

Melodic Flexibility

An easier way to better playing

When something is accepted as new, others may point out that this revolutionary concept has been around for decades. With this in mind, I would like to say that what I am describing is new to me and I would like to share it with you.

Several months ago, I became bored with traditional methods for improving lip flexibility and finger coordination. As an older and supposedly more experienced teacher of the brass, I had enough with the Clarke Technical Studies and every lip flexibility book available to me. Practicing these repetitive patterns was like trying to take a bad tasting pill every day. I knew the exercises were of benefit to my playing but I was also bored out of my mind with these monotonous patterns and for that reason I began writing my own exercises to fill the need for both finger and lip exercises and that was how Melodic Flexibility began.

What is Melodic Flexibility?

Melodic playing has always been the most important phase of any musician's development. The melody coming from the front of our instrument defines our ability as a musician. If we are unable to demonstrate fine melodic skills, few will be interested in hearing us perform. To perform a melodic line musically requires many independent elements such as, an acceptable tone, intonation, flexibility, endurance, knowledge of key signature, dynamics and all the other elements of fine musicianship. Melodic flexibility would encompass every element of musical playing. Unfortunately the exercises we have repeated over the past history of brass playing have been far from melodic. Most of our lip flexibility books sound like primitive bugle calls and possibly the finest finger exercise studies (Clarke Technical Studies for the Cornet) is only slightly melodic in nature. Even though we respect the vast library of books dealing with both lip and finger development, how wonderful it would be to combine both the lip and finger development into one exercise and reap both benefits as well as save time in our practice routine. In my opinion, Melodic Flexibility succeeds in this venture.

As with both traditional lip exercises and finger exercises, Melodic Flexibility requires repetition. The difference between the traditional and my exercises is that Melodic Flexibility is based on well known and/or recognizable melodic patterns. When performing a melody which is known to you, it is more like reading a story than just pounding out short, repetitious patterns. A melody has a beginning, middle and an conclusion. Traditional patterns have no plot, no story and are consequently boring. Each time I play an exercise from the Earl Iron, "27 Groups of Exercises" or the Walter Smith "Lip Flexibility" book it is like taking short jabs to the face. I know they are good for me, just as medicine is good for me, but these patterns are as far from music as anything could get. The same is true for the finger development exercises. After playing every day out of these books for most of my life, I have decided to stop. For me, Melodic Flexibility is a better way to spend my time.

How to Begin Melodic Flexibility

By combining the basic concept of repetition used in traditional methods with well known melodic phrases, I feel every musician would gain more in a shorter amount of time by using this approach. I am not here to sell my method for the concept is so easy anyone can develop their own material and begin experiencing the benefits. If you have a program such as Finale, Finale Songwriter or any similar music writing software, you are ready to begin.

You first need to decide on a simple four measure melody which is limited to a range of about an octave. In your exercise sheet, I have used the song “**Humoresque**”. This melody was ideal for it demonstrates a perfect melodic curve, beginning low, extending up an octave and eventually returning to the original starting note. One characteristic which must be in every song that you select is the element of familiarity. The selection of melodic material must be known to the performer for it is the *known melody* which replaces boredom with enjoyment while practicing. Notice that the melody begins in the low range. By starting low, the player will be able to relax and deliver a full, rich, warm sound. This is very important. The melody is then repeated up one half step. Notice that this is beginning to look very similar to the Clarke Studies with one big difference- the player is now performing a recognizable melody. By playing an actual melody, the player is drawn from the first note to the last in a musical fashion; not being forced to just bang valves down. How far you continue upward by half steps will be determined by the goal set and the limits of each player. Do not exceed the comfortable upper register of the player for discomfort is not what we are after at this point.

Once you have reached an upper register which is still comfortable to perform, it is now time to retrace our path back down to the low register. To do this we will now start a new melody. This time I have chosen “Happy Birthday” for our example. Begin in the upper register and descend back to the lower register. The reason for this is to let the embouchure gradually begin to relax. This “start low, work up, return to low concept” seems to work best for the gradual increase and decrease of your embouchure’s work load gives the lip a pattern of work and rest which is very beneficial in gaining both strength and flexibility. Pay close attention to the measures indicated for resting. Make sure that you “rest as much as you play”.

Slurring your material can not be stressed enough at this point. I have found that the more these melodies can be slurred, the more the air is allowed to flow through your instrument. The more slurring you do, the more relaxed your air passage will become. I have noticed that through the use of slurring, my tone quality has improved substantially. I am aware of more overtones in my tone than ever before. These additional overtones are good examples of an embouchure working more efficiently. As you practice these exercises, listen to the quality of your sound and if you experience more volume with less effort, you are beginning to use your air and embouchure more efficiently.

Gradually Increase the Work Load

Once you have established this basic concept, then you need to move on to more advanced levels. The example I have included at this point is the first phrase in an old melody called “**Nola**”. I was amazed at the difficulty of this simple melody. Even in a comfortable key, you may find this a challenge. While playing this tune, notice that your concentration is directed to the melodic line more than to the key or fingering. Let the melody draw you through the notes. Keep thinking melody, not pitches, key or fingerings. Concentrate on the melody for by doing so, you are forcing yourself to play music and not just playing notes. There is nothing melodic about the Clarke Technical Studies. Those exercises are just that, exercises. This melody on the other hand is music.

The Eventual Goal

Once you have become at ease playing the four measure melodies, then it would be time to increase the length and difficulty of the songs. In my next example I have used the melody to “**The Nearness of You**”. Because of the added length of the phrase, you will be required to use all of your air and take in additional air to complete the melody. The reason for this is to have you get used to longer phrases and also force you to use up all of your air and quickly refill your lungs to finish the example. This is a wonderful exercise to learn how to quickly fill your lungs.

The Many Benefits from the Practice of Melodic Flexibility

- Improved desire to practice
- Improved ability to play in all keys
- Increased playing efficiency
- Increased lip flexibility
- Increased finger control
- Improvement in tone quality
- Improved embouchure strength
- Increased upper range
- Decrease in practice time

If you have had experience using this concept, or a similar routine, I would be very interested in learning from your observations. By working together, we all might someday be able to be better musicians.

Melodic Flexibility

Humoresque.

Chidester

The sheet music consists of eight staves of musical notation for trumpet ensemble. The staves are arranged vertically, each starting with a different key signature and ending with a measure of rest followed by a repeat sign and a new key signature. The first staff starts in G major (one sharp) and ends in E minor (two flats). The second staff starts in A minor (no sharps or flats) and ends in D major (one sharp). The third staff starts in C major (no sharps or flats) and ends in F major (one sharp). The fourth staff starts in B-flat major (two flats) and ends in E major (one sharp). The fifth staff starts in E major (no sharps or flats) and ends in A major (two sharps). The sixth staff starts in G major (one sharp) and ends in C major (no sharps or flats). The seventh staff starts in A minor (no sharps or flats) and ends in D major (one sharp). The eighth staff starts in C major (no sharps or flats) and ends in F major (one sharp). Measure numbers 1 through 57 are indicated at the beginning of each staff. Measures 1, 9, 17, 25, 33, 41, and 49 are explicitly labeled with their numbers. Measures 5, 13, 21, 29, 37, 45, and 53 are indicated by small dots above the staff lines. Measures 11, 19, 27, 35, 43, and 51 are indicated by small dots below the staff lines. Measures 23, 31, 39, 47, and 55 are indicated by small dots between the staff lines. Measures 3, 11, 19, 27, 35, 43, and 51 are indicated by small dots above the staff lines. Measures 7, 15, 23, 31, 39, 47, and 55 are indicated by small dots below the staff lines. Measures 15, 23, 31, 39, 47, and 55 are indicated by small dots between the staff lines. Measures 19, 27, 35, 43, and 51 are indicated by small dots above the staff lines. Measures 27, 35, 43, and 51 are indicated by small dots below the staff lines. Measures 35, 43, and 51 are indicated by small dots between the staff lines. Measures 41, 49, and 57 are indicated by small dots above the staff lines. Measures 49 and 57 are indicated by small dots below the staff lines. Measures 57 is indicated by a small dot between the staff lines.

Melodic Flexibility

Happy Birthday

Musical staff showing a melody in 3/4 time. The key signature is one sharp. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a dynamic range from piano to forte. Measure number 500 is indicated at the beginning.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to two sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 518 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to three sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 526 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to four sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 535 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to five sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 543 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to six sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 552 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to seven sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 560 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Musical staff showing a melodic line in 3/4 time. The key signature changes to eight sharps. The melody includes eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure number 569 is indicated at the beginning. A measure repeat sign is shown above the staff.

Melodic Flexibility

Nola

386

3 3 3 3

Measures 386-388 show a melodic line in G major (two sharps) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 386 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 387 and 388 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes.

387

3 3 3 3 4

Measures 387-389 show a melodic line in G major (two sharps) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 387 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 388 and 389 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes. Measure 389 ends with a measure of 4/4 time.

393

3 3 3 3

Measures 393-395 show a melodic line in F major (one sharp) on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 393 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 394 and 395 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes.

395

3 3 3 3 4

Measures 395-397 show a melodic line in F major (one sharp) on a bass clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 395 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 396 and 397 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes. Measure 397 ends with a measure of 4/4 time.

401

3 3 3 3 3

Measures 401-403 show a melodic line in G major (two sharps) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 401 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 402 and 403 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes.

403

3 3 3 3 4

Measures 403-405 show a melodic line in G major (two sharps) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 403 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 404 and 405 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes. Measure 405 ends with a measure of 4/4 time.

409

3 3 3 3 3

Measures 409-411 show a melodic line in G major (two sharps) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 409 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 410 and 411 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes.

411

3 3 3 3 4

Measures 411-413 show a melodic line in G major (two sharps) on a treble clef staff. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns. Measure 411 starts with a sixteenth note followed by eighth notes. Measures 412 and 413 continue with similar patterns, ending with eighth notes. Measure 413 ends with a measure of 4/4 time.

Melodic Flexibility

The Nearness of You

"Remember to rest as much as you play"

The sheet music consists of eight staves of musical notation for trumpet ensemble. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one sharp. It features a melodic line with various note values and rests, some of which are grouped by vertical lines. The second staff begins with a bass clef, a common time signature, and a key signature of one flat. It continues the melodic line with similar patterns. Subsequent staves follow a similar pattern, alternating between treble and bass clefs, and changing key signatures at regular intervals (one sharp, one flat, one sharp, one sharp). Measure numbers 10, 19, 28, 37, 46, and 55 are visible on the left side of the staves. The music is characterized by its rhythmic complexity and the use of melodic flexibility through various note heads and rests.



