

Trumpet Tips: The Power of Preparation

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For the latest Trumpet Tips installment, I am going to talk about preparation. Practice is part of preparation, but preparation is more than practice, at least in the traditional sense. Think squares and rhombuses. When you are handed a piece of music a few hours before a performance to a sold out, 1,000-seat auditorium, and know there will be no rehearsal or sound check, what will you do? When it is the day of the state concert band contest and your head director comes down with the flu, will you be ready to step in lead your students? These are scenarios that are usually not specifically practiced for, but they certainly must be prepared for.

Fundamentals

We must prepare ourselves from a fundamentals standpoint. This means practicing scales, arpeggios (including the diminished ones), Clarke studies, flow studies, lip slurs, etc. Everyday we need to tackle what makes us excellent trumpet players. Practice the "hard" keys, the awkward fingering patterns, and all registers and volumes. When Clarke says to practice at *pianissimo*, do it. These are the things that give us the technical facility to be skilled performers on our instrument so that we do not have to actively think about it when playing.

Train your ears

Beyond fundamental playing, we must listen to as much music as possible. Learn styles and sounds, what pieces need what articulation and accents, and what the proper role of the trumpet in different composers' works. The trumpet is used substantially different by Mozart than by Mahler. Do not play Beethoven like Bruckner. What do east coast big bands sound like compared to their west coast counterparts? Know the difference in the decades of jazz music. Miles Davis reinvented himself every five years, so which Miles do you need to sound like? Once you build up this musical database in your head, trust it. Trust your mind's ear and play the recording back as you perform.

Pay attention in aural theory, too. This helps you also learn to trust your ear. You will know what those diminished arpeggios sound like. The less you are consciously concentrating on the fundamentals of playing, the more free you are focus on musical considerations. We play a melodic, not harmonic instrument (we only play one note at a time versus playing chords), meaning the overwhelming majority of our music is written to make the most sense when played as a horizontal line. Focusing on technique instead of music causes us to lose sight of the music's horizontal nature. Look through the music and play where you hear the line going.

Embrace the stress

Put yourself in as many stressful situations as possible. Volunteer to sub in a rehearsal when needed. Sightread music you are unfamiliar with (but at a tempo you will likely be successful at). Study all musical styles, especially the ones you do not play on a regular basis.

Pick up your trumpet and play your music without going through a fifteen minute warm-up routine when you know you need to demonstrate on-demand mastery. Your goal is so that when conditions are not perfect, you can still perform at your best.

You want to be known as someone who can be counted on in the clutch. Not all performances come with much rehearsal time, or any rehearsal time. Yesterday may have been a great playing day and today is your worst. Your job is to prepare as though each day could be your worst playing day. This way, you also know each day will be your best day. Rarely will you have an ideal playing situation. Be familiar with as many styles as possible. Be able to hear your music before you play it. Practice fundamentals daily. By preparing yourself to be a complete artist, you will know you will be ready whenever and wherever you may be called upon.