



PRACTICE LIKE A PRO

THOUGHTS OF AN ASPIRING YOUNG TRUMPET PLAYER

“I have always maintained that excepting fools, men did not differ much in intellect, only in zeal and hard work.”
—*Charles Darwin*

There isn't one right way to practice, but there are many wrong ways to practice. The procedure for individual practice sessions needs to be designed to fit the goals you have. Before the horn even comes out of the case, decide what you need to get done and what will be your focus. This doesn't limit you to these few points, but guides you in what needs to be done. Always adapt. If you discover that something isn't working, stop and fix it. Decide which skill you wish to develop and find an exercise associated with that skill. If you can't find one, create one! There is no magic practice routine, but all effective practice sessions include the following:

HAVE A PLAN

It is valid to play all the way through a segment when first learning, but don't call it practice. If your goal is to get the feel of the piece, make the conscious choice, “I am going to read this and not worry about nailing it.” Remember, you should always have a plan. It is perfectly acceptable to reduce the difficulty of the music to make it achievable. For example, slow the tempo, break ties, remove articulation, etc. Whatever you decide, do that to the best of your ability. It is NOT okay to slap the instrument on your face and just hope you get lucky. You might get lucky on a few notes, but nobody gets lucky for an entire Mahler symphony. If you accomplish what you set out to do musically, even if you modify it, you are practicing *achievement* and you will be comfortable translating the music in your head to the music coming out of your instrument. After all, this is what you will be required to do in performance.

ALWAYS MAKE MUSIC

Regardless of the tempo, or any alterations you implement to make the music more achievable, always perform the dynamics and style to the utmost and always with your best sound. If you wait until the last minute to begin making music, the time you spend working up the tempo will be wasted because you would have increased the difficulty after the fact. If you are in the habit of performing a satisfying musical experience every time you play, it will always be present and will be more sincere in the performance. In many ways, style and musicality are the most difficult aspects of performance, so make them as much of a priority as notes and rhythm. Notes and rhythms are vital but at the highest level, everyone will perform the notes and rhythms correctly. Musicality and style will separate the good players from the great ones.

This doesn't just go for orchestral excerpts and etudes. Make a musical line out of your warm up exercises. Give direction to Cichowicz studies, play Remington exercises with style and purpose. No one likes to listen to a dead sound; that is, a sound without energy or emotion. You can satisfy all the requirements that a musician needs: play with a good sound, play in tune, and play right notes, but the things that you can't put on paper are what gives music its substance.

Remember that musical notation is only a substitute for the music in the composer's head. To achieve the composer's artistic goal, you have to think of yourself as a musician, not simply a tool. Music is art, and art has its flaws. Don't be comfortable with mistakes but know that they are obstacles on the path, not a dead end.

PRACTICE CONSISTENCY

Drilling (repetition) is an appropriate approach to gaining consistency that should be used as ONE method of practice, not THE method of practice. Simply repeating a phrase continuously can cement mistakes and bad habits.

Before you drill a segment, take 20 to 30 seconds to rest but don't disengage mentally. Place 10 coins on the left side of the stand and, without the instrument in your hands, think through the segment and create the perfect performance in your head. Simulate a performance as best you can and create pressure for yourself. Don't play a "test note." If you experience pressure and nerves before the performance, it will be less daunting when it counts.

Play the excerpt at a tempo that you are comfortable with. Every time you play the entire excerpt to your expectations, move a coin from the left side to the right side of the stand. Here's where it can get frustrating. As soon as a discernable mistake is made, stop and move all the coins back to the left. Don't cheat! If you successfully play the excerpt, increase the number of measures and the number of coins.

"Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

—Albert Einstein

If you find yourself making the same mistake multiple times, go back and relearn the specific segment you are having trouble with. Remember that consistency is what you want in performance, so practice like you are performing.

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the very least, your practice should consist of the following:

1. A conscious approach to making your best sound

Don't say, "I tried." Be able to list specific ways you are improving.

2. Maintenance

Don't say, "I know my scales," or "I can double tongue." The pros work on these skills every day. You can always improve.

3. Performance

Play for a parent, a recorder, or for anyone who'll listen. Be in the habit of performing daily so that a concert becomes just another day.

At the end of a practice session, you shouldn't feel done. Be content with where you are in your development, but never fully satisfied.

—Garrett Lindholm

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