

# Maintenance and Building

By Paul Baron

In this article I'd like to discuss the differences between maintenance and building of the chops. I'll also talk about balancing practice with heavy or lighter performance schedules, or for times when there is a break in performance schedules altogether. I've talked about **BALANCE** in previous articles regarding practice and rest, balance of mouthpiece placement, and so on. In this article I'll discuss **BALANCE** in a broader sense as far as performance and practice schedules.

Maintenance practice is a subject I think that is important to address and one that hasn't been written about as much as chop building methods. I've found that when I'm in a long run of a show, or have a busy playing schedule in general, the maintenance practice is important to balance the other aspects of playing that might not be covered in performance. When I start a long run of a show I try to sum up what the demands of the show are and pay attention to what in my overall playing that isn't covered in the show. For instance, some shows are demanding in upper register playing and may have mostly all loud playing. As a consequence, my soft and low playing isn't being addressed in the show, so I really need to cover that more in practice and warmup. I've found that if the show starts right out of the gate with some high and loud passages, I need to warmup slow, soft, low, and build up to the upper register gently. This brings the lip focus together and makes the upper register more relaxed. Some shows aren't very demanding of the higher register or loud playing, and I've found that unless I balance that playing with some practice where I really step on the gas, that I atrophy in that area and if the show is a long run, it's tough to practice hard enough to get that part of my playing together while still being able to play the show with fresh chops. This conscious and balanced approach is invaluable in chop maintenance and will help falling into the rut of developing "show chops". "Show chops" is what happens when maintenance practice, as I've described above, is neglected and you end up being able to play the show but the other areas of your playing atrophy and become harder to play. This is an easy place to get to, but with a little thought as to balancing playing and practicing, just as easy to avoid.

A chop building routine requires stretching the boundaries of your range, endurance, and volume but with a **balanced** approach so as not to injure your lips. In a previous article, I talked about rest being important in the practice routine, and that is certainly true of a chop building routine. The general rule of thumb is to **rest** as long as you play. As well as many of the routines out there designed for chop building, I like to take existing exercises and expand them into the upper and lower registers further. For instance, I use Clarke's studies and expand them further than in the book. Also, as I play exercises higher, I alternate by playing the exercises consecutively lower. Play Clarke's study number two starting the pattern on first space F#, then play in G, then F, and so on, alternating spreading higher and lower through the exercises. In this way, the more you work out the lips playing higher, the more you have to relax to be able the lower keys and

restore the blood, flexibility, and suppleness to the chops. I also take lyrical studies, such as Concone vocalizes and play them in higher keys. Start out by transposing them up a fifth, and then when this is comfortable, up an octave. I play a full phrase up an octave and then insert a four bar rest, then play the next phrase, and so on. In this way I'm playing in a similar way to a lead book I might find in a show or big band. You can gradually work up to playing two or three phrases together, and insert a four or eight bar rest between. Remember to balance loud and soft playing. I like to play the Concone very soft, and in this way bring my lip focus together. Then when I step on the gas I've got the focus, and playing loud really doesn't require much more air. Playing along with recordings is a good way to build your chops as well. There is a published book and CD set of Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band with the lead trumpet book. This is a great workout and simulates a real work load you might encounter on the gig. It also helps playing along with other instruments to keep your ears and intonation in check.

In the case of a playing and practicing schedule where I have a day or two off of performance, and then a few heavy performance days, I try and balance my playing between building and maintenance playing. An example of this might be Monday and Tuesday recording sessions, Wednesday and Thursday off work, and a heavy weekend of playing. I need to stay in good shape for everything and balance the playing and non-playing days. Making sure to start the week on the right foot, I do a good warmup to setup up the session so I'm ready for whatever is thrown at me. This helps to make sure I don't get beat up, which might make the next day a little rough. The same approach for Tuesday. Then on Wednesday and Thursday, depending how taxing the sessions were, I either do a lot of relaxing and low playing to return the flexibility and suppleness to my lips, or if the sessions weren't much of a workout, I practice heavier to get a good workout. All practice sessions are approached in a balanced way with the proper amount of playing and rest. Then on Friday and Saturday I make sure to do a good warmup to prepare for the rest of the day. Remember that there is a difference between warmup and practice.

Warming up is a subject that might invite some debate. There are those who insist on playing the same warmup routine everyday, and take as much as an hour to feel warmed up. Some pick up the horn and blow a few notes and are ready to go. While both may be the right thing for a minority of players, or necessary for some, I think most of us fall in between those two extremes. Sometimes a travel schedule may preclude a longer warmup and sometimes I've gone directly from a bus or plane into performance mode. For me this isn't ideal but sometimes I don't have the choice. Many people are warmed up long before they put the horn down, and "over warmup" thinking that unless they play their highest and loudest notes possible they aren't warmed up. Some think that a few blasts are good enough and use the gig to warm up. While this might work for some, I think this is a risky way to go and the job is not the place for a warmup. The audience expects and deserves a good performance from the very first notes. A good warmup sets you up for whatever the music demands but doesn't tax you to the point that you've used up all the "good" notes in the practice room. I see this in a lot of younger players and some more experienced players as well. Often band directors, in their effort to ensure a good strong performance, over rehearse and warmup their bands. Then when it comes to

performance, the brass players are already worn out. A good warmup gets the air and blood flowing, and the lips relaxed for the gig and no more. Don't fall into the trap of being a "warmup specialist" and use everything up before the gig. The audience doesn't care how great you sounded in the practice room, but how you sound on the gig. A good guide to follow in how much to warmup and when to put the horn down is to listen to your body and go by the feeling and feedback your chops give you. If you are truly listening to that biofeedback, you will know when you're warmed up and ready for the gig.

The major point of this article has been to talk about balancing playing and non-playing schedules, and to listen to our bodies, which if we really hear, will tell us what we need and don't need to do. With some attention to the playing demands on the job, and balancing practice to round out all aspects of trumpet playing, we can maintain and build the chops and be ready for whatever might be thrown at us.

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