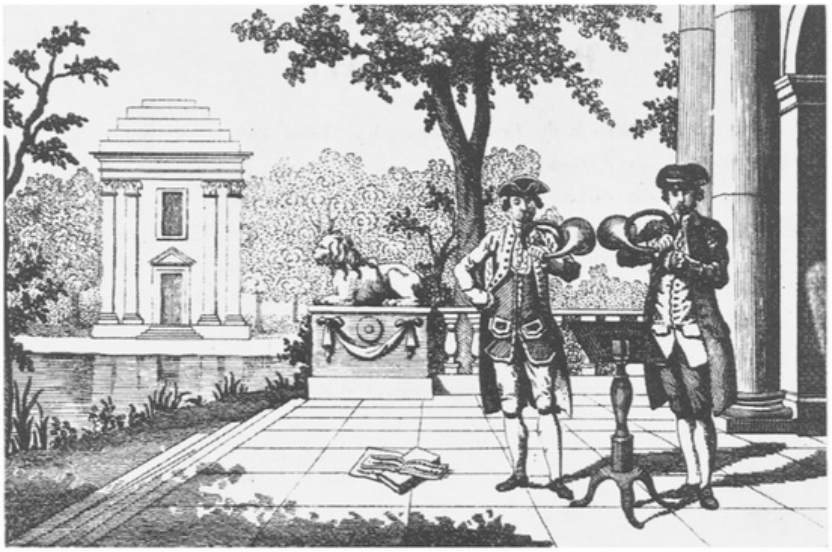


Illustration 8: Frontispiece from the anonymous New Instructions for the French Horn (London: Longman & Broderip c. 1780). (London: British Library, b.160.t).

If you are coming to the hand horn from modern horn playing you may have learnt to hand-stop thinking of the right hand as being a pivot, a door that opens and shuts, and that the right hand has a very set position when stopped.

The human hand is an incredible thing. There are 27 bones in your hand, 29 major joints, 123 ligaments, 34 muscles moving the fingers and thumb and 17 muscles in the palm of your hand.

We can move our hands in very subtle ways and when playing the hand horn it is essential to learn how to manipulate the hand fluently.

There are three main reasons horn players (both modern and period) put their hand in the bell:

1. To correct intonation (broadly speaking closing the bell slightly makes it flatter and opening the hand out further makes it sharper).

2. To aid tone (without the hand in the bell the tone is brighter and shrill, the hand helps the more mellow tone we associate with the horn).

3. To stop us dropping the instrument.

Today the vast majority of horn players play with their right hand in the bell of the instrument and their left either operating the valves or, in the case of the hand horn, holding the instrument. However, historically it was not uncommon for horn players to play with their left hand in the bell, and horn players often played as a mirror image pair. In the same spirit as the “first exercises” above, try experimenting with “playing backwards”. Aurally it is a strange experience but some may find that the foreign feel to it helps discover new tricks.

Five basic hand positions

1. Basic open position. This is what most modern horn players will have learnt. Your hand rests in the bell of the instrument with most of the weight resting on the joint of the thumb. The hand is in line with the body of the instrument and the knuckles of the fingers touching or nearly touching the inside of the bell on the side furthest from the body. Imagine that the tips of the fingers of your right hand are pointing in the direction of your left hand. The fingers reach into the bell and the fleshy part of the palm is kept quite open. There is a gentle curve to the hand; to recreate this, take your hand out of the bell, put your fingers together so you have a flat palm and fingers, then mould the hand around the back of your head. This gives you a perfect curved hand.

2. Basic stopped position. Go from the basic open position and this time leave the fingers where they are and take the heel of the hand across to the inside part of the bell closest to your body. The left side of your thumb, the heel of your hand and the right side of your little finger should create a seal. From this position you can also experiment with what happens if you wriggle your fingers. See what difference moving different fingers makes.

3. Hump backed bridge. Go from the basic stopped position but this time bring your finger tips over to the near side of the inside of the bell. Try and keep your knuckles where they are. See what happens if you make the "bridge" steeper (by sliding the fingers and heel of the hand closer together) or flatter (by sliding the fingers further into the bell and the heel of the hand further out). Again, repeat the experiments with wriggling your fingers.

4. The stopper. Fold your fingers over so the tips of your fingers just touch the top of the palm of your hand. Imagine your hand is a pad, a lid perhaps, that fits into the bell. Keep it flat and as broad as possible, you may find that when you put your hand into the bell the knuckles are further in than the heel of the hand but try and keep your hand as far out of the bell whilst also sealing off as much air as possible.

5. The wave. Certain notes require the hand to come out of the bell. Brace yourself – this hand position requires co-ordination and a good left hand position. You should aim to be able to hold the instrument just with the left hand so that when your right hand pops out of the bell for this position the horn does not swing in the breeze (worst case scenario) or judder the mouthpiece (still pretty bad scenario). The acoustics of the horn mean that for certain notes the hand really needs to come out of the bell; it's easy for us to think we're taking the hand out far enough whilst in reality it has hardly moved. Wave! Jazz hand style if you like.

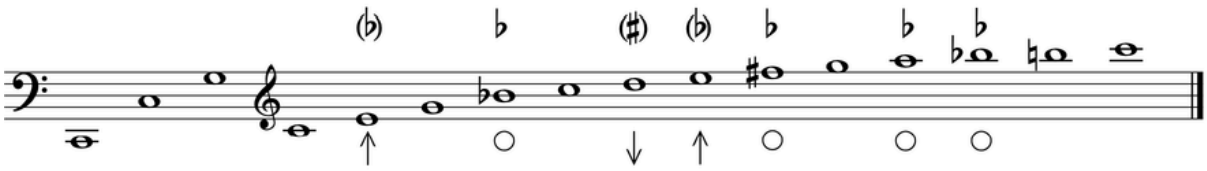
Whilst these are some of the most common "stock" hand positions you may find many more. Or indeed there may be other images that help you find the hand position that works for you. Again, experiment and see if you can add to the list above.

Hand position charts

There are various issues to bear in mind when consulting hand position charts:

- The hand positions for individual notes can vary in small ways from crook to crook and from instrument to instrument.
- Hand positions can also subtly vary from player to player due to the size of the player's hand.
- The hand position you use for a note may vary depending on the tempo of the piece and the context in which the note appears.
- The hand position you use may vary depending on the function of the note in the harmony or melody, as you may need slightly to alter the pitch of the note accordingly. Similarly, enharmonic notes may also have different positions. This is a distinct advantage.
- Representing the nuances of right hand position in print is inevitably slightly unrefined.

The basic principle of hand stopping is that the harmonic series provides us with the open notes. As mentioned before, these notes are not all in tune, and in general they follow the following pattern:



(♯) Sharp harmonic - i.e. needs to be pulled down (↓) in pitch.

(♭) Flat harmonic - i.e. needs to be pushed up (↑) in pitch.

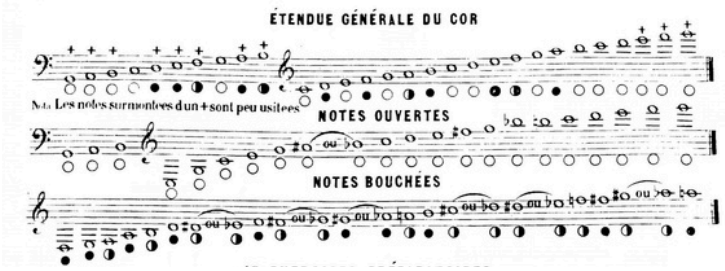
♭ Very flat harmonic - i.e. hand may need to come out of the bell (○).
Some of these notes also have the option to be played stopped (see chapters 6 and 9).

The non-harmonic notes need to be created by manipulating our hand in the bell.

Because of the issues outlined above, when we look at the various ways hand positions were notated in original sources, whilst they are broadly similar, we can see some variation, for example the top line F♯, which in some sources is played as a stopped note, in others as a very open note.

We also see a number of different approaches to explaining the subtleties of hand stopping. Some writers use fractions, some attempt the same effect with filled-in circles, some construct individual charts for notes that share the same characteristics, while others write long texts explaining each note (see Illustration 9, below).







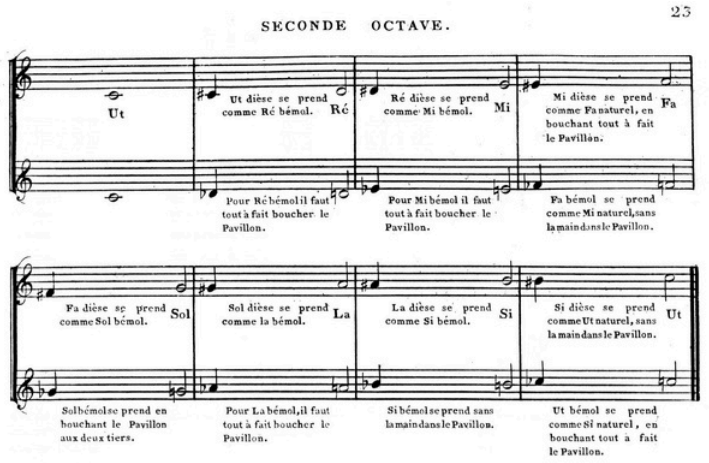


Illustration 9: Hand position charts. Top to bottom: Émile Lambert, Méthode complète et progressive de cor chromatique suivie d'exercices pour cor simple d'harmonie (Paris: Henry Lemoine & Cie., 1922), p.50; Victor Cornette, Méthode de cor (Paris: Colombier, 1855), p.6; Franz Strauss, Übungen für Naturhorn zum täglichen Studium (Leipzig: Ernst Eulenburg, 1909), p.3; Frédéric Duvernoy, Méthode pour le cor (Paris: Imprimerie du Conservatoire, c. 1802), p.15.

The following chart is taken from Jean-Baptiste Mohr's Méthode de premier et second cor. Note that enharmonic notes (e.g. A♯ and B ♭) have different hand positions, reflecting the different harmonic roles of the two notes.

- The zero indicates an open note.
- 1 indicates a totally closed/stopped note
- 1/0 indicates a note that can be played either stopped or open.
- The fractions 1/4, 1/2 and 3/4 indicate that the bell is closed by a quarter, a half or three quarters. The
- notes which have crosses underneath are very low; to be in tune the bell needs to be very open.

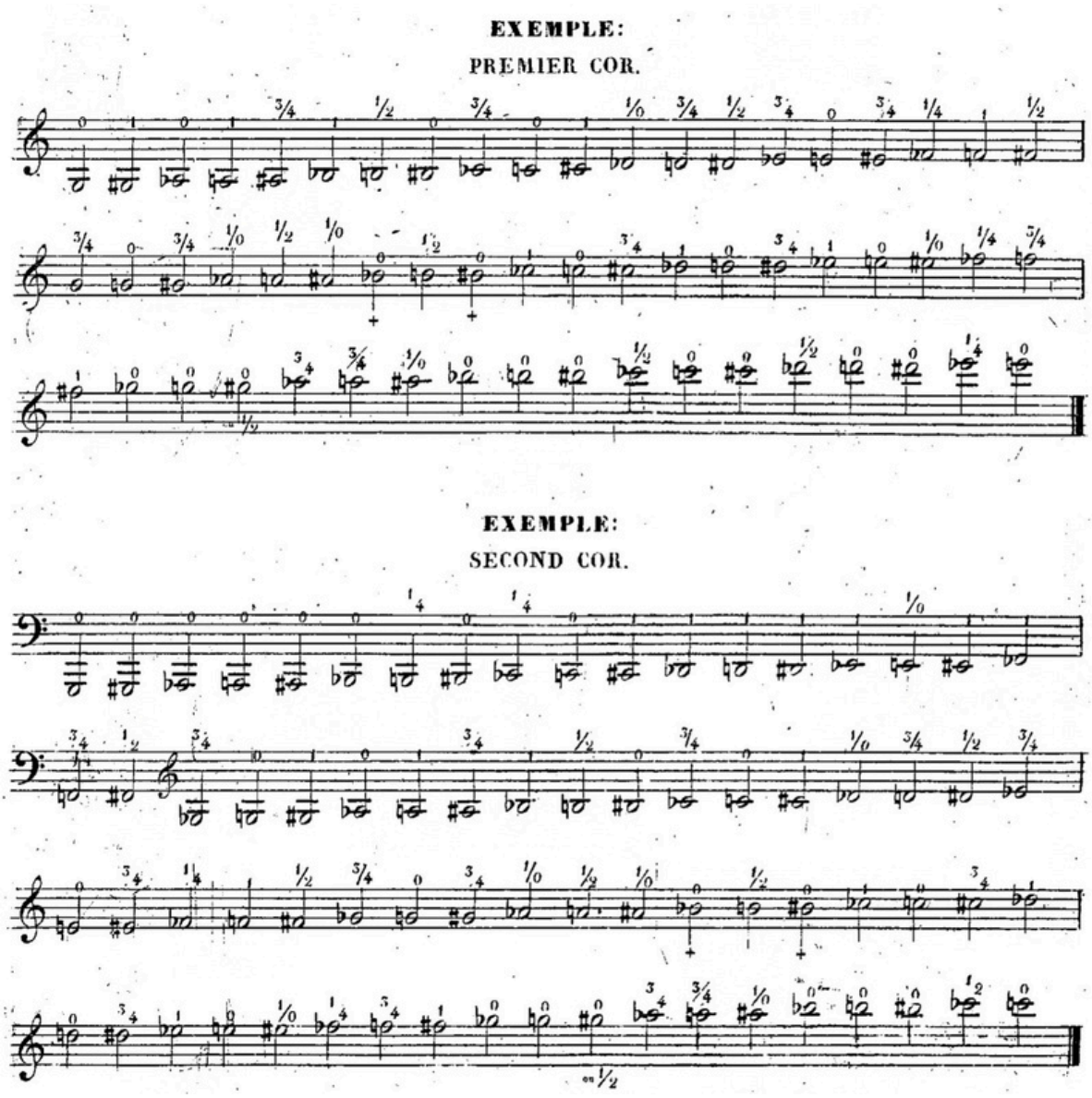


Illustration 10: "Gammes enharmoniques sur l'étendue des deux genres" from Jean-Baptiste Mohr's Méthode de premier et second cor (Paris: Léon Escudier, 1870), p.1. (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, M/1654).

Christoph Ess

Christoph Ess
The 7 Elements Daily Routine

1. Doodle exercises
I start my daily warm-up with some doodle exercises. It's literally about warming up the lips and circulating the blood as well as the activation of the breathing system. DON'T play these exercises in extreme registers but in a relaxed middle range and comfortable dynamics.

2. Air flow
After the doodle exercises, I usually continue with these breathing exercises. Airflow is one of the most important parameters of playing the French horn. In particular, it's about streaming the air evenly and homogeneously from the first to the last note of the phrase and building a vibrating air column, especially during the transition from one note to the other. I always start with the long F-Horns (F123 or F13) as the airflow is automatically higher within the long F-Horns whereas the air pressure is lower. That helps a lot when we change to the shorter Bb-Horn. These exercises should be played with metronome to control the steady air flow. It is useful to make two versions in direct succession. A *slow* followed by a *fast* one; a *slurred* followed by a *tongued* one, for example, to phrase steadily during changing tempi and articulations.

3. Sound
The sound forms the emotional basis and heart of the performance. It's important to create an even, centred, and straight sound which doesn't shake, and which doesn't lose quality also during crescendi, decrescendi and other combinations. Thus it is essential to practice long notes as well as homogeneous dynamic changes. It's helpful to use an electronic tuner here to control the intonation and to respond to small variations.

4. Natural horn and flexibility
While playing our modern valve horn we are permanently "switching" between the many imaginary natural French horns and their overtone series, but our embouchure (which is responsible for the modifications of the muscle tension) and our air speed remain the determining factors for the connection between two overtones. Thus, flexibility is one of the parameters we should exercise daily. I usually start with a small ambitus first and expand it constantly. During these exercises I also advance into more extreme registers. All of these natural harmonics exercises are airflow exercises at the same time. Lead the air from the first to the last note and pay attention not to have air bumps in your phrase, and especially during the transition of tongued and slurred notes.

5. Scales
We have to play scales in almost every piece, most of the etudes and many excerpts. Scales have to be included in one part of the daily practice in all different keys and variants, major and minor, slow and fast. I'm going to show you a lot of different versions of scale exercises.

6. Stability
A steady sound with a good centre is essential but also one of the most difficult aspects of playing the horn. We create a warm and resonant sound by playing it rich in overtones. This can be done through playing with a solid centre. This is essential for the homogeneity in an orchestral horn group or for chamber music with other musicians as well. These are the most important parameters to find a stable intonation and an optimal sound balance. We need to make sure that all notes have a good accentuated start. Don't think of a *sotto di voce*, think of playing chimes. The centre should be hit right after the impulse and not after a few milliseconds. The note should have a good tongued start but what is even more important is to push the air stream directly afterwards. Each note must be phrased and has an undefined ending on the consonant 'm'. This helps a lot to connect the next note without bumps. It would make sense to use an electronic tuner here as well.

7. Power
We are progressively developing lip and embouchure strength. We start gently and increase slowly from week to week, not from day to day. When you start practicing again after three weeks off you will have the impression of quickly being tired and exhausted. Indeed, it often helps to do the daily basics disciplined, without pushing forward into extreme registers. This will make your performance flexible, and if you had a good embouchure before, it will return soon. Basically, all of the stability exercises from chapter six are also power exercises if you play them into the high registers. I will show you four more.

1. Dudelübungen - doodle exercises

Je nach Zeit und Lust kann man auch höher spielen. Aber noch nicht in Extremlagen vorrücken!
Zuerst gebunden und dann gestoßen spielen.
If you want: proceed to higher or lower registers. But don't play extremely high in the beginning of your warm-up!
Start this exercise slured and continue tongued.



2. Luftführung - air flow

Hoher Luftfluss, geringer Luftdruck!
Zentrierter Klang durch Üben auf den langen F-Hörnern.
Gebunden und gestoßen üben.

High air flow, low air pressure!
Good centre by starting on long F-Horns.
Practice slured and tongued.



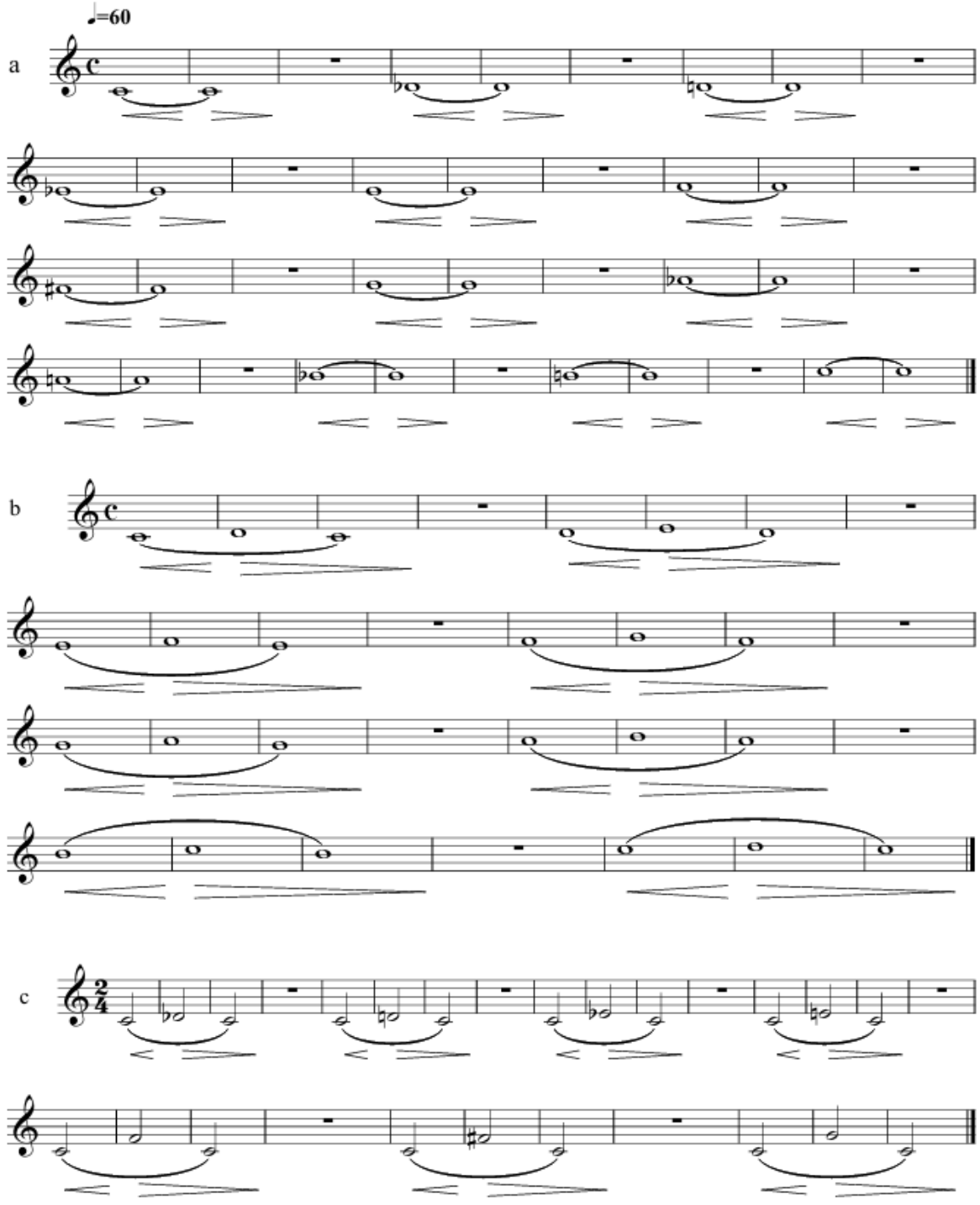
Diese Übung auch gestossen spielen.
Play this exercise tongued as well.



3. Klang - sound

Hier geht es um einen gleichmäßigen, zentrierten und geraden Klang sowie ein homogenes Crescendo und Decrescendo.
Metronom auf 60 einstellen und Luft sehr kontrolliert führen, vor allem im Decrescendo.
Außerdem mit dem Stimmgerät kontrollieren.
Der Zeiger sollte immer stabil bleiben.
Zu empfehlen dafür: Die App "Tunable".
Diese Übungen auch in anderen Tonarten üben.

We should create a steady and straight sound with rich overtones as well as a homogenous crescendo and decrescendo.
Set the metronome to 60 counts per minute and pay attention to a controlled and good airflow especially in the descrescendo.
Check the tuner for not having big variances.
Recommendation: App "Tunable".
Also practice these exercises in other keys.



Wichtig bei all diesen Naturton- und Flexibilitätsübungen:
Die Änderung der Luftgeschwindigkeit ist hauptverantwortlich für den Tonwechsel, nicht nur die Lippenspannung!
Achtet beim Wechsel von gebundenen zu gestoßenen Noten darauf, dass der Luftfluss gleich bleibt und die Zunge diesen nicht stört, sondern nur für den Anstoß kurz unterbricht.
Im Hintergrund fließt die Luft weiter!

One important thing for all of the following flexibility exercises:
The change of the airspeed controls the line, not just the embouchure and the tension of the lips.
Pay attention to a steady air flow during changing from slured to attacked notes. The tongue mustn't disturb the air. It just interrupts it for a short attack!




c
B0
B2
B1
B12
B23
F0
F2
F1
F12
F23
F13
F123

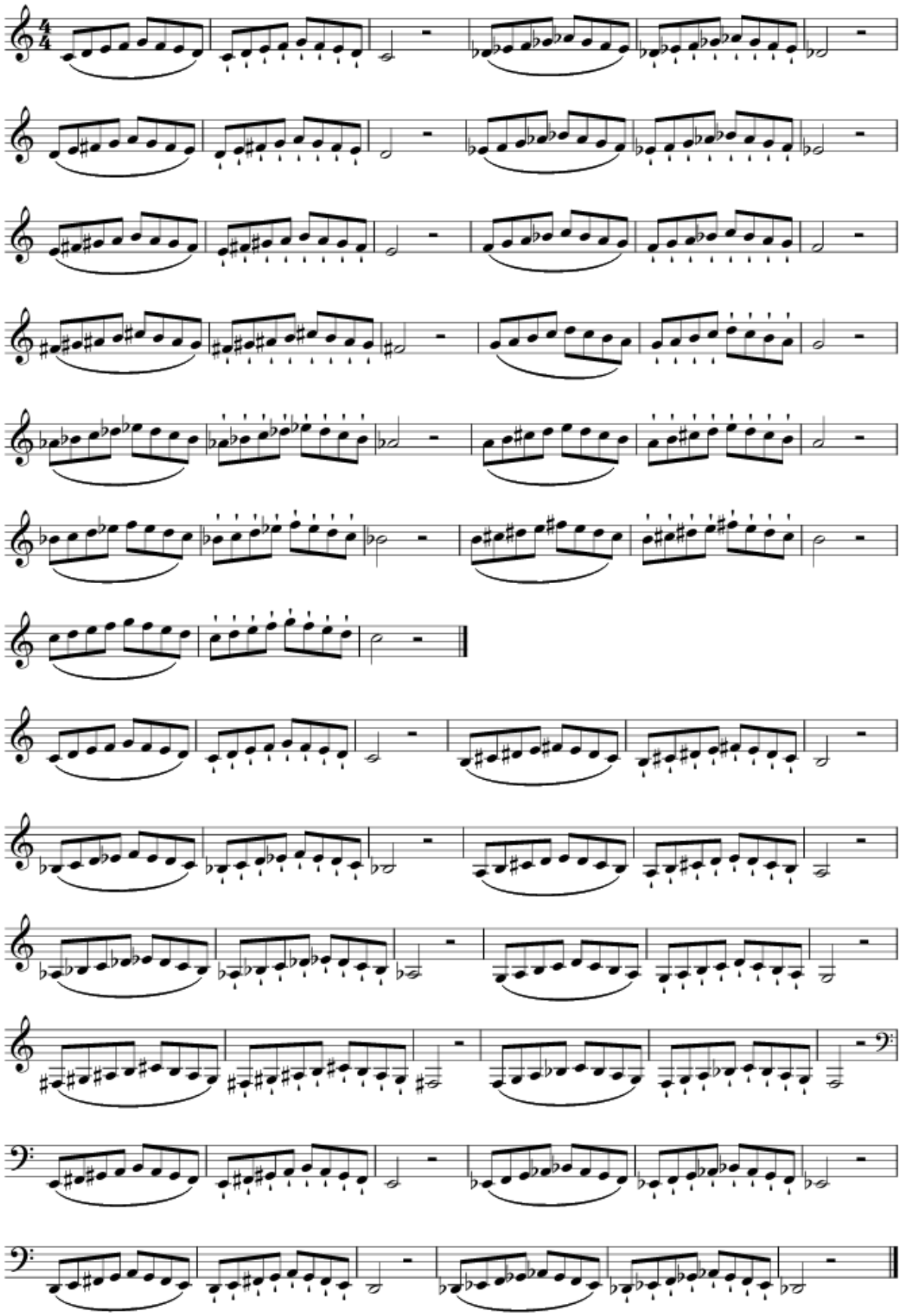
Diese Übung auch gestossen spielen.
Der Wechsel zwischen B- und F-Horn
ermöglicht und trainiert den schnellen Wechsel
zwischen der kleinen und großen Mundöffnung
bei kurzem B- bzw. langem F-Horn.

Play this exercise tongued as well.
The immediate switch from short Bb to
long F horns is good for practicing the fast
change between big and small mouth opening.



5. Tonleitern - scales

a



Diese Übung auch in der kleinen Oktave spielen.
Diese Übung auch von oben nach unten spielen.
Diese Übung auch in Moll spielen.

Practice this exercise also in the low register.
Practice this exercise also top down.
Practice this exercise also in the minor keys.



6. Stabilität - stability

28 Luftakzente machen. Darauf achten, dass das Tonzentrum sofort synchron zum Luftimpuls getroffen wird.
Die Übung auch erweitern bis zur Oktave.
Übung von Horst Ziegler.

Play with air accents. Pay attention to hit the centre of the note directly with the impulse of the air.
Expand this exercise also to the Octave.
Exercise by Horst Ziegler.

a



f



g



7. Kraft - power



Fergus McWilliam



Introduction

It is all very well, me blowing off polemic steam, tilting at windmills, and generally being a cheap critic, but what about some practical advice, some practical suggestions?

In this section therefore I shall describe the six most effective exercises I know of, and which are consistent with the pedagogical philosophy I have been trying to articulate.

First, they are universal in application, by which I mean that simply everybody, no matter what their level, will profit from these exercises.

Secondly, none of them represents a radical departure from conventional teaching. All of them will seem familiar and logical and that is precisely their charm: there is no revolutionary or idiosyncratic pedagogy here. Neither are any of them truly my own original work; usually I have taken the efforts of others as a starting point for further modifications. (Where possible, I have recognised the individual sources.)

Thirdly, integrating the following exercises into every hornist's daily routine guarantees not only rapid improvement but also helps to build and maintain a solid and healthy technique. Both the student who aspires to a professional standard, as well as the professional who wishes to maintain his proficiency over many years, can make excellent use of such ideas.

Finally, and most important, they actually require no teacher. Their effectiveness lies in the fact that the student can—indeed must—rely entirely on himself or herself, in order to judge the results. Self-observation is the key.

5.4.a My Favourite Fundamental Exercises

1. The "Pamper" Exercise (McWilliam, Joseph Singer)
2. Three Octave Arpeggio Exercise (Eugene Rittich)
3. Long Tones (the Classic including blocks of subito piano and forte)
4. Scales—tongued and slurred, minor and major: 2-3 octaves (i.e. Pares)
5. Trills
6. Air from the 3rd Orchestral Suite (J.S. Bach/Rittich)

1. The "Pamper" Exercise

(McWilliam, inspired by Joseph Singer [32])

1. 4 single half notes and a fifth long tone with crescendo and diminuendo—approx: p < mf > p

2. start on a note of your individual free choice between middle c and g, your choice of dynamic somewhere between p and mp



Fig. 5

32 Joseph Singer—Embouchure Building for Horn, Belwin, USA 1956

3. ascend chromatically until it starts to become "work" and STOP wherever that occurs!

4. return to the beginning note and chromatically descend until it starts to become "work" and STOP wherever that occurs!

tempo: 60mm — don't look in the mirror!

"Secret" Advantages of the "Pamper" Exercise:

- We are not faced with some intimidating task that requires superhuman skills or stamina. This is easy. Truly easy. We are *pampering* ourselves.
- We hardly need any air to make the first notes speak; the "onboard" air already in the lungs will suffice completely. So no hang-ups about "correct breathing".
- We hardly need any lip muscle effort; in the "at rest" position the lips will already be very close to the necessary position to allow the first note to speak. So no hang-ups about "correct embouchure".
- The entire procedure takes surprisingly little effort and that is how it should be. Easy. Pampering.
- No teacher is necessary.

What's the point?

Throughout our studies and after we enter the profession, we continually worry about, and work on the difficult stuff (virtuoso solo repertoire and technically demanding orchestral horn parts), losing sight of the fact that the largest proportion of the

most nerve-wracking stuff is made up of exposed, quiet entries which are, technically speaking, not difficult to play. It is insufficient familiarity with "easy stuff" that makes life so hard.

Why then are such relatively simple passages such so difficult? What is it about them that cause so many of us such difficulty?

It is because our "bank account balance" of accumulated, positive experience in playing uncomplicated "easy" things is too small.

We do, on the other hand, invest a lot of playing time in learning and mastering difficult and challenging passages, creating a large "bank balance" of positive experience and memories of the difficult repertoire, lending us self-confidence when we are later confronted by this repertoire "in the heat of the battle". Not only do we know how to play it; we *know* that we know how to play it.

However when it comes to an "easy" but exposed passage, which we *assume* we know how to play, we discover in fact that we are less self-confident and less sure how to play it. We are not sure at all *if* we know that we know how to play it.

Why? Because we have not invested enough playing time doing simple and easy things on the horn. Our accumulated memory of "easy" and "simple" playing is too meagre.

We have to build into our daily work the opportunity to build up this "bank balance" and the so-called "Pamper" exercise helps to do just that. By playing it every day, the experience of mastering quiet, exposed entrances *easily* is repeated so often that true confidence develops really quickly.

This exercise presents us with a wonderful opportunity to experience playing the horn *easily*. Nothing about it is difficult. In fact the most important point is that the moment we notice things becoming more difficult we should actually *stop* playing.

This last point needs repeating: when you notice that you are starting to struggle, even a little …..

S T O P !!!
Do NOT try to continue.
Do NOT try to break through the "wall".

Do this *Pamper Exercise* every day. Enjoy it as the first thing you do, even before you start your warm-up (that is if you still feel a warm-up is necessary). In a surprisingly short space of time you will be producing beautiful, round, stable, ringing tones with a gratifying sense of ease and security.

Enjoy! It's not only fun, it's also good for you.

The Pamper Exercise is also a very good thing to do at the end of a heavy day of playing—something like enjoying a massage after a heavy workout.

All this of course seems to fly in the face of that puritan ethic, "if it doesn't taste bad then the medicine can't be any good" and its famous corollary in the sports world, "No pain, no gain".

As the reader will have realised by now, I am no advocate of self-mortification as a legitimate path to progress.

2. Three-Octave Arpeggio

(from Eugene Rittich)



Fig. 6

Play this one on all valve combinations, on both F and Bb horns, **and do it in ONE breath!** Of course that may well be impossible

at first but don't worry so much about getting the right notes so much as **getting through in one breath**.

"Secret" Advantages of the Three-Octave Arpeggio Exercise?

There are no helpful hints here or instructions about how this is to be achieved. No teacher is needed at all.

The beauty of this exercise is that the very effort to complete it in one breath will reveal all sorts of things to you about your personal playing, particularly about how you manage your air, as well as how you use your mouth and abdominal muscles while crossing the inevitable, and indeed necessary, embouchure break(s). This is a quick road to true flexibility.

Pay attention—"listen"—to your body. Enjoy the trip.

3. Long Tones

(the classic including blocks of *subito ff* and *subito pp*)



Fig. 7

There is perhaps no more universal exercise than this one. Once again, it is uncomplicated and simple—although that doesn't mean it is easy! And once again, if you are willing to listen carefully to your body and your sound, no teacher is required.

An interesting and very fruitful variation of the classic "Long Tone" exercise is this:



Fig. 8

4. Scales

Tongued and slurred, minor and major: 2—3 octaves

Simply mandatory. Use any one of many available scale books, i.e. by Gabriel Pares. There are countless sources available.

5. Trills

Work on trills is not only important for musical ornamentation. Trills are also miniatures of horn technique. Both air speed and embouchure flexibility are required to master trills and horn playing in general profits immensely from the ability to trill well.

Here is one of the classics:



* in all keys, F & Bb horns.

Fig. 9

The following is a useful and effective combination of arpeggio and trill. It is important to alternate between two versions of

approaching the trill—from above—and from below. Increase the speed of the trill slightly at first and then decelerate it before the resolution to make it musical. Try also to include a ***crescendo*** and a ***diminuendo*** on the trill. Observe yourself and how you do it.

"**SNAPSHOT**"!

Pure speed by itself has no value when it comes to trilling—unless you just want to show off.



Fig. 10

(These two arpeggios plus trill exercises are of Czeck origin)

6. Bach—Air

This version of J.S. Bach's Air on the G String is from Eugene Rittich. I don't know what his source was.

Once again, the magic of this exercise is that no teacher is required; no big pedagogical explanations are necessary. The only rule is this: play it EXACTLY as it's written! Breathe *precisely* where it is marked, observe the tempo marking *absolutely*, and play the dynamic levels *exactly* as marked, exaggerate them even.

It does not really matter which transposition you start with. Most hornists will choose a range in which they are comfortable at

first. Fine. But do move on to all the other transpositions as soon as you can perform your first version *perfectly*.

Naturally of course, Example 1, the lowest transposition, presents the most dramatic difficulties. Don't avoid it—the improvements in power, security and breath control, which will result across the entire range, are truly impressive. For this reason I include it first. I believe it is the most important version. Every one's playing will benefit immeasurably from it.

This is the opposite of the *Pamper* exercise. This IS hard work. Don't avoid the challenge. Depending on your natural predisposition, you may find the transpositions go too low or too high for you.

So what? Just do it! No excuses. Only by staying the course will you discover what changes your body must go through in order to play this Bach Air in every transposition.

This is an extreme exercise. It makes huge demands on your body. "Listen" to your body as it adapts to the requirements being made on it. Take note—take "Snap Shots" (see 5.1.b) of the physical changes each transposition requires.

Once you have mastered it in every transposition, you will not only know, you will also truly believe, that you can be comfortable across the entire range of the horn, and that you truly will be able to handle all the demands of modern horn paying.

And once again—**no teacher is necessary**.

Horn in F

AIR

from Orchestral Suite No. 3

J. S. BACH



fig. 11

Horn in F

AIR

from Orchestral Suite No. 3

J. S. BACH



fig. 12

Horn in F

AIR

from Orchestral Suite No. 3

J. S. BACH



fig. 13

Horn in F

AIR

from Orchestral Suite No. 3

J. S. BACH



fig. 14

James Boldin

Basic Warm-Up

James Boldin




57
62
67
74
81
88
94
99
Scale/Articulation Pattern: Practice slowly at first, then gradually increase speed.
105
111


117
122
128
132
Major Arpeggios: Play with normal fingerings and the indicated fingerings, tongued and slurred.
138
0
2
1
12
23
143
13
123
T23
147
T12
T1
T2
T
♩ = 60
151
Low Register: Practice slowly, exaggerate dynamics.
p f p f p f simile
157
T T2
T T2 T1
T2 T1 T12
T1 T12 T23
T12 T23 0

John Humphries

Hunter's Moon by Gilbert Vinter: Some Hints for an Effective Performance

The bassoonist, conductor and composer Gilbert Vinter wrote Hunter's Moon during World War II while staying at a pub in Babbacombe, Devon, called The Hunter's Moon, and it was given its first performance in the Torquay Pavilion by John Burden. Originally scored for horn and orchestra, it was performed on the radio by Dennis Brain and rapidly became an established favourite among horn players. It features on many examination syllabuses and is often played by candidates, because it is both fun to play and is not too taxing, though it needs reserves of stamina to bring off the high notes at the end.

The "Hunter's Moon" is the traditional name given to the full moon which occurs in October each year. And although no written hint to the story implied by the music is printed in the score, horn folklore has given it quite a specific programme.

After an initial flourish, the music is marked Giocoso and is written in 6/8 time, featuring the kind of dotted rhythms that have been synonymous with galloping horses since Mozart's time. The huntsman seems to be galloping home under the light of the Hunter's Moon, after an evening spent celebrating a day's hunting. At first, his ride is purposeful, but after a few bars, the music sounds as though the huntsman has hiccups and maybe a sneezing fit:



Most horn players will understand the "+" symbol over the first note as meaning that the note is to be played hand stopped, and that the "o" on the next note means that this is to be played open again. However, what players coming to it for the first time may not appreciate is that most performers play this as a glissando from the stopped G to the open A, moving the right hand out of the bell while playing the G. The trick here is to choose a fingering which will enable you to play it as a slur, giving the somewhat tipsy effect that the composer seems to be looking for. Conventional wisdom says you play the stopped G as a second-valve note on the F horn, but what works best here is to play it open on the B flat horn. (I know that sounds unlikely, but try it: it really does work!) You then move your right hand out of the bell as far as you can and the pitch of the note will rise to A. This may be a little flat, so alternatively try the passage using first and second valves. This way the G may be sharp, but use your ear and decide which fingering works best!

A few bars on, there are some hand-stopped A flats and then a few bars later, some hand-stopped D flats. Play them without any valves on the F side of the horn and don't be afraid to make them sound rude!

At the climax of this first section this passage appears:



Played with conventional fingerings, this passage often sounds rather laboured as the fingerings are awkward to play. The following fingering pattern compromises tuning a little, but the gains from fluency outweigh any losses.



A whole tone scale in the piano part suggests that something dramatic has happened. Has our hero fallen off his horse? The music dies away and slows down. The key signature turns major, and the horn's theme, marked espressivo and "very tenderly" suggests that our huntsman has fallen asleep in a ditch. The great horn player Ifor James used to claim that he was dreaming of the barmaid back in the hostelry! Horn players are often very suspicious of using vibrato as they play, but this is a place where its judicious use can give the music an appropriately sentimental mood.

The piano takes over for a while: our huntsman seems to be dead to the world as he sleeps off his over-indulgence, but eventually he wakes up and the horn player is asked to sound a pedal G, followed by a rising arpeggio. This is one of the trickiest passages in the piece and many a fine soloist has come to grief here. Getting the G in the first place can be a problem as can holding it steadily. Then the rising arpeggio often goes flat, especially if you try to play the final second-line G as a first valve note on the B flat horn. Practise it hard and listen carefully to tone and tuning! Dennis Brain used to play on a B flat single horn, on which the low G was not available, so he cut this passage. But, unless you are also playing on a B flat single horn, that is cheating!

The tempo then picks up, the huntsman finds his horse and mounts it again before galloping off into the night. Ifor James used to move his hand in and out of the bell during the following passage so each note started slightly flat, thus enhancing its bucolic effect:



Just before the end, Vinter asks the player to glissando from F sharp up to high B flat. Joie de vivre is what is called for here rather than precision. Play the F sharp with second valve, then press down all three valves for the upwards whoop, catching the B flat with first valve. And the final B natural? Good luck with it, and if it doesn't come out, play a second line G with the piano's final chord. That way you will both end together!

Piotr Pożakowski

FORGOTTEN CONCERT SONGS FOR VOICE, HORN, AND PIANO

Song – one of the oldest musical forms – has undergone various stages of development. The combination of poetry and music was closest to the ideals of Romanticism, so it is no wonder that it was during this era that song developed most fully. Various types of Romantic songs – categorised based on their construction, poetic structure, or the composition of the performers – constituted a continuation and expansion of earlier varieties or represented the era's creative contribution to the development of the form.

One of the types of songs developed during Romanticism was the concert song, which is a song for voice, a solo instrument, and piano. Just as in the case of all forms in music history, its emergence was a consequence of specific processes and ideological and aesthetic conditions.

The origins of the concert song should be sought in the Baroque tradition of combining the voice with a solo instrument. The concerto technique played a particularly significant role in the emergence of this tradition. The voice, treated instrumentally, formed a performing group in combination with the instrument, within which an internal imitative dialogue also took place. Baroque vocal-instrumental works provide a number of examples of such practice. The violin was the first to take on the role of a solo instrument. Among the wind instruments used in Baroque works, the very popular oboe and oboe d'amore were performed, as well as the flute or traverso flutes. Compositions in which the trumpet was the solo instrument gained particular popularity. Examples of its use in this role can be found in the works of all the masters of the Baroque. The most well-known are probably the aria "Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen" from J.S. Bach's Cantata No. 51 and the aria "Let the bright Seraphim" from G.F. Handel's oratorio ***Samson***.

In Classicism, due to the dominance of homophonic texture, the practice of imitative dialogue between voice and instrument was abandoned. There are also fewer examples of introducing a solo instrument into vocal works. The most famous ones come from Mozart's works – for example Sesto's aria from his opera ***La clemenza di Tito*** (with the clarinet as a concerting instrument).

In Mozart's work, we also encounter arias in which – following the Baroque model – he sets apart a group of solo instruments from the orchestra to engage in a dialogue with the voice. This is the case, for example, in the aria "Et incarnatus est" from the Mass in C minor (the concertante group consists of flute, oboe and bassoon). A similar case is Leonora's aria from Beethoven's opera ***Fidelio***, in which the concertante group consists of three horns. While in the Baroque era the solo instrument was essentially treated on an equal footing with the voice, which was sometimes even reflected in the titles of the works, in Classicism it remained the orchestra's solo instrument – despite its significant role, it was always in the background, always in the shadow of the vocal part.

The practice of combining the voice with a concerting instrument intensified again during Romanticism. However, the mutual relationship between the vocal and instrumental parts, as well as the role of the instrument, have changed completely. In the Baroque era, the voice was treated instrumentally and competed with instruments in imitative dialogues. The singer therefore had to strive to develop instrumental precision and a way of phrasing. In Romanticism, the situation was reversed – the part of the solo instrument was modelled on the

vocal part. Now, it was the instrumentalist who had to shape the phrase in a vocal manner, as the instrument led a melodic line parallel to the vocal one, acting as a second voice or a harmonic accompaniment, sometimes only for short stretches by joining in an imitative dialogue.

In the opera orchestras of the first half of the 19th century, it was common practice to entrust the main theme of an aria's introduction not to the entire orchestra, but to a selected instrument or instruments. However, few examples can be given of arias in which a concerting instrument is introduced. Just as was the case in Classicism – despite being a responsible and often difficult part – it is not an equal vocal partner, but rather a solo orchestral instrument complementing the vocal part. Examples of the important and responsible function of concerting instruments can also be found in religious works of this period, especially in the works of Donizetti and Rossini.

However, the idea of combining the voice with a concerting instrument was most fully realized in the realm of song. "At the beginning of the 19th century, a new type of song emerged in the form of an aria with one or two obbligato instruments, (...) Generally referred to at the time as the concert song (***Konzertlied***), it immediately conquered concert halls, while the intimate, lyrical solo song remained limited to demanding private circles."[1] The beginnings of the concert songs were associated with the names of Andreas Jakob Romberg and Conradin Kreutzer. Shortly after them, Franz Lachner and Heinrich Proch joined the group of creators of this form.

Song, including the concert song, as a form closely linked to poetry and intended to best convey and co-create its atmosphere through music, was meant to be free from artificial, virtuoso displays. The introduction of an additional instrument undoubtedly made a song more impressive, however, a virtuoso element is essentially absent in it. The only exception is the most famous concert song – Franz Schubert's ***Der Hirt auf dem Felsen*** for soprano, clarinet, and piano, the third movement of which is significantly virtuoso in character, both in the vocal and instrumental parts. This does not change the fact, however, that this song and also ***Auf dem Strom*** for soprano or tenor, horn, and piano (both composed in the final months of Schubert's life in 1828) remain masterpieces of the concert song. A perfect balance is maintained between the vocal part and the part of the solo instrument, which is an equal partner, co-shaping the expression of the work. What draws attention, however, is the piano part, which is unusual for Schubert as it is limited to accompaniment. This, however, is a general characteristic of all concert songs – given the coexistence of two melodic elements within them (the voice and the solo instrument), the role of the piano is reduced to creating a background that may take on various figures and forms, but generally does not go beyond accompaniment.

Over the course of more than 20 years of research on this subject, the author has uncovered information regarding 141 concert songs written in the 19th or early 20th century by 44 composers – including such well-known figures as Brahms, Meyerbeer, Berlioz, Schubert, Gounod, Saint-Saëns or Richard Strauss. There are certainly more. A portion of the vast number of songs, including concert songs, written by lesser-known or now forgotten composers, awaits discovery, editing, and publication in library archives. It must be emphasised that this compilation does not include works for voice, horn and piano in forms other than song,

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[1] G. Wagner – "Franz Lachner als Liederkomponist nebst einem biographischen Teil und dem thematischen Verzeichnis sämtlicher Lieder", Giebing (Chiemsee) 1970, p. 13.

which are nineteenth-century transcriptions of popular operatic themes, nor does it include choral songs that utilize a horn or horns in a larger ensemble.

Among the wind instruments in 19th or early 20th century concert songs, the following appeared: flute (11 times), clarinet (27 times), horn (69 times). Among the string instruments: violin (12 times), viola (8 times), cello (51 times).

The vast majority of pieces of this kind were therefore written using the horn or the cello (which are often used interchangeably). This is no coincidence – the horn and the cello are eminently Romantic instruments, whose sound particularly appealed to the composers of the era and predestined them to the role of carriers of Romantic elements in music. Their use in the song reinforced that element, which was sometimes further amplified through the use of two obbligato instruments. Entrusting the horn with the function of a solo instrument, in addition to the aforementioned aesthetic reasons, was related to the development of playing technique and the construction of this instrument. The appearance of the invention horn and the subsequent invention of valves significantly expanded its technical capabilities. The horn gained entirely new meanings and functions in Romantic scores. It had never been used so widely before. The growing interest in this instrument was also manifested in the creation of many solo works for horn with orchestra or piano, which utilized the instrument's sonic and technical capabilities.

According to the author's current knowledge, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, 27 composers wrote 70 songs for voice, horn (sometimes interchangeably or in combination with another instrument), and piano. Among them there were also creators who are practically unknown today. Slightly less than half of them were composed by Franz Lachner and Heinrich Proch. These creators – completely forgotten today – were among the most outstanding figures of musical life of their time, and their fame reached a European dimension. For this reason as well, they deserve a brief reminder.

Franz Lachner was born on 2 April 1803, in Bavaria. Setting aside the beginnings of his musical education, his musical career began in Vienna, where in 1823 he became an organist of the Evangelical church. There, he joined the circle of participants in artistic gatherings involving Franz Schubert, with whom he formed a long-standing friendship.

In 1827, Lachner became the vice-conductor, and two years later, the conductor of the Vienna Kärntnertortheater. In 1833, he moved to Mannheim, where from 1834 he conducted the orchestra of the local opera. In 1836, he settled in Munich, where he took up the position of conductor of the Königliche Vokalkapelle and the Hofoper, which he led for over 30 years. His life and work remained connected to this city. In 1852, he became the general music director of the University of Munich, and ten years later, he received an honorary doctorate from the university. He gave regular concerts at the Munich Musikalische Akademie and music festivals in Munich, Salzburg, and Aachen.

Lachner made Munich's musical life one of the most vibrant in Germany. During the thirty years of his directorship, the opera became one of the country's leading stages. After finishing his work at the opera, for the 23 years that remained until the end of his life, he enjoyed great authority within the Munich artistic community.

In 1883, Franz Lachner received honorary citizenship of Munich. He died on 20 January 1890, at the age of 87. Franz Lachner's compositional output encompassed many musical genres and forms, yet none held such a special place in his work as the song. Lachner's thematic catalog includes 355 songs[2], which he wrote throughout almost his entire life. 30 of them are concert songs.

[2] Günter Wagner – "Franz Lachner als Liederkomponist, nebst einem biographischen Teil und dem thematischen

A clear majority of them (21) were created in Vienna between 1825 and 1833. More spectacular than the intimate solo songs, they better suited the tastes of a wide audience and enjoyed considerable popularity at that time. Young Lachner was aware of this, and, wanting to achieve success, also wrote concert songs. He also owed a great deal to the fact that his name soon became known both in Vienna and throughout all of Germany.

Lachner was one of the pioneers of the concert song, and his song ***Sturm*** for baritone, 2 horns and piano from 1825 predates Schubert's concert songs by three years. He was a creator possessing a reliable compositional toolkit and great melodic invention. It is therefore no wonder that his songs became widely known and beloved, and generally met with critical acclaim as well. The popularity of Lachner's works was reflected in musical lexicons and encyclopaedias of the first half of the 19th century. It is worth emphasizing that the concert songs featuring the horn – ***Waldvöglein***, ***Bewußtsein***, and ***Nachts in der Kajüte*** – enjoyed the greatest acclaim, being mentioned in almost all sources of that era. In the encyclopaedia published by Schilling in 1837, his songs were already recognized as the most valuable part of his work, among them ***Waldvöglein***, which "is on almost everyone's lips in Austria and will preserve Lachner's name forever."[3]

F. Lachner – ***Waldvöglein***, Op. 21 No. 1, mm. 1-16 (horn part – introduction).



Heinrich Proch was born in Vienna on 22 July 1809. He began his first violin lessons at the age of 7. In 1822, his talent was nurtured by the eminent violin virtuoso Josef Benesch. After only a few weeks of studying under his guidance, Heinrich made his debut at his first public concert. On 14 November 1822, at the Städtischen Theater in Wiener Neustadt, he performed Ludwig Spohr's Concerto for Two Violins alongside his teacher.

In 1826, Proch began two years of philosophical studies at the University of Vienna, which he completed in 1828, after which he commenced four years of law studies. At the same time, however, he continued to study composition and the violin. In 1834, he was accepted as a violinist to the Wiener Hofkapelle. In 1837, he became the conductor of the Josefstadt Theater, for which he wrote music for 28 stage plays over the course of 7 years. A breakthrough moment in Proch's conducting career was his preparation of Meyerbeer's ***Huguenots*** at the Josefstadt Theater. The premiere in 1839 was a great success and earned Proch the position of conductor

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Verzeichnis sämtlicher Lieder", Musikverlag Emil Katzbichler, Giebing (Chiemsee) 1970, pp. 141-308.

[3] Gustav Schilling – "Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen Wissenschaften, oder Universal-Lexikon der Tonkunst", Stuttgart 1837, vol. 4, p. 294.

at the Kärntnertortheater (the later Hofoper), a role he held continuously for 30 years. The most important events during this period included the premiere of the opera ***Marta*** by Flotow prepared by him, as well as the performance of Mozart's ***Don Giovanni***, which opened the new Hofoper building in 1869. After retiring in 1870, he did not remain idle. He was involved, among other things, in the creation of an opera buffa in Vienna. On 17 January 1874, the Komische Oper inaugurated its activities in the new Ringtheater building with a performance of Rossini's ***The Barber of Seville***, under the direction of Proch.

Before Proch had even gained recognition and a position in Vienna through his work as a conductor, it was his bravura vocal variations and numerous songs that brought him fame and popularity extending far beyond the borders of the empire. As early as 1839, Parisian newspapers hailed him as Schubert's successor and rival. Interestingly, in Proch's songwriting, we find 24 compositions written to his own poetry.

Proch was also a highly regarded singing teacher. Although he devoted himself primarily to teaching singing in the final years of his life, as early as in 1856 issue of ***Theaterzeitung*** it could be read that "if the effective master Proch continues to act in this manner, devoting himself to the teaching of singing with such zeal, then soon there will not be a single German opera stage where at least one young talent will not bear witness to his excellent method."[4] Heinrich Proch died in Vienna on 18 December 1878.

In the survey of Proch's works, it is noteworthy that he wrote orchestral, instrumental, or chamber pieces somewhat on the periphery of his creative output, focusing clearly on vocal music, especially songs. Proch's thematic catalogue of works[5] contains 242 compositions in the "Lieder" section. However, these are also vocal works of a genre other than song. It is noteworthy that his first song, ***Der Jüngling am Bache***, Op. 1, is a concert song. This testifies to the composer's interest in this type of work, from his earliest compositional attempts to his fully mature works.

Proch wrote a total of 29 concert songs, 15 of which were for voice, horn, and piano. All available sources agree that Proch's most popular work, which made his name famous throughout Europe, was the concert song – ***Alpenhorn***, Op. 18. It was performed for the first time at a concert in Vienna on 7 February 1836. The scale of its popularity can be evidenced by numerous compositions based on its themes, including Clara Wieck's ***Phantasie über das Alpenhornlied*** for flute and horn, as well as Jakob Offenbach's ***Capriccio pour Violoncelle***, in which the theme of this song serves as the basis of the piece.

H. Proch – ***Alpenhorn***, Op. 18, mm. 1-10 (horn part – introduction).



[4] Theaterzeitung 1856, p. 451. Quote according to: Völker Inge-Christa – -Heinrich Proch. Sein Leben und Wirken". Doctoral thesis at the University of Vienna (1949), p. 154.

[5] Völker Inge-Christa – op. cit., pp. 317-411.

Regardless of the visible commonalities or differences, the concert songs of Lachner and Proch are fully representative of all such works in the 19th century. Very popular during their lifetime, they eventually fell into oblivion. Contemporary editions date only from the 1980s. It is therefore no wonder that these compositions remain unknown to this day, not only to the general public but even to singers or horn players.

Of course, concert songs for voice, horn, and piano are not limited to Franz Lachner and Heinrich Proch, nor are they confined to Romanticism and the 19th century. The concert song remained a subject of interest for composers also in the 20th century. Aside from the composers whose lives and work spanned the beginning of the 20th century, the songs for voice, horn and piano were written by, among others, the German composer Bernhard Krol (1920–2013), the British Arnold Cook (1906–2005), and the Americans: Donald Busarow (1934–2011), Ronald Perera (1941–2023), and Steven Winteregg (b. 1952). Also interesting are the songs with two concerting instruments – compositions for soprano, oboe, horn and piano can be found in the works of William Henry Presser (1916–2004) and Harold Kafer (b. 1949). The form of these works, the approach to the poetic text, the musical language, and the harmony provide an interesting example of how song, including the concert song, evolved in the 20th century. That is, however, a subject for a separate article...

Saar Berger

The Modern Horn Player

Performance, Artistic Identity, and New Perspectives in Contemporary Music

Prof. Saar Berger
Professor of Horn
Trossingen State University of Music (Germany)

Introduction

The French horn has undergone a remarkable artistic transformation over the past decades. While its historical role remains deeply rooted in orchestral tradition, today's horn player is expected to embrace a much broader artistic, educational, and soloistic landscape. Contemporary performers move naturally between orchestral performance, chamber music, solo recitals, interdisciplinary productions, recordings, teaching, artistic research, and close collaboration with living composers.

More importantly, they are invited to discover the unique artistic freedom of sharing their individual musical voice directly with an audience through sound, imagination, colour, communication, and personal interpretation.

Modern horn playing is no longer defined solely by technical excellence. It is characterised by curiosity, openness, artistic courage, and the willingness to explore new perspectives. Every new work, every collaboration with a composer, every concert, and every performance without accompaniment becomes an opportunity to discover new colours, new possibilities, and new ways of communicating through music.

For this reason, contemporary repertoire should never be viewed as a specialised field reserved for only a small group of performers. Instead, it has become an essential part of the artistic education of every horn player.

The purpose of this paper is to explore how modern performance practice can become one of the most powerful educational tools in shaping complete musicians—artists who remain deeply connected to the great traditions of horn playing while confidently embracing the musical language of today.

1. The Modern Horn Player

The modern horn player is no longer defined solely by technical excellence. Today's musical world offers us more artistic possibilities than ever before. With these possibilities come new responsibilities, new forms of communication, and an endless invitation to remain curious, creative, and open to discovery.

Performance is no longer simply the accurate execution of written notes. Every appearance on stage represents an opportunity to communicate imagination, emotion, energy, personality, and artistic vision.

Contemporary repertoire continuously expands tradition. From the groundbreaking contributions of Olivier Messiaen, Oliver Knussen, György Ligeti, Gérard Grisey, Wolfgang Rihm, György Kurtág, and Peter Eötvös, to living composers including Heinz Holliger, Jörg Widmann, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Thomas Adès, Dai Fujikura, Miroslav Srnka, Chikage Imai, Cathy Milliken, Sven-Ingo Koch, Nina Šenk, and Vito Žuraj, together with many other established and emerging composers around the world, the repertoire continues to evolve through new musical languages, colours, artistic perspectives, and close collaboration between composers and performers.

2. Sound Identity Comes First

Before exploring extended techniques or contemporary notation, every horn player should be encouraged to discover a personal sound identity.

Long before audiences analyse interpretation or technical precision, they instinctively respond to sound. Sound communicates personality before a single phrase is understood intellectually.

I believe every horn player should be encouraged to explore and develop a sound that feels natural, resonant, colourful, expressive and, above all, authentic to their own artistic personality.

There is no single perfect horn sound. Every musician brings different experiences, influences, imagination and artistic sensitivity. Developing a personal sound identity is not about copying another performer or striving for a predetermined ideal. It is about learning to listen carefully — to ourselves, to others, and to the music we perform.

Before we communicate through music, we first need to reflect on what we wish to communicate. What do we want the audience to hear? How do we want our sound to speak? What kind of artistic atmosphere do we hope to create?

Our sound is our voice. It is the first and perhaps the most personal form of communication between performer and listener.

3. Performance Beyond Technique

The development of technical excellence is undoubtedly one of the foundations of every successful musician. However, technique alone has never been the final artistic goal. It is the language through which ideas, emotions, imagination, and personality become audible.

True performance begins where technique becomes invisible.

When listeners leave a concert, they rarely remember every perfectly played note. Instead, they remember how the music made them feel. They remember a particular sound, a moment of silence, a phrase that touched them, or an artist whose presence transformed the atmosphere of the concert hall.

For this reason, performance should never be understood merely as the accurate execution of a musical score. Every concert is an act of communication. Every performance tells a story. Every phrase carries intention, direction, and meaning.

The modern horn player therefore develops not only technical precision but also artistic imagination, emotional intelligence, curiosity, flexibility, and the courage to communicate something deeply personal.

Performance becomes a dialogue rather than a demonstration. The performer does not simply present music—the performer shares an experience.

Every audience is different. Every concert hall is different. Every acoustic environment changes the relationship between performer, instrument, and listener. Learning to react naturally to these changing circumstances is part of becoming an artist.

For this reason, I encourage students not only to practise notes, rhythms, articulation, and dynamics but also to practise communication.

How do I enter the stage?
How do I breathe before the first note?
How do I create silence?
How do I shape tension?
How do I invite the audience into my musical world?

These questions are just as important as technical preparation.

Great performances are remembered because they communicate honesty.

Technique allows us to play. Communication allows us to inspire.

4. Communication Through Sound

Every musician speaks a language.

For the horn player, this language is created not through words but through sound.

Every note carries information.

Every colour carries emotion.
Every articulation changes the meaning of a musical sentence.

Just as every human voice is unique, every horn player possesses an individual sound that reflects personality, experience, imagination, and artistic identity.

Developing this personal language requires careful listening: listening to ourselves, to colleagues, to singers, to orchestras, to composers, and even to silence.

Only by listening deeply do we begin to understand what we truly wish to communicate.

The horn possesses an extraordinary ability to speak with warmth, brilliance, intimacy, heroism, mystery, vulnerability, humour, and lyricism.

Rather than searching for one ideal sound, we should seek an authentic artistic voice capable of adapting naturally to different musical languages while remaining unmistakably our own.

Reflection

What do I want my sound to communicate?

Which colours feel most natural to my artistic personality?

What makes my voice different from every other horn player?

When I perform, what do I hope the audience remembers after the final note?

5. The Musician as a Storyteller

When we step onto the stage, we do far more than perform music. We accept the privilege and the responsibility of inviting an audience into a shared artistic journey. Every piece, regardless of style or period, becomes an opportunity to tell a story through sound, imagination, silence, colour, communication, and human connection.

The greatest artistic challenge — and perhaps the greatest privilege—of every musician is to become a storyteller.

Becoming a storyteller is a deeply personal journey. There is no single formula and no universal method. Every musician discovers an individual artistic language through experience, curiosity, reflection, and continuous exploration. Learning how to communicate honestly, naturally, and authentically is one of the most rewarding lifelong processes in music.

It is precisely this individuality that makes every performer unique. Two musicians may perform the same work with equal technical mastery, yet each performance can offer a completely different emotional experience. This diversity is one of the greatest treasures of our artistic world.

Music is not about creating identical interpretations — it is about discovering our own voice and sharing it generously with others.

6. Working with Living Composers

One of the greatest privileges of today's musicians is the opportunity to collaborate directly with living composers. This dialogue transforms the traditional relationship between composer and performer into a creative partnership.

Every rehearsal, every conversation, every question about notation, colour, articulation, timing, or sound becomes an opportunity to understand not only what is written but why it was written. In return, performers contribute practical experience, artistic imagination, and an intimate understanding of the instrument.

This collaborative process enriches both composer and performer. New repertoire grows naturally from this exchange, while performers develop greater artistic flexibility, curiosity, and confidence in approaching unfamiliar musical languages.

For students, working with living composers is more than preparing a premiere. It is an invitation to become active participants in the continuing evolution of music itself.

Reflection

What story do I want to tell through my next performance?

How can I communicate more honestly with my audience?

What have I learned from the most recent composer whose music I performed?

How has contemporary music changed my artistic identity?

Beyond the Written Notes

Working with a living composer is unlike any other musical experience.

Unlike historical repertoire, where the score is fixed and the composer can no longer answer our questions, contemporary music offers a unique opportunity for direct artistic dialogue. Every rehearsal becomes a conversation. Every question becomes part of the creative process.

This dialogue extends far beyond interpretation. Performers and composers explore together the practical possibilities of the instrument, discussing sound, articulation, breathing, colour, notation, timing, extended techniques, and musical intention.

Every composition presents its own technical and musical challenges. Some passages appear extremely demanding, while others reveal unexpected simplicity once their artistic purpose becomes clear. Preparing a new work therefore requires more than technical practice. It demands curiosity, flexibility, careful listening, imagination, and a willingness to experiment.

Time becomes an essential artistic investment. Every hour spent exploring a new score gradually transforms uncertainty into understanding.

An Artistic Exchange

The relationship between composer and performer should never be understood as one-sided.

While the performer seeks to understand the composer's artistic vision, the composer also gains valuable insight into the practical realities of the instrument. A passage that appears convincing on paper may invite discussion once it is brought to life. Sometimes a different articulation, another breathing point, an alternative notation, or a slight adjustment of a technical gesture communicates the same artistic idea more naturally.

These conversations should never be seen as criticism. They are among the most rewarding aspects of artistic collaboration.

The performer contributes practical experience, technical knowledge, artistic intuition, and a deep understanding of the instrument. The composer contributes imagination, structure, and artistic vision. Together they search for the strongest possible musical result.

Occasionally, performers may even discover new possibilities that inspire the composer to rethink or further develop a passage. In this way, the collaboration can improve not only one performance but also future performances of the work, allowing other musicians to benefit from the same artistic dialogue.

This exchange represents one of the most democratic and inspiring aspects of contemporary music. It reminds us that artistic creation is often not a solitary act but a shared journey built on openness, trust, respect, curiosity, and mutual inspiration.

Artistic Thought

"The strongest collaborations are not built on agreement alone but on curiosity, openness, and the shared desire to discover the best possible artistic result."

7. Flexibility – The Artist's Greatest Strength

When musicians hear the word "flexibility", they often think first of technical ability. Certainly, technical flexibility is essential. The ability to move freely between registers, dynamics, articulations, colours, and styles forms an important part of every musician's development.

Yet true artistic flexibility reaches far beyond technique.

It begins in the mind.

Every new composition asks different questions. Every composer speaks a different musical language. Every concert hall changes the acoustic environment. Every audience listens differently. Every collaboration opens unexpected artistic possibilities.

Learning to embrace these changes rather than resist them is one of the defining characteristics of a mature musician.

Artistic flexibility means remaining open without losing one's own identity. It means respecting tradition while welcoming innovation. It means having the courage to leave familiar habits in order to discover new artistic perspectives.

Perhaps flexibility is not the ability to change.

Perhaps flexibility is the willingness to continue growing.

Technical Flexibility

Technical flexibility includes breathing, embouchure, air support, resonance, articulation, endurance, intonation, dynamic control, register, colour, and the ability to move naturally between traditional repertoire, orchestral playing, chamber music, solo performance, and contemporary techniques. Every new challenge is another opportunity to expand our artistic vocabulary.

Musical Flexibility

Musical flexibility begins with listening. It means adapting naturally to conductors, chamber music partners, composers, rehearsal situations, acoustics, and audiences. Sometimes the greatest musical decision is not to play more but to leave more space.

Mental and Creative Flexibility

Contemporary music often invites us beyond our comfort zone. New notation, unfamiliar rhythms, unexpected harmonies, and innovative techniques encourage us to ask not "Why is this difficult?" but "What is this music inviting me to discover?"

Creativity grows whenever we allow ourselves to experiment. Every rehearsal is an opportunity to explore different colours, tempi, articulations, breathing, and emotional directions. Even experiments that never reach the concert stage enrich our artistic development.

Reflection
What artistic situations challenge me the most?

Which habits support my artistic growth, and which limit it?

What new perspective can I discover today?

8. The Heart of Practice
Practice is often understood as repetition. I believe it is something much deeper.

Practice is a conversation between today's musician and tomorrow's musician.

Every practice session is an opportunity not only to improve technique but also to understand ourselves more deeply. Great practice is measured not by the number of hours but by the quality of attention, listening, imagination, curiosity, and reflection.

Practising with Curiosity
Rather than asking "How many times should I repeat this passage?", perhaps we should ask, "What is this passage trying to teach me?" Every technical challenge hides an artistic lesson.

Listening While Practising
Listening is perhaps the most underestimated aspect of practising. When we learn to listen honestly, every note becomes feedback, every phrase becomes information, and every rehearsal becomes an opportunity for discovery.

Sight-Reading
Sight-reading develops confidence, imagination, musical reflexes, curiosity, and the ability to communicate naturally with unfamiliar musical languages. It should become part of every musician's daily artistic routine—not as an examination but as an adventure.

Reflection Instead of Repetition
Instead of asking, "How many times have I played this?", perhaps we should ask, "What did I discover this time that I did not know five minutes ago?"

That single question transforms practice from mechanical repetition into artistic exploration.

Artistic Thought
"***Practice is not the repetition of yesterday. It is the discovery of tomorrow."***

9. The Language of Colour
Colour is one of the most personal dimensions of musical expression. Beyond dynamics, colour is shaped by resonance, articulation, breathing, timing, silence, acoustics, imagination and intention. Every performer develops a unique palette, and learning to recognise, refine and expand that

palette is a lifelong artistic journey. Rather than searching for one ideal colour, we should cultivate the ability to choose the colour that best serves the musical story.

10. Extended Techniques as Artistic Vocabulary

Artistic Thought

Every technique should serve expression. Technique is never the destination - it is the vocabulary through which music speaks.

Most discussions of extended techniques begin with a catalogue of effects: multiphonics, half-valve techniques, glissandi, microtones, air sounds, percussive effects, natural harmonics, stopped horn, singing while playing, and many other possibilities.

Although these techniques are important, such a catalogue does not yet address the essential question: Why do we use them?

An extended technique becomes artistically meaningful when it communicates something that cannot be expressed in the same way through conventional horn playing. It can create a new colour, a physical gesture, a sense of distance, instability, intimacy, tension, humour, fragility, or transformation. The technique should therefore never become more important than the musical idea it is meant to serve.

For this reason, I do not encourage students to learn extended techniques only as isolated technical exercises. Instead, I invite them to reflect on three questions:

Why did the composer choose this particular sound?

What emotional or dramatic atmosphere does it create?

How does it change the story I am telling?

Only after reflecting on these questions does the technique become part of an artistic vocabulary. Every new sound can then become another colour, another gesture, and another possibility for communication.

Colour

Stopped horn, hand-horn technique, half-valve effects, mute changes, alternative fingerings, and microtones can transform the colour of the instrument. They may darken or brighten a phrase, create distance, suggest instability, or produce a sound that seems to move between familiar and unfamiliar worlds.

The hand inside the bell plays a particularly important role. It is not used only for stopped horn or historical technique; it can also become a flexible tool for shaping resonance, intonation, microtonal movement, and changes of colour. These effects are most convincing when the performer understands their relationship to the musical line rather than treating them as separate events.

Air

Air sounds, breath tones, whispered attacks, and sounds without a clearly defined pitch remind us that breath is already part of music. They allow the performer to work at the border between sound and silence and can create an atmosphere of suspense, vulnerability, distance, or physical presence.

Such techniques require careful control of airflow, articulation, timing, and resonance. Their quietness does not make them simple. On the contrary, they often ask for refined concentration and a strong awareness of the acoustic space.

Voice

Multiphonics and singing while playing unite the human voice with the horn. They can create harmony, friction, beating patterns, or a striking dialogue between two sound identities produced by one performer.

These techniques depend on coordination between air, embouchure, pitch, and the vocal cords. Yet their artistic meaning goes beyond coordination. The performer should consider whether the voice is meant to blend with the horn, oppose it, emerge from it, or create the impression of several musical characters speaking at once.

Movement

Glissandi, lip bends, natural harmonics, flexible intonation, valve trills, and rapid transitions between registers bring movement into the sound itself. They encourage performers to think beyond fixed notes and to experience pitch as something that can travel, bend, dissolve, or transform.

Extreme high and low registers, sudden dynamic changes, and fast shifts of articulation can also become forms of movement. They demand technical preparation, but their purpose is not to demonstrate difficulty. Their purpose is to shape energy, direction, and dramatic development.

Rhythm and Percussion

Tongue percussion, valve noises, mouthpiece sounds, bell effects, and other percussive gestures expand the rhythmic identity of the horn. They may support pulse, interrupt it, create mechanical energy, or transform the performer into both wind player and percussionist.

The challenge is to integrate these gestures into the timing and character of the composition. A percussive effect should feel like part of the musical sentence rather than an interruption placed beside it.

Space and Resonance

Resonance, silence, distance, direction, and the acoustic character of the room are essential parts of contemporary performance. A sound played into the bell, away from the audience, from another position in the hall, or through a mute can completely change the listener’s perception of space.

Extended techniques should never compete with musical meaning. At their best, they deepen it. They allow the horn player to discover new languages while remaining connected to sound, imagination, communication, and artistic identity.

11. Silence

Silence is not the absence of music; it is part of music itself. Every first note emerges from silence, and every final note returns to it. Learning to shape silence requires patience, confidence and trust. In performance, silence creates expectation, breathing space, emotional depth and connection. Often, the most memorable musical moments are those that occur between the notes.

12. Solo Performance

Performing as a soloist offers a unique artistic freedom. Without accompaniment, every phrase, every breath, every colour and every silence belongs entirely to the performer. Solo performance strengthens imagination, concentration, confidence and communication, inviting the musician to create a complete artistic world through the voice of a single instrument.

13. Chamber Music

Chamber music teaches some of the most valuable lessons in a musician's life: listening, trust, flexibility, leadership and generosity. It reminds us that artistic excellence is created together. Every rehearsal is a conversation, every phrase a shared decision, and every performance an act of mutual respect and inspiration.

14. Artistic Life: Orchestral, Chamber and Solo Performance

Modern musicians rarely belong to only one musical world. The artistic journey often moves naturally between orchestral, chamber and solo performance. Each environment develops different qualities: the orchestra teaches responsibility and collective listening; chamber music develops communication and partnership; solo performance strengthens individuality, courage and artistic vision. Together they create a complete musician, capable of adapting while remaining true to an authentic artistic identity.

15. Teaching and Learning

Teaching is not about producing identical musicians. It is about helping every student discover an authentic artistic identity.

Every student learns differently. Some learn through listening; others through experimentation. Some need detailed explanations, clear structures, and precise technical information. Others grow most naturally through trust, encouragement, imagery, or the freedom to discover a solution independently.

Different paths can lead to equally meaningful artistic development. A teacher should therefore remain flexible enough to recognise what each student needs at a particular moment rather than applying one method to everyone.

Progress Has Many Forms

One of the greatest responsibilities of a teacher is recognising that progress cannot be measured only through technical achievements. Naturally, register, articulation, endurance, rhythm, intonation, and control are important. Yet sometimes the greatest lesson of an entire semester is not a higher note or faster technique.

It may be a new way of listening. It may be a deeper understanding of sound, a more confident stage presence, a clearer artistic intention, or the courage to communicate honestly. These developments may be less visible than technical progress, but they often remain with the student for a lifetime.

Finding Your Own Artistic Voice

The role of a teacher is not to create copies. It is to help every horn player discover and develop an authentic artistic voice.

A teacher can offer knowledge, experience, structure, thoughtful questions, technical tools, and artistic inspiration. The final sound, interpretation, and artistic identity, however, should always belong to the performer. This individuality is not something to correct; it is one of the greatest strengths of our artistic community.

Two performers may work on the same composition and arrive at different, equally convincing interpretations. The aim should not be to make both performances identical but to help each performer understand the score, make responsible artistic decisions, and communicate with honesty and imagination.

A Shared Journey

Teaching is also a continuous learning process. Every lesson offers new perspectives not only for the student but also for the teacher. A question from a student may reveal a new way of explaining an idea. A technical difficulty may encourage the teacher to reconsider an established approach. A surprising interpretation may open an artistic possibility that had not been imagined before.

Curiosity, openness, patience, and mutual respect create an environment in which artistic growth becomes a shared journey rather than a one-sided transfer of knowledge.

Creating Space for Discovery

A productive lesson should offer both guidance and space. Students need clear information, but they also need opportunities to experiment, make decisions, take artistic risks, and reflect on the results.

The teacher does not need to provide every answer immediately. Sometimes the most valuable response is another question: What do you hear? What do you want to communicate? Which colour feels most convincing? What changes when you try another breathing point, articulation, or tempo?

In this way, students gradually learn not only how to solve one passage but how to think, listen, practise, and make artistic decisions independently.

Artistic Thought

The best teaching does not create followers. It gives students the confidence, curiosity, and freedom to discover their own artistic path.

16. Today's Musician

Today's musicians develop within a rapidly changing artistic world shaped by technology, recordings, social media, artificial intelligence, and global collaboration. Alongside technical excellence, they benefit from cultivating critical listening, resilience, curiosity, balance, adaptability, and the confidence to develop an authentic artistic identity. The challenge is not simply to keep pace with change but to remain deeply connected to one's own artistic voice while embracing new opportunities for learning, communication, and creativity.

17. Preparing for the Future

Competitions, auditions, premieres, recordings and international collaborations are all part of a musician's journey. Technical preparation is essential, but lasting success is built on curiosity, professionalism, generosity, adaptability and continuous artistic growth.

18. Final Reflections

Music is a lifelong journey rather than a destination. Every rehearsal, every lesson, every collaboration and every performance offers another opportunity to discover, to communicate and to grow. Our responsibility is not only to preserve tradition, but also to enrich it through imagination, openness and our own artistic voice.

Takeshi Hidaka

On Playing the Horn

— The Body, Breathing, and Airflow —

Takeshi Hidaka
Associate Professor of Horn
Tokyo University of the Arts

Introduction

In this article, I would like to share some ideas about the body, breathing, and airflow that I have developed through my experience as a horn player.

These ideas have been strongly influenced not only by many years of performing and teaching but also by advice I have received from a physiotherapist regarding the structure of the body, posture, balance, and breathing.

I have tried these ideas with my own body and observed what happens when I apply them to playing: How does the sound change? How does the instrument respond differently? When I have found something helpful in my own playing, I have also incorporated it into my teaching.

What I present here therefore includes general knowledge about the body, practical approaches I have learned from a physiotherapist, and ideas and images that have emerged from my own experience as a performer and teacher.

Rather than presenting these ideas as a single “correct” method, I hope they can serve as starting points for young musicians to think about their own bodies and breathing, and to experiment with them in their own playing.

1. What Do We Need to Play the Horn?

One of the most important elements in playing the horn is airflow that creates vibration. Another important element is the quality of the airflow required by the music.

We do not use exactly the same kind of air all the time.

High and low notes, short and long notes, brilliant and gentle tone colours, soft and loud dynamics all require different qualities of airflow.

Therefore, simply “taking in more air” or “blowing harder” is not enough to respond to the wide range of musical expression.

Depending on the sound we want to produce, the amount, speed, and direction of the airflow may change, and the condition of the body and the shape of the oral cavity change with it.

As a starting point, I first consider posture and physical balance.

2. Posture for Creating a Free Airflow

To breathe freely, it is important that the body does not interfere with the natural movements of breathing.

Excessive twisting or tension in the body can restrict the free movement of the rib cage and abdomen.

While learning about the body from a physiotherapist, I became familiar with the idea of observing the body through three anatomical planes:

- the transverse plane,
- the frontal plane,
- the sagittal plane.

By imagining these three planes as being basically perpendicular to one another, I try to find a position in which the body is not excessively tilted or twisted.

This does not mean trying to align the body at mathematically perfect right angles. Rather, I use this as a way of becoming aware of asymmetry, tilting, or twisting in my body and of finding a more neutral position that does not interfere with breathing or movement.

For breathing to function smoothly, the respiratory system, including the diaphragm, needs to be able to move freely. The diaphragm is also involved not only in breathing but in trunk stability and postural control.

For this reason, I believe it is important to find a posture without excessive twisting or tension that might interfere with the movements of breathing.

However, “standing straight” does not mean holding the body rigidly in one position. The body moves with the breath while we play. It also moves naturally in response to the music.

What matters is not maintaining a fixed posture but creating a physical state in which the body is free to move.

3. Centre of Gravity and Balance

When considering a posture without unnecessary twisting, two important concepts are the centre of gravity and the base of support.

In human movement, the body is never completely still while standing. It is constantly making small adjustments, controlling its centre of gravity in relation to its base of support.

In this sense, good balance does not mean fixing the body at a single point. It can also be understood as maintaining stability while continuing to move.

• Checking Your Posture When Playing Standing Up

Here I use a practical method that I learned from a physiotherapist.

I imagine a virtual centre-of-gravity point approximately one centimetre inward from the navel, in the direction of the spine.

This is an image that I use to feel the centre of my body and check my balance while playing. In my case, when I bring my attention to this point, I feel the abdominal muscles engage gently, making it easier to remain stable without stiffening the body. From this point, I imagine a vertical line extending downward toward the centre of the Earth. I then check whether this line passes approximately through the centre of the base of support formed by the areas where both feet contact the floor and the space between them.

The actual position of the body's centre of gravity changes continuously according to posture and the movement of different parts of the body. Therefore, rather than trying to hold this imagined point in one fixed position, I try to feel it moving within the surrounding area as the body continually adjusts its balance.

- Stability Is Not the Same as Fixing the Body

When playing while standing, I use approximately hip-width apart as a general reference for the distance between my feet.

Of course, body size, skeletal structure, and the way each person moves while playing are different, so this does not mean that exactly the same stance is appropriate for every player.

In my own experience, placing the feet approximately hip-width apart makes it easier to feel the centre of the body without unnecessarily bracing the lower body. It also leaves room for the body to move naturally forwards, backwards, and from side to side in response to breathing and the music.

The aim here is not simply to create a body that is as difficult as possible knock off balance.

When playing the horn, the rib cage and abdomen move with breathing, and the entire body is continually changing in response to the music.

In my own playing, I have found that if I place my feet unnecessarily far apart, I tend to brace through the legs in an attempt to become more stable. This can introduce unnecessary tension throughout the body. The imagined centre of gravity may also have to find its relationship to the centre of a much wider base of support.

By contrast, when the base is comfortably stable, the upper body can move more freely. Stability and fixation are not the same thing.

To keep breathing flexible, it is important not to hold the body in place through muscular force but to find a state in which it can continue to balance naturally.

4. Breathing in Horn Playing

When playing the horn, I sometimes think of breathing as having two broad characteristics.

One involves a relatively strong sense of movement in the chest.

For example:

- a brilliant or incisive tone
- short notes
- the high register

In situations requiring a quick response, I may use this kind of sensation.

The other involves a greater sense of movement throughout the body, including the area around the diaphragm.

For example:

- long phrases
- a rich middle or low register
- louder dynamics

In these situations, this sensation becomes more important.

For convenience, I sometimes refer to these as “chest breathing” and “diaphragmatic breathing,” but I do not mean that they are two completely separate breathing techniques.

The diaphragm is involved in breathing in both cases. In horn playing, I believe we need breathing that can incorporate both of these characteristics.

However, diaphragmatic breathing does not mean consciously trying to move the diaphragm itself.

When playing the horn, rather than trying to control the diaphragm directly, I believe it is important to experience a physical state in which the entire breathing mechanism, including the diaphragm, can function naturally.

Posture and physical balance are therefore important here as well.

• How the Diaphragm Moves

Let us briefly consider what happens to the diaphragm during breathing.

The diaphragm is a dome-shaped muscle separating the thoracic cavity from the abdominal cavity.

When we inhale, the diaphragm contracts and moves downward. This increases the volume of the thoracic cavity, allowing air to enter the lungs.

As the diaphragm descends, the abdominal organs beneath it are affected as well, producing changes in pressure and position within the abdominal cavity. As a result, the abdominal wall expands not only forwards but around the sides of the body as well. From the outside, this can look as though “the abdomen expands when we inhale.”

In other words, when the abdomen expands during diaphragmatic breathing, it is not because air is entering the abdomen.

The abdomen expands as a result of the downward movement of the diaphragm. Understanding this mechanism can help us avoid deliberately pushing the abdomen outward in order to inhale. Instead, we can think of abdominal movement as the result of the breathing mechanism, including the diaphragm, functioning naturally.

I find this idea—rather than moving the abdomen deliberately, allowing the body to move as a result of breathing—very important in my own horn playing.

5. Observing Your Own Breathing

There is a simple way to become more aware of how you breathe.

Place the palm of one hand on the area just below the sternum and the other hand on your chest.

In this position, slowly breathe out.

Which hand moves first?

The hand below the sternum?

Or the hand on your chest?

Now breathe in.

Observe how each hand moves during inhalation and exhalation.

The important point here is not to decide immediately that one of these movements represents the “correct” way to breathe.

First, it is important simply to feel and observe what is actually happening in your own body.

In the kind of diaphragmatic breathing that I find important for playing, I feel movement around the upper abdominal area both when inhaling and when exhaling.

By placing your hands on the body and observing these movements, you can begin to understand how you normally breathe.

Again, the goal is not to deliberately move a particular part of the body but first to become aware of the movement that is already taking place.

6. Let the Air “Flow” Rather Than “Push”

When playing the horn, we sometimes think:

“I need to blow more.”

“I need to put more air into the instrument.”

As a result, we may stiffen the body or try to create excessive pressure inside the mouth.

Here I use a particular image:

Just as wind flows along a wall, I imagine the air flowing along the surfaces inside the mouth.

This is not intended as a physical or scientific explanation of airflow. It is simply an image I use to experience the flow of air while playing.

Inside the mouth is a space shaped by the upper palate, tongue, cheeks, and other structures.

Rather than forcing air into this space, I imagine allowing it to flow naturally along the “pathway” created by these structures.

- Vowels and the Shape of the Oral Cavity

When the shape of the oral cavity changes, the pathway through which the air flows also changes.

This is easy to understand if we think about what happens when we speak.

Try producing the pure vowel sounds [i], [e], [a], [o], and [u]. The position of the tongue and the space inside the mouth change naturally with each vowel.

I use a similar image when playing the horn.

In the high register, I imagine an oral shape closer to the vowel sounds [i] or [e].
In the low register, I imagine a shape closer to [o] or [u].

In the high register, I experience the pathway inside the mouth as relatively narrow; in the low register, I feel a larger internal space.

These changes inside the mouth can be observed very clearly in MRI footage introduced by horn player Sarah Willis, showing the oral cavity while the horn is being played.

- Avoid Trying to Control the Tongue Too Directly

The important point here is not to think:

“This is a high note, so I must move my tongue here.”

“This is a low note, so I must lower my tongue.”

When we speak, we do not think, “I am going to pronounce [i], so I need to move my tongue by a certain number of millimetres.”

Rather, as a result of producing the vowel, the tongue naturally moves into a position appropriate for that sound.

I believe the same principle can be useful in playing: the image of the desired sound or vowel leads to a corresponding change in the tongue and the shape of the oral cavity.

If we try too hard to create these shapes consciously, not only the tongue but also the jaw, neck, and even the rest of the body may become rigid, making the airflow less free.

7. The Rhythm of Language and the Flow of Air

While thinking about the shape of the oral cavity and airflow, I have become interested in another question:

What relationship might there be between the language we normally speak and the way we use air when we play?

Over many years of teaching students whose first languages include Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and various European languages, I have sometimes noticed differences in airflow and the way notes are shaped that seem to relate to the language a player speaks.

Japanese, Korean, Chinese, English, German, and other languages differ in their sounds and rhythms, as well as in the ways consonants and vowels are connected.

For example, compare counting in Japanese:

“ichi, ni, san, shi”

with counting in English:

“one, two, three, four.”

The units of pronunciation, the length of the words, and the relationship between consonants and vowels are different.

The Japanese words ichi, ni, san, and shi do not all have the same phonetic structure. On the other hand, when counting a steady pulse with the English one, two, three, four, there can be a sense of fitting each word into a single beat.

I have wondered whether such differences in pronunciation and linguistic rhythm may influence not only speech itself but also the way we use exhaled air and physically experience the pulse.

At present, this is an observation and hypothesis based on my own experience as a performer and teacher.

In my teaching, when a student has difficulty producing a clear beginning to a note, when the airflow seems to stop in the middle of a phrase, or when the end of a note closes too abruptly, I have sometimes found that counting in English or German before playing can make the airflow more continuous and the playing smoother.

In some cases, even the resonance of the sound becomes richer.

Similarly, when rhythm is unstable, changing the language used for counting can change the way the player experiences the beat and can sometimes lead to greater rhythmic accuracy.

• The Language of a Work and the Flow of the Music

There is another phenomenon that I have found particularly interesting in my own playing and teaching.

When a Japanese-speaking musician performs Western classical music, counting in the language associated with the cultural and linguistic background of the work can sometimes make the playing feel more natural.

For example, when playing works by Mozart or Beethoven and other composers from German-speaking regions, I may ask a player to count in German. With music by composers from French-speaking regions, I may ask the player to count in French. Even though the same person is playing the same music, the sense of pulse and the way the notes connect can change, and the air may begin to flow more naturally. Sometimes the direction of the phrase and even the resonance of the sound seem to change.

I do not yet have a clear answer as to why this happens.

Languages have their own patterns of pronunciation, accentuation, word length, and rhythm. Music also has its own sense of pulse, connections between notes, and direction of phrase.

This has led me to wonder whether there may be some relationship between the rhythm of the language that surrounded a composer and the rhythmic or phrasing characteristics of that composer’s music.

Again, at present this is only an observation and hypothesis arising from my own experience in performance and teaching.

Nevertheless, when a performance somehow feels unnatural, counting in a language associated with the cultural background of the music can be an interesting way to change the musical flow and use of air without trying to manipulate the body directly.

- Changing Language to Change the Body's Response

The important point is that the pronunciation and rhythm of the language we use every day may unconsciously influence the way our bodies and breathing behave.

When playing is not going well, rather than trying immediately to correct the embouchure, tongue, or breathing directly, a simple approach such as

"Try counting in another language"

can sometimes change an unconscious physical response.

Instead of trying to control the body directly, changing a word or an image may naturally change breathing, tongue movement, the shape of the oral cavity, and even the way rhythm is experienced.

I believe this kind of indirect approach can also be a useful way of making playing freer.

8. Think About the "Quality" of Air, Not Only the Amount

Let us return to the idea of the "quality of airflow" introduced in Section 1.

Playing higher does not simply mean blowing harder.

Playing lower does not simply mean using more air.

There is more to it than that.

When the shape of the oral cavity changes according to register or tone colour, the sensation of the air flowing through it also changes.

The air required for a short note is different from that required for a long note, and the airflow for a brilliant tone differs from that for a gentle one.

In other words, I believe that playing requires not only quantitative differences such as "stronger or weaker" and "more or less," but airflow with a quality appropriate to the music.

Rather than forcing that air out through muscular effort, I think of the process as a continuous sequence:

Prepare the body
↓
Breathe
↓
The oral cavity responds to the desired sound
↓
The air flows
↓
Vibration is created

↓

Sound emerges

Sound comes at the end of this entire process.

9. From Knowledge to Music

So far, I have discussed posture, centre of gravity, breathing, the shape of the oral cavity, airflow, and the relationship between language and rhythm.

However, I do not believe that we should remain consciously focused on all of these things while we are actually performing.

Ideas about posture and the oral cavity should first be understood as knowledge that helps us understand how we play.

To connect this knowledge with actual playing, we need to work on fundamentals—long tones, scales, arpeggios, and other basic exercises—while observing our bodies, breathing, airflow, and the response of the instrument.

We take something we understand intellectually and try it in our fundamental practice. Sometimes it works; sometimes it does not.

Through this repeated process, something that initially required conscious attention gradually becomes integrated into the body until, eventually, it can happen naturally without deliberate control.

・Prepare the Body Before Producing the Sound

Before I begin playing, I first check my posture and physical balance.

Is there any unnecessary twisting in the body?

Are my feet comfortably stable?

Am I using unnecessary muscular effort?

Can I breathe naturally?

Once I have checked these things and prepared the body, after the sound begins, I focus on the music.

If, while playing, we continually ask ourselves,

“How is my diaphragm moving?”

“Is my tongue in the correct position?”

“Where is my centre of gravity?”

we may actually interfere with the body’s natural movement.

We prepare the body in order to play; preparing the body is not itself the purpose of playing.

Ultimately, our attention should be directed toward sound and music.

・When Things Stop Working, Stop for a Moment

On the other hand, when playing stops working well, knowledge about the body can become extremely useful.

The sound is unstable.

The air does not flow freely.

The high register feels difficult.

The tone does not sound the way we want.

Or perhaps fatigue has accumulated during practice or performance, and things that normally work have become difficult.

In such situations, I believe it is important not simply to keep playing through the problem but to put the instrument down and take a break.

Once the body has recovered, we can ask: “What might have caused the problem?” Was there unnecessary twisting in the posture?

Was I holding the body too rigidly?

Was my breathing natural?

Was I trying to force the air?

Was I trying too hard to control the oral cavity?

Was my sense of rhythm or the language I was imagining interfering with the airflow?

Or was I simply tired?

There is no need to identify one single cause.

The knowledge we develop about the body and about playing gives us clues for investigating what may be happening.

10. Consciousness and Unconsciousness

Instrumental playing seems to involve two processes that may initially appear contradictory.

One is to consciously understand what is happening in the body.

The other is to repeat what we have learned through fundamental practice until eventually we no longer need to think consciously about it.

Just as we do not think about the exact position of the tongue every time we speak, ideally the body should be able to respond naturally to the music while we play.

To reach that point, we first bring something that normally happens unconsciously into conscious awareness and observe it.

Then, through fundamental practice, we gradually allow that movement to become unconscious again.

Just as changing language can sometimes alter unconscious breathing, tongue movement, or rhythmic perception, consciously manipulating the body is not the only way to change our playing.

For me, an important principle is:

We learn in order to become conscious, and we practice in order to play without having to consciously control each movement.

I believe it is important to move continually between these two processes.

Conclusion

When we think about learning instrumental technique, we often imagine acquiring new movements or learning to control the body more precisely.

In my own experience, however, removing unnecessary tension and avoiding interference with the breathing and movement the body already possesses can sometimes change our playing more profoundly than trying to “do” something additional.

Learn about the body.

Prepare your posture.

Feel your balance.

Observe your breathing.

Become aware of the pathway of the air.

Explore the relationship between language, rhythm, and airflow.

Then, through fundamental practice, gradually allow these things to become part of your body.

But when you actually make music, let them go and focus on the music.

And when something stops working, rest for a moment, then return to the body and investigate what may be causing the difficulty.

Knowledge about the body is not there so that we can continuously control the body while performing.

Nor will every method or image described here produce the same result for every player.

Rather, I see them as clues that may help us produce sound more freely and express music more freely.

There is no need to memorize the ideas and images presented here as the “correct” way to play.

Try them during your fundamental practice and observe how your own body and instrument respond.

And ask yourself:

What kind of physical state allows my air to flow most naturally and enables me to express the music most freely?

Discovering the answer for yourself is, I believe, one of the most important parts of learning to play the horn.

Tommi Hyytinen

Warm-Up "Playing from the Core"

Tommi Hyytinen
DMus, FRSO, Sibelius Academy

