

Martin Hackleman Clinic Part III

Darts, Low Horn, Auditions

Concentration is something that I kind of developed out of desperation. Proper concentration is absolutely essential and one of the gimmicks which I stumbled upon was throwing darts. It's so simple. But in order to do it right you have to concentrate so there are no extraneous thoughts getting in the way. It's just you and that dart and you have to put that dart in the right place. If you just casually toss it you'll get bored quickly but if you really try to concentrate on it you get in the habit of focusing your mind. So when you sit down to practice your mind is already focused.

I've tried this with students and it helps to a degree. Some of them come in and they're real space cases and I'm wondering if they're even breathing. But after a little while of going back and forth between darts and playing I notice they will begin to pause and focus before they play. I throw darts a lot myself while practising in my studio.

Another one of the subjects I was requested to talk about today is low horn playing. Many of you know I have a little book I put out (*34 Characteristic Etudes for Low Horn Playing—Ed.*). The main reason I did this is because I didn't know of too many other such etude books.

I never had too much trouble playing low. Actually, I think low horn playing is thought about too much. First of all it's something that students should do earlier in their studies. Not immediately. They should play in the middle range first and then go up gradually until they are able to play up to a G consistently, which leaves many of us out right now. But generally you go up to that point so the embouchure has a little bit of maturity and tension in it. Because that's what low playing requires. But what typically happens when a student goes down into the low register is the old nebulous flabby embouchure routine with the fuzz ball sound. Well there's no real embouchure so there's no way they can get a sound.

Most people think, well I've got to open the embouchure, I've got to pull the mouthpiece away from the lips to get the low notes. That's not true. You have to get a larger **aperture**. Now granted, you don't have a hell of a lot of room to start with. But that's the key to the problem. Because you have so little room you have to keep the pressure on the lips and let the jaw gradually open up

the embouchure. But a lot of times with low playing we release the pressure way too much. Now the pressure has to be released a little bit for low playing, but on the **upper** lip, not the lower. The main thing is that you want to feel like you are duplicating the middle range feeling with your embouchure. As I've already said, I think you should do most of your playing in the middle range because that's where you are most efficient. And that's where you need to memorize what your embouchure is doing. Why is it I can play this G and I can't play that C or that C or whatever it is?



Now logically, if I could only make it feel like this second line G, I should be able to play it. So you should memorize and learn to duplicate the middle range feeling no matter what octave you are playing in. But as we go low we tend to get puffy, we start pouching the lips out. And that's the reason the air we're passing into the horn can't be held. So no sound comes out. So, try to keep the embouchure the same and try to keep an even pressure on the lower teeth.

Now this sounds weird because we always say, "Ah, no pressure. Don't press." But you have to put a certain amount of pressure on the teeth. As a matter of fact you can use a little bit more pressure if the embouchure muscles are relaxed. This additional pressure takes the place of a lot of muscle tension and the resulting embouchure is more efficient. It's more

balanced and relaxed. You'll use maybe just a shade more pressure, but a hell of a lot less tension. And it won't feel foreign. What feels weird is if you have a tight muscle that's like this and you're pressing this little piece of metal against it like this. That's what feels weird. So, try to relax the embouchure a bit and keep the same type of pressure from the middle range into the low range.

Now the way to practice getting down there and to learn to make it workable is to do down scales or arpeggios but making sure you always start in the middle range and memorize what's going on there. Just because you can play a middle C doesn't mean you understand the principles involved. Figure out how it works on a middle C and then get the same principles to work in the low range. Don't just play and hope you're going to eventually get it right. Study it thoroughly and try to keep the same balanced embouchure and straight air column in the low range.

So these are some of the ideas I've picked up in working to get a quality low range and I hope they will be of some assistance to you. As I said earlier, the main point about producing **anything** on the horn is to avoid unnecessary tension throughout the entire body, and especially in the embouchure and air column. If it feels tight here, it sounds tense out there. Conversely, if you can stay relaxed here, that quality has to creep into the sound and get out there. If you're too tight and working too hard you're going to have to put up a hell of a smokescreen to keep the strain from going out into the hall. It's bound to get out there. In the long run it's like brick-laying or anything else. To get a quality performance you have to work for it and care for it.

Brass and Woodwind Repairs

by Patrick DeHart and Jerry Porter

Top quality guaranteed, reliable workmanship

Day Music Co.

5516 S.E. Foster Rd.

Portland, Oregon

Phone 775-4351

The last thing I would like to talk to you about today is some of my ideas about auditions. We made up a definition of an audition once. We were sitting there one day and I made this up and I think it's applicable: "What a terrible business—which reduces years of strain to a 10-minute caprice of vain-glorious taste." And that's really what an audition is. But it's completely necessary. There's no really easy way. It'd be great if for a position a player could just play in the orchestra and see if he got along, see if he'd fit. It'd be great. It'd be easier, too. But, as we know, there are just too many people, not enough time, and not enough jobs for that to happen. So auditions unfortunately are a necessary evil.

Having been through some painful auditions myself, and having been through some good ones too, I've come to the conclusion that the quality of your audition is only about 50% of the game. The other 50% is "what is he listening for, or does he like the color of my eyes, or who knows?" And then, most conductors don't really understand very much about playing the horn to begin with. And combine that with the fact of missing notes—"Oh! You missed a note!"

Well, that's a terminal disease that we've caught from the recording industry. And we've lost a lot of sight of what real music is. I think a lot of teachers are conveying this to their students: "Don't miss a note. Whatever you do, don't miss a note." Certainly it's important. You can't crap all over things and play musically. But more importantly, you have to be able to play with confidence. Everybody's going to make a little mistake here or there. It's just that on horn you happen to hear it. You're sitting next to a flute or an oboe and they squawk a little bit or the flute flubs something and who cares? On horn you take it out of the case and you're treading on thin ice already. So auditions, you know, are just stacked against the horn player.

But I thought maybe as a person who has gone through some auditions himself, and also as a person who has sat through auditions and put together excerpts for other poor chaps to play, I might be able to say a few things of value to you. I've had the dubious honor of hearing many top quality players crash and burn and I tried to find out why

and how I can learn from it. And I've come to the opinion that being able to convey the proper rhythm is perhaps the most important aspect of a good audition. Again and again I've heard quality players foul up because of poor rhythm.

Till Eulenspiegel is a perfect example. Everybody and his dog can play *Till Eulenspiegel*. Thirty years ago nobody could play it. James Chambers once said, "You know, when I was studying you couldn't find five players in North America who could play *Till Eulenspiegel*. Now everybody can play it. Technique goes higher but nobody plays the right rhythm. They say, "Oh, this is a capricious little solo. I need to sound like this prankster, right?" But



Strauss was no fool. He wrote it that way. You've got to play it just the way it's written. But nobody ever does it that way. It might be just a mental lapse and you wouldn't do it if the conductor was conducting, or someone mentioned it or you took the time to think about it. But in an audition, it makes all the difference in the world. Just playing the rhythm.

In an orchestra you know how critical rhythm is. When you have eighty people you've got to go for the rhythm. You've got to exaggerate. And in an audition circumstance you have to literally, musically, tap your foot for them so they can say, "Geez, he's really thinking of it." But then you have to do it in the guise of musicality and then you have to hope they're listening to you in the first place. It's a hopeless battle at the best of times.

Nevertheless, rhythm is very important. And a quality sound too. A lot of times you try to second guess the audition committee as to what kind of sound they want. Unfortunately, this doesn't really work. But you do have to get a sound that's not too extreme. Sometimes people will come in and they'll play just great, but they have this little frenchy vibrato and a real tiny, squirly sound. It sounds great. But it doesn't fit. So try to develop a good basic sound, but don't go to extremes to try to second guess anybody.

Another thing I've discovered is that there's a big difference between the way you play a passage in an audition and the way you play it in the orchestra. For example, when you play *Beethoven 7* or *Don Juan* in the orchestra, you're really pumping away. But in an audition, if you do it exactly the same way, it sounds really weird. It doesn't come across. It's too much because it doesn't have a context of other sounds to make it relative. So be a little more prudent sometimes with the dynamics. With the loud passages especially, but also the soft. Because quite frankly, if you're the only one playing they're not going to be able to tell if you're playing **that** soft or just soft. This is not to say that you should throw dynamics out the window. Just keep the dynamics within reason, much as one does when playing a solo piece.

And another thing which I think is very important. Don't go in there trying to show off. Simple musicality and rhythm is what comes across the most. That's a sign of maturity.

The thing I find difficult and the more I play in an orchestra the more I have to fight against it, is that, for example, when I play *Brahms 1* for an audition, it's completely different from what it's like in reality. I know what it feels like to play it in the orchestra, and when I go to play it in an audition I have to try to stop and recreate the feeling in my own face and head and the sound that I want to produce and then try to produce it. And it's very difficult. When playing with the orchestra, the sound is there, the rhythm set and you play and it's easier. At an audition, it's "Next!"; you come in and play a string of excerpts. It loses something. Even *Till Eulenspiegel*. That little introduction that it has makes a difference, it makes it a little easier. And actually if you look at the score, technically the eighth notes should be equal to the previous tempo. There is a pulse that goes on and that helps you set up rhythmically too. So I think it's important to try to recreate the proper context for each passage you play in an audition. For me it's the only way that makes any sense.

I hope some of these ideas will be of help. Be conservative, be simple, be musical, but above all be rhythmic. And don't blow your socks off. □

Martin Hackleman