

The **Singing** Trumpet



Using Singing and Speech as
Literal Models for Trumpet Performance

Peter Bond

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra

CARL FISCHER

Table of Contents

Preface.....	4
Biography.....	5
Introduction	6
Part I: Concepts of Tone Production	
Chapter 1: How the Trumpet Works.....	8
Chapter 2: Two Schools of Playing and Singing.....	9
Chapter 3: Bringing a Vocal Model to the Classical Trumpet.....	13
Chapter 4: Attacks, Articulation and Efficiency.....	18
Chapter 5: Creating Sound with Maximum Overtones (Color)	26
Chapter 6: Embouchure and Air/Wind.....	27
Chapter 7: Breathing and Wind.....	41
Chapter 8: Mouth Shape and Articulation.....	45
Chapter 9: Tone: Bright and Dark.....	50
Chapter 10: Posture and Tone.....	53
Chapter 11: Making Playing Look and Sound Easy.....	54
Chapter 12: Mental Approach.....	55
Chapter 13: Practicing	57
Part II: Putting Theory into Practice	
Chapter 14: Buzzing the Mouthpiece.....	60
Chapter 15: (Not So) Long Tones, Descending.....	63
Chapter 16: Lyrical Patterns	68
Chapter 17: Sound Studies	78
Chapter 18: (Not So) Long Tones, Ascending	82
Chapter 19: Articulation.....	88
Chapter 20: “Bricks,” Accents, and “Hairpins”	95
Chapter 21: Flexibilities or “Lip” Slurs.....	100
Chapter 22: Pianississimo.....	114
Chapter 23: Pedal Tones	117
Chapter 24: Intervals.....	120
Chapter 25: Speed Techniques.....	124
Chapter 26: Consistency and Security on High Entrances	133
Chapter 27: Mixed Studies	138
Chapter 28: Extending and Connecting Registers in a Major Way	145
Chapter 29: Advanced Flexibility and Agility.....	150
Chapter 30: Lip (Tongue) Trills	163
Chapter 31: Dynamic Extremes/Acoustic Power	166
Chapter 32: Melodies	172

Introduction

Brass players earnestly practice from studies of Bordogni and Concone, hoping to establish a singing sound or style, but use techniques that have little to do with singing. Moving vast amounts of air and articulating an artificial manner are two examples. Some players make this work (or think this is what they are doing), but the rest carry on in frustration, handicapped by an approach that limits their potential. Many less successful players assume (or are told by teachers) they simply “don’t have what it takes,” while the pedagogy goes unchallenged because it’s espoused or endorsed by a famous player or teacher. It is then passed on as received wisdom or natural law.

The fact is there is no single correct way to play a brass instrument, nor are there any rules that apply to everyone except perhaps, “Blow in the small end,” and I will take issue with even that in the following pages.²

Trumpet can be difficult to learn and to teach. Most of the processes involved are invisible, and players perceive and describe them differently. Also, air, embouchure, and articulation are interconnected, infinitely variable, and nearly impossible to isolate.

After my trials with the Philharmonic and the Met, I reevaluated much of what I had read or been taught. Experimenting with Pandolfi’s concepts and working with the world’s greatest singers led me to adopt singing and speech as literal models.

When “cantabile” appears in print, it is invariably over a gentle, lyrical passage. But singers express the full range of emotion, from tenderness and sorrow to rage or triumph. Approaching playing like a singer can expand our expressive range.

I think of the lips and their support system (the embouchure) as taking the place of the vocal cords and the larynx. For resonance, singers use their body, while brass players have their instrument. Few realize that we can use both; a singer’s approach to production and resonance can enhance and even control the resonance of the instrument, making it a literal extension of our body.

Primary Concepts

Blowing and singing are different, and the body uses air differently for each. We are taught to blow, but a singing approach is more efficient and expressive.

Sound is not literally blown through the instrument. Trying to do so is inefficient and counterproductive.

Wind is not sound. Support vibration, not wind.

The trumpet does not require lots of air or great physical strength. If the embouchure is efficient, no more effort is needed to play than to sing.³

There are two parallel schools of singing and brass playing: classical and commercial. Awareness can help brass players cross idioms more convincingly.

The tongue is the largest variable in mouth shape, so articulation affects all aspects of playing. Tonguing exactly like speaking is ideal in most cases.

Tone is a window into function. A colorful, vibrant tone is preferable to a dull, “inoffensive” sound, and is also an indication of optimal, efficient function.

Tone “color” is the harmonic activity in the sound.

When balance and blend are a problem, the issue is often stridency, but mislabeled a “bright” sound. Stridency is caused by “sitting on the air,” and trying to blow sound through the instrument.

The most beautiful, resonant tone requires the least effort.

“Placing” pitches as if singing (falsetto for men) can improve response, accuracy, intonation, and ease of playing.

Your tone is not like your DNA or fingerprints; you can change it, fundamentally and for expressive purposes.

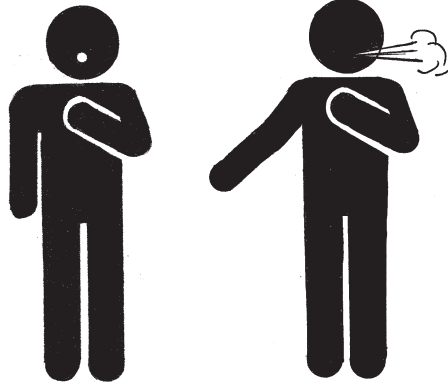
² The word “blow,” anyway.

³ The literal singing model is less effective above the staff, and disappears above “high C.” Extreme *fortissimos* will also require more wind power.

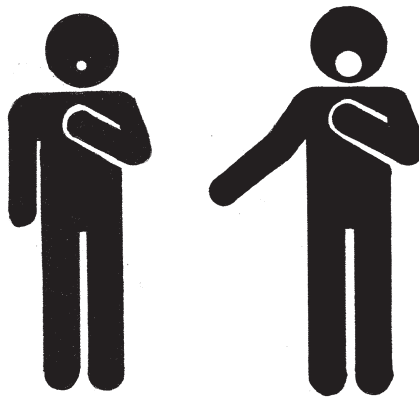
Chapter 3

Bringing a Vocal Model to the Classical Trumpet

- 1) Stand or sit tall and place one hand on your sternum (breast bone).
- 2) Take a full breath and create a wind stream as if blowing out birthday candles.



- 3) Breathe again and this time, sing a sustained note.



Q: Did you notice anything different under your hand when singing versus blowing?

A: When blowing, your chest likely collapsed, but when you sang, it remained elevated. This is because singing and blowing are different. The body uses air differently for each.

For twenty-eight years, I've observed the world's greatest opera singers. Without histrionic breathing or red-faced straining, they can fill the 3800-seat Metropolitan Opera House with magnificent sound. Some can overpower a 100-piece orchestra. I began to think; "We brass players are taught to blow, but what if instead we use our air and resonance of our body more like opera singers?"

We don't blow the voice, and we don't HAVE to blow the trumpet.⁹

⁹ Unless the embouchure is dysfunctional.

Chapter 4

Attacks, Articulation and Efficiency

For clear, well-defined attacks, many players “tongue harder.” This explosively pressurizes the air (truly an attack!), creating a louder, more strident sound. In the case of accents, the effect is exaggerated, distorting the sound. What is the alternative?

Articulate exactly like you speak and sing.

You’ve been speaking since you were a toddler, and you’re very good at it. Why not articulate the same way on the trumpet?¹⁵ If your embouchure is reasonably efficient, notes will sound clearly and instantly with no more air than you need for speech or song. You can then articulate and phrase with ease and fluidity.

If this is problematic, look to the embouchure. An inefficient or dysfunctional embouchure that does not respond immediately will cause delayed notes, a dull sound, and sometimes “air balls.” This is an illustration of how all aspects of playing are connected.

Response problems are often misdiagnosed as faulty articulation or lack of “air support.”

More wind or air support is (again) the standard advice in these situations, but even if this temporarily helps, the result is louder, labored, and often coarse. More air does not address the underlying problem(s). Incidentally, very pressurized attacks can sometimes *create* response problems when explosive wind pressure overpowers the vibrating area.

Some teachers have beginners articulate between their lips to ensure a response, in effect jump-starting the buzz. This gets quick results but creates other problems that will have to be corrected later.

After taking up serious classical/symphonic study, I found coordination of breathing, articulating, and wind without a compressive attack to be a hit-or-miss affair. With speech and singing models, the problem disappeared.

“Attack” is a terrible term for starting a musical tone, but Arban used it, so we are stuck with it. I prefer to think of “releasing” the tone, just as I would to sing. Thinking this way coordinates the complex actions that go into any change of technique, no matter how subtle.

Here is a dialogue I frequently have with students in the first lesson:

Me: Say “ta-ta-ta.”

Student: “ta-ta-ta.”

Me: Good. How much air did that require?

Student: Uh, not much?

Me: Indeed. Very little. Did you miss any syllables or blurt one out too loud?

Student: Ha ha, no.

Me: Were you blowing your vocal cords to make them sound?

Student: Uh...no.

Me: Was it in any way difficult?

Student: Nope.

Me: Why not use the same approach to play your trumpet?

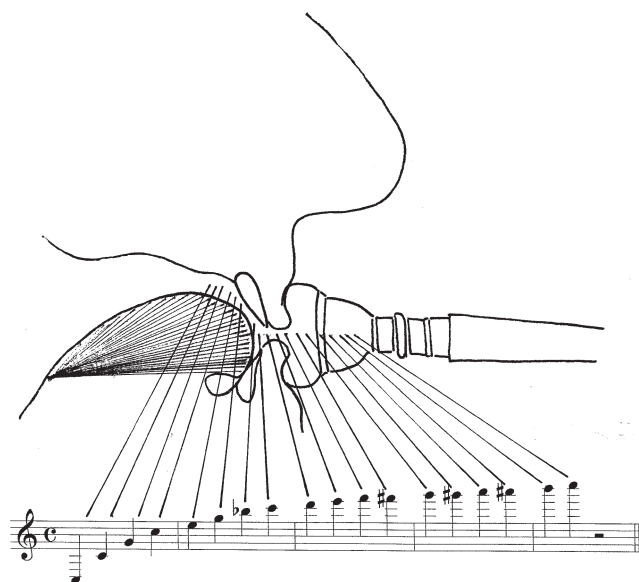
If we “speak” or “sing” instead of blowing the trumpet can become a literal extension of our body (in the staff, anyway). Whispering is an even better model for articulation because the vocal cords are silent and the air is closer to that needed for playing.

Forget tonguing and blowing; if you can say it you can play it!

Try singing (or whispering) and playing this pattern alternately to compare and experiment:

¹⁵ Of course, we’re all different, and sometimes native language has an effect (my reference is North American English), but try it. If it does not work, experiment with hybrid solutions. THERE ARE NO RULES (except “don’t push down on the air”).

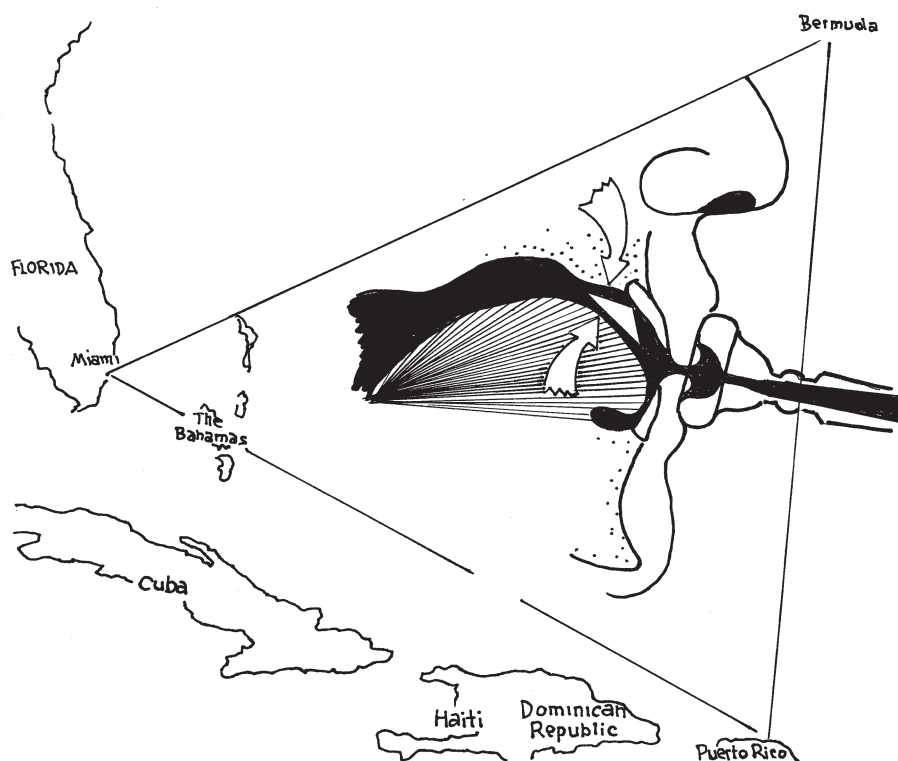
But close together;¹⁶



Play into higher pitches, not up to them.

This is not a high-note method (there are no lack those!), and I am not a high-register specialist, but I have found these ideas helpful for exploring the upper register while maintaining tone and response in the middle and low registers where I make my living. I play or buzz arpeggios and scales to the second C below and second C above the staff in my morning routine, and these concepts help me do it.

I think of the tone as happening in the little space between my (arched) tongue, my front teeth, and the roof of my mouth. I call this the “Bermuda Triangle.” Instead of losing ships and aircraft (as in the infamous area on the map), we can find control and efficiency.



Concentrating on the Bermuda Triangle greatly reduces work for the embouchure. I think of controlling tone color, range, agility, and dynamics from this area. Endurance is dramatically increased. This enables

¹⁶ This fanciful illustration represents a way of thinking about pitches. It's not literal.



Neal Balm

Principal, NY Pops and Mostly Mozart Festival. Co-principal American Ballet Theater. Solo appearances on Live from Lincoln Center. Piccolo trumpet specialist (over 200 Brandenburg No. 2 performances), prolific recording artist.



John Sheppard

American Symphony Orchestra, American Ballet Theater. Frequent appearances with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, N.Y. Philharmonic, Orpheus Chamber Orch. For six years Principal in Mary Poppins on Broadway.



Alex Holton

Regular in many Broadway orchestras (lead; Sunset Blvd, Billy Elliot, An American in Paris, The King and I, etc.). Extra trumpet with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra since 1977.



Jim Ross

2nd Trumpet Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, former member N.Y. Philharmonic, Seattle Symphony, Vancouver Symphony. Appearances with Chicago Symphony, Orchestra of St Luke, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz' All-Star Orchestra.



John Dent

N.Y. Pops, N.Y. City Opera, Mostly Mozart, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, many Broadway credits (Carousel, Billy Elliot, She Loves Me, Candide, The Music Man, etc.).

Finger Speed, Major Scales

“Snap” valves down quickly. Grip instrument firmly.
 (Transpose or extend as desired. Write your own studies based on these principles.)

The musical score consists of ten staves, each containing exercises for a major scale in B-flat major (two flats). The exercises are as follows:

- 1a:** A single staff in 2/2 time with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. It features a half-note scale ascending and descending, connected by a slur.
- 1b:** A single staff in 2/2 time, identical to 1a but without the dynamic marking.
- 2a:** A single staff in 4/4 time featuring eighth-note triplets ascending and descending.
- 2b:** A single staff in 4/4 time featuring eighth-note triplets ascending and descending.
- 3:** A single staff in 4/4 time featuring sixteenth-note triplets ascending and descending.
- 4:** A single staff in 4/4 time featuring sixteenth-note triplets ascending and descending.
- 5a:** A single staff in 4/4 time featuring eighth-note triplets ascending and descending.
- 5b:** A single staff in 4/4 time featuring eighth-note triplets ascending and descending.

Chapter 26

Consistency and Security on High Entrances

It's often said that we must "hear" a note before we play it, and it certainly helps. But in the upper register it's not always enough. Higher notes also have a physical feel to them. Muscle memory can save the day in loud or harmonically thorny music when our ears aren't working as well as they should. Obviously, the ideal is for both to work together.

These exercises were inspired by an accuracy study in Augie Haas' book *Building Your Range*.³⁷ My twist on his study is to finish the repeated attacks with excerpts in different styles. You can easily substitute excerpts that are practical for your musical needs. Another variation is to preface each study with the corresponding exercise from "Stretching Range" on p. 86. Excerpts are notated for B \flat trumpet. If using a C trumpet, transpose. Adapt these as needed. When preparing these or other excerpts for performance, you may want to transcribe so that they look like what you'll see in the performance.

Take the mouthpiece off your lips between each note.

Don't play loud. Notice how easy these notes can be, and how consistent you can become. Buzzing the study first on the mouthpiece alone may be helpful.

The method of articulation has a tremendous influence on upper register accuracy.

Repetition of attacks helps coordinate eye, ear, tongue, and air, developing a strong motor-memory and confidence through a personal history of successful entrances.

When preparing for an audition or performance, practice from the excerpt as you'll be seeing it to link visual recognition, aural imagery, and muscle-memory.

Accuracy on A \flat and G \sharp

Trumpet in B \flat

(Play three times)

1 *mf*

5 *ff* *cresc.* **5**

13 *pp* *très lointain* *dim.* **3**

In "one"
(Play three times)

2 *ff*

5 Tchaikovsky: *Sleeping Beauty* *ff*

³⁷ www.augiehaas.com. *Building Your Range* Published by Playtime Music, LLC