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CLINIC

FRANK G. CAMPOS, COLUMN EDITOR

TIME IS SHORT

BY FRANK CAMPOS

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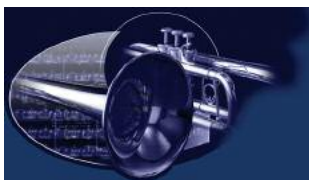
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Clinic addresses a wide variety of teaching and playing issues. Ideas and suggestions should be directed to: Frank G. Campos, Clinic Editor, Whalen Center for Music, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY 14850 USA; clinic@trumpetguild.org

TIME IS SHORT BY FRANK CAMPOS

Whether you intend to be one of the world's greatest players or just the very best player you can be, the trumpet demands your daily attention. Regular practice is the price we must pay to make beautiful music with a trumpet.

Many musicians think a long, uninterrupted stretch of time is required to have a productive practice session, but what if the day does not present that kind of opportunity? As is often the case for a busy student or working person, there don't seem to be enough hours in the day. Many think it isn't worth cracking open the trumpet case for just a few minutes. On days like this, if the player has not established the discipline of a faithfully kept practice time, the day may pass without playing.

It is not enough to "wait and see" if you will have time tomorrow to practice. If you are a serious student of the instrument, you must have a dedicated time every day to play. Life has a way of overriding the best of intentions, and there will often be something more important if you allow it. Like anything else you truly care about, your trumpet practice has to have your full attention the moment it is time to get your instrument out of the case.

How easy it would be, we think, if we were locked in a room with our instrument, music, and a case of valve oil—then we could really accomplish something! But real life does not always present such easy solutions. There are many things to do in a day, and sometimes we don't feel we have the luxury of an uninterrupted hour to practice the trumpet. How do we get the necessary practice each day when there seems to be no time?

Recognizing that everyone is different and every day is different, how much time do you spend actually playing the trumpet during a typical practice session? For many players, as much as half of the average session is spent doing something other than playing. When we look at the amount of time spent actually sounding the trumpet, we find it is just a matter of minutes every twenty-four hours. Day after day and year after year, your musical accomplishment and growth are built upon a foundation of those few minutes of quality work each day.

If you have only sixty minutes to practice in a day, is it better to do one sixty minute session, or three twenty minute sessions? There are advantages to both, but shorter sessions are

often better for several reasons. For instance, we are less inclined to get physically fatigued or lose our mental focus in a short session. Long sessions without appropriate breaks lead to fatigue that can invite bad habits such as forcing the tone, excess mouthpiece pressure, and excessive body tension. With short segments of intense work, we are more likely to remain alert and fresh to the end, reinforcing good technique the

entire time. And with several short sessions, we learn the easiest way to warm up quickly because we have to find our best sound and get our technique up and running many times in a day. This is a very important thing to learn.

Maurice André, one of the greatest trumpeters in history, recommends shorter practice sessions. When asked how to develop endurance, he said "It is important to practice often during the day, and not a long time. Play thirty minutes and rest fifteen minutes. Play thirty minutes and rest thirty minutes. Play thirty minutes and rest an hour. The lips are a muscle and it is important to rest them frequently. In all, it is good to practice four hours per day..."

The trumpet demands our attention, but not too much at a time. A percussionist or pianist may be able to practice for very long stretches without rest, but this approach is not advised for the trumpet. The golden rule for brass playing is, "Rest as much as you play." This is especially important during long sessions. A real threat of injury exists for the trumpeter who does not heed the signals and signs from the body to take plenty of rest and stop when it is time to stop.

Studies have shown that the total amount of our practice time is not related to success in performance unless correct technique is emphasized. In other words, just doing a lot of playing doesn't necessarily produce excellent performance ability. As always, the way we do it makes the difference. If we are playing scales with a clear, resonant sound, consistent articulation up and down, steady tempo, good pitch, and a sense of musical line, then we are more

likely to improve than if we are just running scales without really listening. We become what we expect of ourselves. If we constantly expect quality and excellence in our musical performance, it will appear.

Whether you have long sessions, several short sessions spaced throughout the day, or a mixture of the two, it is ulti-

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mately about how many minutes of quality time you spend reinforcing your best playing. If the day does not present big chunks of time for practice, then the solution lies in a new way of looking at practice, of using our time differently.

We may not be able to find large chunks of practice time on any given day, but if we think and plan a little, we can get great benefit from many short sessions that are only minutes long. The idea is simple: find a few minutes here or there to do things that advance your playing ability and move you forward, even if you don't have the trumpet in your hands.

For example, like many players, I keep a spare mouthpiece in my car and often do light buzzing while driving. When I am sitting in front of any screens, I do breathing exercises such as the Brisbois ten-minute exercise, reverse breathing, or nose panting to really supercharge my breathing and energize the entire body.²

If I have only a short time with my trumpet and a practice mute, I might play some very soft bent tones or pedal tones.³ I play them as softly as I can to the very end of my breath. Three very soft bent tones in a row to the end of the breath without a break is an effective way to get my playing up to a higher level really quickly. Alternatively, I could practice a few bars of vexing music very softly and very slowly, or practice some finger patterns while blowing freely through the trumpet without making a tone. Each of us has favorite exercises we rely upon to get our playing going, and these are the best for short sessions.

The Clinic article "Four Simple Exercises" outlines some easy and quick exercises to do away from the trumpet.⁴ Though they take only a minute, they strengthen and reinforce good performance posture and breathing. The Pilates exercise called "the plank" (maintain the up position of a push-up as long as you can) may be one of the simplest and best total body workouts you can do in one minute. Sit-ups are beneficial in so many ways. Do as many as you can, then three more when you really feel the burn.

When was the last time you practiced pianissimo long tones? The wonderful benefits of soft playing are well documented. Perhaps you have been meaning to try Cat Anderson's Twenty Minute G one of these days—why not the next time you watch sports or a movie at home?⁵ I have known some fine players who keep the trumpet at hand when the TV is on. If adding a few minutes of breathing exercises, long tones, and mouthpiece buzzing to your regular routine can advance your playing in a noticeable way, imagine how beneficial it might be if you did that at every commercial during a football or basketball game throughout the course of an afternoon.

If you haven't played the trumpet in a long while, just add ten or fifteen minutes of easy playing at lunchtime or before dinner every day and soon you will be excited to look for more time to play. Have your instrument out and available, and grab it when it occurs to you that "now" would be a good time to get in some prime minutes.

I know a wonderful older gentleman who likes to keep his backup trumpet in the trunk of the car just in case someone needs to hear Stardust. A practice mute is invaluable for short stealth sessions when the environment is not friendly to your music. I have to use a mute when I take my instrument to the lake, the ocean, and the woods, but it still feels great to play in

the open air and natural settings.

"Time is short," goes an old Spanish saying, "but wide." We don't need lots of time if we use the time we have more thoughtfully. We can get a great deal accomplished in just a few minutes when our attention is deeply into the task at hand. Filling the nooks and crannies of the day is the easy way to add more high quality playing to your routine.

We are often unaware of the importance of the small things we do, but every little thing helps if done the right way. Small changes, pennies a day, produce mighty fortunes.

"We don't need lots of time if we use the time we have more thoughtfully."

About the author: Frank G. Campos is professor of trumpet at Ithaca College's Whalen Center of Music. For many years he served as a member of the ITG Board of Directors. Campos is the author of *Trumpet Technique* (2005) published by Oxford University Press.

Endnotes

1. "An Interview with Maurice André". Nelson, Boris and Alexander, Anne. *Instrumentalist*, June 1976.
2. See Hara and the Reverse Breath Part 2 in the March 2011 *ITG Journal*, and Wax On, Wax Off in the October 2011 *ITG Journal* for more on breathing exercises.
3. See What About Pedal Tones in the October 2011 *ITG Journal* for more on pedal tones and tone bending.
4. See Four Simple Exercises in the June 2008 *ITG Journal* for more on physical exercises that will improve your trumpet performance.
5. Cat Anderson, Duke Ellington's lead player, claimed that playing a G on the staff for twenty minutes "like a whisper" was "the secret to playing high notes." Rest as needed, play as softly as you can, time yourself, and hold every fifth tone as long as you possibly can.

