

Academy of Music  
Gdansk

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*The Pursuit of Confidence in Horn Playing*  
*From Dis-ease to Ease, Sound Technique and*  
*Healthy Musicianship*

Master of Arts Dissertation  
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**Gdansk**  
**2007/2008**

In memory of my beloved parents with gratitude.  
To Mum who dedicated her life to the musical and emotional needs of her children,  
and to Dad who provided me with a second chance.

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## INTRODUCTION

Jim Rohn, recognised as one of the world's leading motivational speakers, philosophers and entrepreneurs claims that, “The greatest step toward success is self-confidence. The greatest builder of self-confidence is self-esteem, and self-esteem comes from doing the daily things you know you should do.”<sup>1</sup>

On taking this recipe for success at face value, it seems that building a successful career as a professional horn player is easy enough: all an aspiring and gifted student has to do to get a good job in an orchestra and stay there is to build up his self-confidence by putting in his daily hours of practice. However recent research carried out in the field of healthy musicianship suggests that life for a musician is not always this easy. Statistics reveal that a proportion of orchestral musicians throughout the world, be they professional, amateur or undergraduates at music college, run into health problems of varying degrees at some point or other which have a detrimental effect not only on their physical and mental well-being, but also on their level of performance. Yet even the experts committed to this particular field of research admit that tangible scientific data is still in its infancy and the causes of such illnesses are not entirely known. Thus lack of confidence and performance-related ill-health remains a challenging area of investigation for musicians, medics and music colleges alike.

One possible thesis, that ill-health is inherent to the artist, has been deemed questionable. Only a decade ago, in his article “Creativity: is there a worm in the apple?” William A. Frosch maintained, “It has not yet been shown that pain or disease are essential to the creation of art, or to other forms of creativity, nor that the creative product necessarily reflects directly the emotional state of its creator...we need a series of systematic cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of living exemplars...and look at qualitative as well as quantitative findings. We need to understand the psychological dynamics of the creativities as well as their possible diagnoses.”<sup>2</sup>

Frosch draws from the long established discussion among scientists and philosophers, traceable as far back as Aristotle, concerning a possible link between creativity and disease. He convincingly argues that the verdict still remains “not proven”<sup>3</sup>. With regard to players of the French horn, it would certainly be unfair to render the creative personality of all those who happen to play the horn as ‘the stress-ridden, horn-playing neurotic’ bent on conquering one problem after another for his art’s sake (even if the French horn does have a reputation as being the most quirky member of the brass family!). As Andrew Evans points out, in fact the vast majority of musicians lead a happy, untroubled musical life, despite perhaps having concerns which do not affect their confidence or playing

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<sup>1</sup> J. Rohn 2004 Weekend Event, VIP Lunch, DVD 8, CD 15, Track 5

<sup>2</sup> W. A. Frosch “Creativity: is there a worm in the apple?” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Sept 1996 Vol. 89, p. 508

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

standards adversely.<sup>4</sup> And yet, the issue of personality or the “psychological dynamics”<sup>5</sup> of the horn-playing artist is worth looking at: while some horn teachers and music psychologists deem personality to be of pivotal significance in the learning experience, others consider it a mere misnomer.

Christopher B. Wynn Parry, senior consultant physician and trustee to the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM) puts the unsettling picture of statistics into perspective in rather more rational terms. He states that any musician can lead a healthy and pain-free life “provided that **technique is sound, body fit, mind and spirit calm**”,<sup>6</sup> and is fully convinced that, “the majority of medical problems facing the musician are preventable.”<sup>7</sup> It seems, then, that there is a direct correlation between a musicians’ potential performance-related ill-health and his playing technique, physical fitness and mental state. And that the focus must be on prevention rather than cure. It goes without saying that French horn players are no exception.

In order to find ways of preventing illness and nurturing confidence, we first of all need to identify those problems which are most common to the horn. Only then can we develop strategies to side-step potential dangers. Secondly, we must define what constitutes a sound technique and discover methods of reaching the levels of mental and physical fitness which according to Parry are vital for healthy music-making. A further area to look at closely linked to developing technique is practice. For if Jim Rohn is to be believed, then it is only through “doing the daily things you know you should do”<sup>8</sup> which will lead to true performance confidence. With the above goals in mind, then, this paper endeavours to take the reader on a journey. It is a journey already navigated by the author, a journey retracing the steps of a horn player who once lost confidence, her development and recovery. Or viewed from the journey’s end, her road to rediscovery.

Chapter one, **Evidence of performance-related ill-health**, provides us with background information, and introduces the reader to our quintessential theme: the concept of autonomy<sup>9</sup> and the validity of personal experience. In the traditions of postmodernism, feminist literary theory and continental philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Husserl, the case studies presented here, including that of the author, can be viewed as phenomenological accounts of horn players’ performance-related health problems within the context of standpoint epistemology and multidisciplinary research. They set the scene. And likewise set universal knowledge of statistics and abstract reasoning against the rich, textured knowledge of individual experience. In our case, the

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<sup>4</sup> A. Ewans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 135

<sup>5</sup> W. A. Frosch “Creativity: is there a worm in the apple?” *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Sept 1996 Vol. 89, p. 508

<sup>6</sup> A. Williamson (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.41

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> 2004 Weekend Event, VIP Lunch, DVD 8, CD 15, Track 5

<sup>9</sup> while acknowledging this vast theoretical field, here the concept of autonomy applies only in the context of perceptual experience pertaining to the individual when acquiring musical skill on his instrument

general evidence found in conventional research is enriched by the personal stories of horn players who embarked on their own journey to regain confidence.

In the field of psychology of music, studies focussing on the musical mind as exemplified by John A. Sloboda<sup>10</sup> in England or Maria Manturzevska<sup>11</sup> in Poland, incorporate the personal case study as a reliable source of evidence. The question is whether personal experience has found its place in the minds of instrumental teachers, music colleges and other institutions dedicated to musicians' well-being. Moreover, to what extent do such personal accounts provide horn players and teachers with deeper insight into finding preventative solutions? More to the point, if a reliable technique is central to having confidence, to what extent is personal experience relevant in developing a sound and healthy playing technique?

Armed with enough background information from the first chapter, the reader is then ready to embark on his journey and find his own solutions. Chapter two, **In Search of a Sound Technique**, explores the core elements of horn playing in search of a sound horn technique and introduces the paradox of personality. Having established which path to take by the end, the reader continues his journey in chapter three, **A Sound Technique – On the Easy Road**, to find the answers. This part looks at issues lying deeper below the surface and discusses a modified, integral approach to horn technique. Chapter four, **Practice Makes Perfect (!)**, puts theory into practice in the practice room. Since this section is practical and optimistic in nature, it addresses the reader directly using more upbeat, informal language. The final chapter, **A Sound Support System**, is dedicated to the field of healthy musicianship and introduces a number of tools and techniques horn players around the world use to help keep themselves healthy in body and mind. The author's opinions and considerations are presented in the conclusion which is rounded off with a personal afterword.

Concerning the research methods to this paper, the author's personal account included in chapter one is of central significance. It is to be viewed as the underlying force and navigation system by which the ensuing paper could evolve. Not only was she guided by the personal journey she herself had undergone; by virtue of her own personal research, she was fortunate enough to gain access to a wealth of relevant information and advice otherwise not necessarily available in textbooks. Extracts from personal, email and telephone communication are weaved into the text alongside references from literature, playing manuals and scientific research. Thus the paper makes conscious use of narrative which in other academic contexts, particularly in the fields of law and philosophy, is increasingly recognised as a respectable discipline in itself. The multi-layered texture is in fact highly indebted to the horn lesson experiences with and generous contributions from the following players: Julian Baker, Professor at the Royal College of Music and former Principal horn of

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<sup>10</sup> J. Sloboda (2005) *Exploring the Musical Mind: cognition, emotion, ability, function* Oxford: Oxford University Press

<sup>11</sup> M. Manturzevska (1991a) "35 Jahre Forschung und Erfahrung in der Findung und Förderung musikalischer (Hoch-) Begabung in Polen" In: H. G. Bastian (ed.) *Musikalische Hochbegabung: Findung und Förderung*, Mainz: Schott

The Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Dave Claessen, third horn of the NDR Radio Symphony Orchestra, Edward Daniecki, Professor at the Academy of Music in Gdansk, Pip Eastop, Professor at The Royal Academy of Music and Principal horn of the London Chamber Orchestra, Andrew Joy, Principal horn of the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, Thomas Jöstlein, Professor of Horn at the University of Illinois and assistant Principal/utility Horn of the NY Phil, Lucinda Lewis, Principal horn of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, Kristina Mascher-Turner of the Virtuoso Horn Duo and former Principal horn of the Flemish Radio Orchestra, Fergus McWilliam, second horn of The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Jens Plücker, Principal horn of the NDR Radio Symphony Orchestra, Katie Pryce, former Principal horn of the KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra, Michael Purton, former Principal horn of the Hallé Orchestra, Frøydis Ree Wekre, Professor of Horn and Chamber Music at the Norwegian State Academy of Music and former Principal horn of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Georg Schreckenberger, second horn of The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Helmut Sprenger, former Principal horn of the Giessen Philharmonic Orchestra, Derek Taylor, Professor at The Royal Academy of Music and former Principal horn of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Theo Wiemes, Principal horn of the NDR Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. The author would also like to thank the following coaches and therapists: Erika Beier, Bremen, Cäcilia Cartellieri, Hamburg, David N. Grimshaw, Michigan, Prof. Dr. Hermes Kick, Mannheim, Diana Schurrmann, Munich, and Anne-Christin Wege-Csef, Würzburg. The use of italics throughout the paper has been employed for emphasis, to express the author's personal opinion or advice. And special attention is drawn to the quotation by Christopher B. Wynn Parry in bold on p. 6 as the running leitmotif throughout.

In the same way as the author, the reader, having experienced the journey himself in the shoes of a searching horn player, should be able to draw his own conclusions. He will have learned to understand the problems and obstacles a horn player may face if he is lacking confidence or has even lost it. He will be able to empathise with the author's personal approach to horn playing, one based on sound, faith and healthy musicianship, and may also rethink the role of the horn teacher both in terms of his general teaching approach, particularly with regard to sensitive personalities, and in the context of assisting a player through crisis. Most importantly however, he will decide for himself on the validity of personal experience. What role does self-knowledge play in finding a reliable technique and, as Jim Rohn suggests, knowing what to do daily in order to build confidence; to make music, and in our case horn playing especially, a life-embracing experience?



## 1.1 Surveys and statistics

In order to create our recipe for self-confidence and before we step out onto the road, we need to establish which demons lurking around the corner pose a potential threat to the mind and body of the horn player. Are there any health issues known to apply to horn players as opposed to for instance harp players? Let us begin by casting an eye on the landscape of some of today's most recent surveys. Interestingly enough, general information concerning the physical and mental demands of performance or the physical and psychological wellbeing of musicians was thin on the ground right up until the late twentieth century. Not until 1986 did the first case of a diagnosed medical disorder among musicians appear in the press, when the pianist Gary Graffman<sup>12</sup> was reported in the New York Times to have focal dystonia. This, alongside the rather earlier (the late nineteen sixties) promotion of beta-blockers as a means of reducing the physical effects of anxiety, marked a growing interest amongst leading medics and music psychologists in the various manifestations of ill-health in performers. In the United Kingdom alone, specialist clinics began to emerge, such as those set up by the British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM), the British Performing Arts Medicine Trust (BPAMT), Arts Psychology Consultants (APC) and the International Society for the Study of Tensions in Performance (ISSTIP) clinic at the London College of Music. The main British symphony orchestras agreed in the early 1980s to having a doctor, one who would be particularly sensitive to the needs of musicians, assigned to them, and surveys were carried out to provide a clearer picture of the correlation between performance practice and ill-health.

The first large-scale survey of its kind by Fischbein et al (1988) reported that 76% of 2212 musicians sampled were plagued by at least one medical condition which impaired their playing. Two years later a survey which was carried out by Brandfonbrener revealed that 19% of 22 000 instrumental teachers suffered from performance-related medical problems. While factors such as difficult repertory and a demanding lifestyle played a significant role, the most common cause was identified to be excess or inappropriate practice. Indeed a survey by Newmark and Lederman (1987) of 79 amateur musicians who normally practised for one hour a day showed that during a week's intensive course, an astounding 72% developed musculoskeletal symptoms.<sup>13</sup> The BAMAP endeavoured to categorise such symptoms in professionals when it embarked in 1992 on an analysis of 1046 musicians who had visited their clinics.<sup>14</sup> This revealed that a clear-cut medical diagnosis such as focal dystonia or structural disorders could only be established in half of those patients seen.

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<sup>12</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 41

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 42

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

The other half suffered from more general, non-specific symptoms which the musicians themselves attributed to bad habits and lack of fitness.

The forecast for younger players, too, is hardly a bed of roses. The figure of 52% of those seen at BAMAP who suffered pain and tension due to technical faults rose to an astonishing 70% in students.<sup>15</sup> The most unsettling statistics overall, however, emerged from what is deemed the most comprehensive study of orchestral musicians to date. The project was carried out in 1997 by the Fédération Internationale des Musiciens (FIM) and included 57 professional orchestras from Europe, North America, Australia and South Africa. Findings were consistent across the globe irrespective of nationality. 56% had suffered pain when playing in the last year and 34% experienced pain at least once a week. And in response to the question as to whether musicians felt that their training college or academy had prepared them for the trials and tribulations of being an orchestral musician, a remarkable 83% said “no”.<sup>16</sup> These figures clearly do not bode well for any student of today’s generation preparing for the music profession. What is more, a study by Warrington in 2002 showed that 48% of those who suffered from non-specific causes of pain, although technique-related, were under the age of 25.<sup>17</sup> Rather unsettling evidence in the light of the fact that strategies to prevent injury are thought to become harder for any adult to learn once they have reached their mid-twenties,<sup>18</sup> by which time the average student has already left music college.

But there is hope on the horizon. Within the last decade there seems to have been a distinct change of heart in the decision-makers of music education. In 2001, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) in the United States called on all institutions of undergraduate and graduate programmes to “assist students in acquiring knowledge from qualified professionals regarding the prevention of performance injuries”<sup>19</sup> to which many institutions have responded, including for instance the University of Michigan or the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. The Royal College of Music in London has also taken the challenge on board. In an effort to combat the traditional tendency in places of music education in the UK to turn a blind eye to issues of body care, prevention of injury or psychological wellbeing, it surveyed a group of undergraduate students in 2006. The study was to serve as a foundation for its ground-breaking curriculum initiative entitled ‘Healthy Body, Healthy Mind, Healthy Music’.<sup>20</sup> The aims of the study were to address the students’ personal experiences of performance-related psychological stress or physical problems, deduce their

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p. 49

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p. 42

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 49

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> D. N. Grimshaw, J. A. Palac (2006) “Music Education and Performing Arts Medicine: The State of the Alliance” *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America Performing Arts Medicine*, Vol. 17, p.880

<sup>20</sup> A. Williamon, S. Thompson (2006) “Awareness and incidence of health problems among conservatoire students” *Psychology of Music* 34, p. 413

general level of awareness of physical and mental health issues in the music profession, and to establish to whom they were most likely to turn for advice.

Of the 63 students surveyed, 15 constituted the category of woodwind/brass instruments, to which the French horn belongs. Results clearly indicated that wind and brass players were especially susceptible to disruptions in the shoulders, neck and back areas, back pain being most prevalent. Performance anxiety or 'stage fright' featured as a particularly common issue of concern among students of all instruments and ranked higher than day-to-day levels of stress. The causes of those non-specific physical and psychological health problems considered to be within the musician's control included lack of mental preparation, lack of fitness, failure to warm up, inappropriate practice regimes, poor technique and bad posture. Without a doubt bad posture was the greatest offender, with poor playing technique lagging not far behind. These findings coincide with those of the 1992 BAMAP survey.

As for causes considered to be out of the musicians' control such as poor facilities or instrument transportation and working hours, students were in agreement that they do significantly contribute to the strain and stress of being a professional musician, and that for these, accordingly, coping strategies must be found. Responses to the question as to where students had gained knowledge about the physical and mental demands of the profession revealed that principal study teachers and personal experience were the most frequent sources. And when asked to whom they would turn for help if faced with performance-related physical or psychological health issues, again the principal study teacher was spotlighted.

Instrumental teachers, including horn teachers, clearly carry the greatest responsibility and have a challenge on their hands. However, if a teacher has had no experience of health problems himself, he may not know how to respond and be in need of a helping hand. Unfortunately the surveys of working professional musicians mentioned above do not include a branch specifically devoted to horn or even brass players, and a comprehensive study comprising of horn players alone giving clear-cut evidence upon which a horn teacher could found his teaching approach simply does not exist. In the BAMAP survey, those suffering from non-specific musculoskeletal problems were divided up into instrumental groups, but the horn would account for just a small portion of the 28% named "other".<sup>21</sup> The only symptoms clearly considered to be horn or brass-specific were problems affecting the embouchure. In the face of this wasteland of hard facts it is primary evidence we need or, as proposed by Mr. Frosch, a "series of systematic cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of exemplars".<sup>22</sup> This may not be easy to find judging by the supposedly secretive nature<sup>23</sup> of musicians when it comes to health problems, as referred to by Wynn Parry.

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<sup>21</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 43

<sup>22</sup> W. Frosch "Creativity: is there a worm in the apple?" *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* Sept 1996 Vol. 89: 508

## 1.2 Case studies

Yet there are some exceptions to Wynn Parry's generalisation, as a number of horn players have been happy to share their experiences. The following personal accounts begin with the author's own story. Only having come full circle and gaining a position in a professional orchestra after losing confidence entirely was she confident enough to share her experiences with others. This in itself led to the discovery of some personal stories of experienced horn players. Five of these are related below in alphabetical order. While the collection may seem too small to be deemed worthy of meeting the specific requirements of Mr. Frosch, viewed as our only pieces of primary evidence, the knowledge shared by each player carries its own value and significance.

### 1.2.1 The author's story

**Irena M. Rieband** Graduate from University of London and Principal horn, Sudecka Philharmonic Orchestra

We all have a story to tell. Mine is of somebody who once lost, then regained and is still building confidence. And of a sunny, smiley young girl who loved to play the horn. That rich warm sound I had heard flowing from the female soloist at a church concert when I was five, was to be indelibly imprinted in my mind's ear. Luckily for me, there was an old battered French horn up on the shelf waiting for me at my new school, so I could get started at the age of nine. Soon enough I was thoroughly enjoying an involved musical life at the local music school every Saturday morning. I had the best possible opportunities as a young horn player - lessons with Derek Taylor at The Royal Academy of Music from the age of 14, a scholarship to go to The Purcell School two years later, a performance scholarship from University of London to study with Julian Baker, and a year's private tuition with Fergus McWilliam in Berlin. In those days I did not worry too much about horn playing, I did not think in terms of technique at all, and issues of instrument or mouthpiece just did not concern me. I certainly never worried about my embouchure. In fact I could not understand those players who did! Regular solo performances were part and parcel of being at school and university, and I could always play whatever was put in front of me in orchestra to everybody's satisfaction – just by listening, breathing and going for it. And anyway, I simply knew I could always rely on my sound.

During a rehearsal of Schumann's third symphony on principal horn at the age of 23, and around the time when I was thinking about embarking on auditions, I was suddenly struck with pain in my coccyx. My mother had tragically passed away four years earlier, and I was living abroad in Germany at the time. Trying to get on with my life in the hope that the pain would go away got me

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<sup>23</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 41

nowhere and very soon I could not sit down, let alone in an orchestra. So I was stuck, and did not know where to turn for help. First of all I turned to conventional medicine, but my spine was declared to be in perfect working order. Visits to orthopaedic doctors, radiologists, gynaecologists and osteopaths proved at best fruitless, and at worse degrading. Nothing helped, and I felt lonely and disorientated, like a character out of a Kafka novel navigating an obscure odyssey. As for my horn playing, I thought I would never pick up the instrument again.

When I finally did, seven years later after undergoing prolonged therapy and working as an university lecturer, in marketing and in orchestral management, I found myself perplexed and frustrated. Never before had I thought about the actual mechanics of playing, yet now I was being confronted with an entire array of issues with the instrument I had not even realised existed.

My whole body was wrought with ever-changing tensions. I could not rediscover my own breathing method nor hold onto my previously carefully nurtured sound. And sometimes I did not even know where to look. I tried out one technique after another but each time came up against what I perceived to be a barrier, reacting emotionally to teachers' advice and inevitably experiencing acute performance anxiety, all of which I had never experienced before. I was in a dilemma, because I was seeking help on the outside yet unable inside to follow any advice I was given. While I believed in myself as a musician inside, I could not express that musicality on the outside. Above all, I just could not understand why horn playing was suddenly so difficult when I already knew from experience that it was in fact easy. In short, I had lost all confidence in myself, both as a person, a woman and as a player.

Looking at the bigger picture certainly helped. Horn players and horn teachers come in all shapes and sizes. As do all musicians. Or all human beings for that matter. Each has his own technique, his own way of breathing, his own embouchure, even his own way of holding the instrument. Each is embedded in his own emotional make-up and life experiences. I began to realise that although many players appear to just stand on stage and do the job fully unscathed, each has his own personal threshold for coping. While some never experience any setbacks in their careers, others are not so lucky. A small proportion of players, to which I belonged, apparently run into problems at some point or other, in one way or another, be it anxiety, bodily tension or stage fright, which can sometimes even lead to total crisis and collapse. So we, the small proportion, *need to fend for ourselves*. I believe this to be the crux of the matter. Having experimented with a variety of techniques, breathing, mental and physical exercises, warm-ups and breathing gadgets, I was still searching. They all helped to some degree. But it was not until I had fully understood the validity of my own subjective experience in finding what was right for me, that the technical problems I had been fighting suddenly began to dissolve. I am now happy to be working professionally in an orchestra on principal horn, to be enjoying my playing again, and most importantly appreciate the quality of Life.

### 1.2.2 Further case studies

**Julian Baker**            Professor at Royal College of Music and former Principal horn of The Royal Opera House Covent Garden and the Hallé Orchestra

Julian admits to having been an anxious performer from an early age. He grew up within a musical family and speculates that the ensuing pressure and being encouraged to become a perfectionist was a major contributor to his anxiety. Or perhaps he did not play in public often enough as a child, maybe he simply wasn't praised enough early on. Julian's performance anxiety began to manifest itself in the form of being physically sick before any challenge, whether musical or sporting or of a social nature (meeting people for the first time for example). This first emanated itself when he was 17 and continued until he was 24. It was during this period, at the age of twenty-one, that he made his concerto debut with a professional orchestra. Only four or five minutes before going on stage, he was vomiting- something to the average concert goer not normally associated with Mozart. As he freely admits, the auspices for a healthy career were not good.

Feelings of nausea became normal for him before every performance, until without medical help, his confidence in his ability to deal with his problem led to a reduction in the physical symptoms of his anxiety. Whereas before he had always doubted the genuineness of others' praise and encouragement, he learned slowly to believe its beneficial use of enhancing his next performance. He also learned successfully to cover up his 'problem' and overcome performance anxiety using various techniques. He always practises slow, deep breathing before a performance and is always aware of his learned breathing skills while playing. While being aware of their limitations he began to use suitable beta-blockers, to help control the physical symptoms of his stage-fright. He knows that for some people they take something away from the performance, in terms of spontaneity, and can spoil some players' concentration. He argues that the fact that one is fully aware of these dangers should suffice in not allowing oneself to be affected adversely by them, and that the freedom they allow is sufficient to encourage the confidence that says "Yes, I can do it!". If surgeons themselves have been known to employ them, he says, why should one not try them out in a different kind of theatre? It is also important not only to use them sparingly and only when one judges them to be absolutely necessary, but also that they are no substitute for practice.

Julian always takes time, away from others, before performances to 'psych' himself up mentally and tell himself he can do it, a process which can last anything from a few minutes to over an hour on occasion. He also actively plans interval time, often with a book, to divert the mind from performing. Although he was no longer vomiting, the habit of arriving on stage at the very last minute remained throughout his entire playing career. And the reasons behind this remained his 'secret', much to the perplexed and not always favourable reactions of his colleagues and some conductors.

Having jumped into the deep end of the profession as a Principal horn in the Hallé Orchestra, at the age of 20, Julian had not had any guidance from a good teacher on any of these issues. He is more or less self-taught, which is one of the reasons why he was and still is highly dedicated to teaching. Julian does not talk about anxiety much in lessons so as not to draw attention to it and give grounds for concern unnecessarily, as he believes that performance anxiety can be a self-perpetuating phenomenon. He maintains that it is far better to teach in such a way that the problem never arises. He believes in the necessity of encouraging a positive mindset in his students at all times. However, if needed, Julian will give some practical hints to combating the ‘nerves’ and “treat it as what it is, a fact of life.” He also focuses on the importance of practising good, relaxed breathing because this is what suffers most when the ‘nerves’ kick in. Finally, he tries to help students recognise that one is allowed to make mistakes. He hates the expression, “You are only as good as your last performance”. “How about all the other performances going back years, that were very good?” he argues. Not having to be perfect was a fact he himself only learned to accept towards the end of his career of playing Principal horn.

Julian is critical of orchestral management in general. He believes that “there is a scandalous lack of understanding of performance nerves and appreciation of the work musicians do, particularly among those responsible for the musicians who are, supposedly, under their care.” He comments that the symptoms of anxiety are usually manifested in antisocial behaviour and often alcohol related, thus sufferers are often stigmatised as being ‘characters’. As he points out, many musicians are ‘characters’ anyway!

Julian is well-informed about recent medical research in the area of anxiety and healthy musicianship, and the access that musicians have to the medical profession. In retrospect, he suspects that he developed a mild form of focal dystonia, due to embouchure overuse (too many “Swan Lakes” and “Sleeping Beauties”) and a lack of sufficient holidays. This manifested itself in uncontrollable shaking, and perpetual tiredness in the lip, even in the mornings, or after a day or more away from playing. This naturally created more and more anxiety. Julian points out that there are programmes in place for stage fright, and contract orchestras have medical experts on hand. He encourages anyone who needs help to put his faith in those who are trained to give it. And most important of all, he advises any horn player to take a holiday every now and then. He advises always practising and reminding oneself of the fundamentals of horn playing, which are style, sound and stamina. Never to practise too much or incorrectly, and find other hobbies in life which are a source of enjoyment and pleasure.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> J. Baker, email (abridged) 12.5.07

**Katie Pryce** Graduate from Royal Academy of Music, former Principal horn KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic Orchestra, currently free-lance in London

Katie had no problems with confidence or performance anxiety in the early years. She had supportive parents who were not at all pushy, always enjoyed playing and had quite a solo career as a girl. But when she went to The Royal Academy of Music, people had already heard her name, which was surprising to her, and she found herself “totally bowled over by the pressure”. At the age of 17 Katie suddenly felt she had to live up to other people’s expectations. She relates, “The nerves crept in at some point when I was at music college. We had performance classes, which started getting to me - all those people just waiting for you to go wrong. If I split a note it would spiral from there.” Katie suffered from symptoms such as shaking, heart-racing, sweating and what she calls “going through the motions”, just getting through to the end of the piece. For the first time in her life she was not enjoying playing, she experienced diminishing motivation, thus did increasingly less practice and became caught up in a vicious circle.

Katie went to see a doctor because she could not understand what was happening to her, and wondered if she was suffering from depression. “I thought there was something wrong with me!” she exclaims. The doctor simply diagnosed a case of performance anxiety and prescribed beta-blockers. Katie was not prepared to take tablets at that age because psychologically she could not accept taking what she considered to be a heavy drug in order to play. Katie explains, “I spent over a year feeling helpless, not knowing what to do. I relied on bananas a lot, which is apparently a natural beta-blocker. And because the first thing that goes when you have stage fright is your breathing due to the rush of adrenalin, I started doing lots of breathing exercises. And started talking to people. It was all breathing and sorting my head out.” Katie emphasises the importance of having such supportive parents who helped to take the pressure off, and in her third year at the Academy she began to regain her confidence. She comments. “I realised it was ridiculous putting all that pressure on myself and just thought f\*\*\* you! Knowing I am a good player was a big step.”

When playing concertos nowadays she usually focuses on holding a piece of paper on the wall with the breath, and advises that it is good to somehow focus one’s attention away from the nerves. According to Katie, “we get it into our heads that the world will come to an end if we mess it up, which isn’t true”. She practises Alexander Technique because it helps get her mind into “a more analytical mode”, started going to the gym a few years ago, and pays attention to nutrition. “Getting fit is very important,” she maintains; “on days of performances I don’t have any caffeine. But that’s probably just a psychological thing.”

Katie admits to having tried beta-blockers some years later, but found the performances very dull. She relates, “Even experimenting with beta-blockers made me realise that I can play the horn. But for me, beta-blockers are not the answer because I found that then I didn’t care about the split



notes or the musical performance at all.” She does insist however that there is nothing wrong at all with other players who take them if that is what carries them through. For her the solution is, “to find a medium between getting all nervous because of a few split notes and taking some heavy drugs where we don’t care.”

Katie emphasises that she did have wonderful teachers at The Royal Academy of Music, however suggests that the music college environment can be perceived as elitist and suffocating, thus students are not always able to blossom. She herself regrets having lost 2 years of her playing life “thinking others were thinking bad things about me when in fact the majority are really nice people.”

Katie concludes that she now perceives performance anxiety as “a very selfish act”. Her bottom line is, “Who cares if the first horn part is a bit pearly? We are there to contribute and to be a filter for the composer. It’s not just about playing the horn, but about personality. Being a good entertainer.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Michael Purton**

Former Principal horn of the Hallé Orchestra

Mike was diagnosed in 1989 to have a very unusual case of focal dystonia. Looking back on his career as a Principal horn, he sees himself as a "sensitive person" who was thus faced with finding ways of getting round nerves. It wasn't until well into his career on first horn that he began to suffer from a balance disorder. His head started tipping backwards and the problem gradually worsened until it got to the point where he just could not keep the mouthpiece in position. He saw the top specialist in London at the time who said the cause of his condition was unknown and that it can sometimes sort itself out. Having tried out a variety of therapies and therapists in an attempt to solve the problem including homeopathy, hypnosis and Alexander Technique, he could not find an immediate cure and decided to change careers. In retrospect he puts it down to a weakness in the sense of balance, which was then exaggerated by additional factors such as occupational stress and bereavement. Mike also admits that he did not always take care of himself in those days. He stresses the need for any horn player to “lead a healthy life-style”, i.e. get enough sleep, keep fit, have good food, and learn to cope with factors in the job climate such as stress, mobbing and high pressure as well as “get rid of any niggling technical difficulties.” Because as he points out, the job of a horn player does have its greatly inspirational and rewarding sides which need to be enjoyed.

According to Mike though, one generally has to think, “it doesn't matter if I cock it up- there are other things I can do in life.” Mike takes a philosophical view and believes that sometimes our inner consciousness is telling us what is right for us. In his case, it was to start something new. Today he is Principal of The Bromley Youth Music Trust and does not regret it at all. He jokes that there are

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<sup>25</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with K. Pryce 19.5.07

two things in his life he is happy about – a) that he was Principal horn of the Hallé Orchestra for thirteen years and b) he isn't any more!<sup>26</sup>

### **Georg Schreckenberger**

Second horn The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

Georg comes from a particularly musical background, and having taken up the French horn at the age of 14, his playing took off like a rocket. He was soon having lessons with Richard Schneider at the Pfalz Philharmonic Orchestra in Ludwigshafen close to home, and after a few weeks of lessons he recalls practising Mozart 3. Horn Concerto in the summer holidays in Bayreuth where his father was Principal trombonist during the Festspiel season. There he met Gerd Seifert, and by the age of 16 he had won a scholarship to study at the Mannheim music conservatoire. Soon afterwards he began to study with Marie-Luise Neunecker in Frankfurt, and when a colleague from the Bayrischer Rundfunk suggested he did an audition at the age of 17, he made it through to the finals. Georg was grateful for not having his studies interrupted by getting the job, and continued at music college where he wished to improve his embouchure and gain more orchestral experience. However, his Father's enthusiasm about his achievement led him to do another audition soon afterwards, for the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra which this time he won. Thus Georg embarked on a professional career in Cologne at the early age of 18 and left his youthful dreams of further study behind.

Six years later Georg progressed to second horn in The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, where he remembers having to rise to the challenge of producing the entire spectrum of dynamics. "It was an enormous change playing-wise. Pianissimos I found particularly difficult. But over the years I gained confidence; I noticed that many musicians respected me, even Abbado seemed to abide my playing, and so I felt confident in my position. Everything progressed without any problems, and I would even play in Bayreuth in the summer. At least until I had a wisdom tooth out in 2001. When I returned to playing I felt a slight irritation in the bottom left lip and chin area, but thought it would just go away. After all, I hadn't played for a few days. But things didn't improve, I began having problems in the middle register and soon enough I was having anxiety issues."

Georg was diagnosed as having a mild case of dystonia in 2002 and was off work for three months. He was prescribed tablets for anxiety and felt well enough to go back after the summer. But playing became increasingly difficult again and by the summer of the following year he could not get a note out of the instrument. "It felt like my tongue was tied and as if my lips clamped up from the inside and wouldn't allow the air through. It wasn't until I started concentrating on the air-flow that things began to improve."

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<sup>26</sup> author's notes, phonecall with M. Purton, 28.3.07

Georg sought help from a good teacher, experimented with various methods such as the Chicago techniques, Song and Wind and Alexander Technique and has found therapy helpful. He gives the following advice on how to cope in such a situation: “The most important thing is to reduce your own expectations and celebrate the small successes. Because the first thing that goes is your confidence in something you have learned, something you have been doing for years - successfully. So when you are at the point of zero and nothing is working and you want to get back on that stage, you have to completely turn your head around.” His instructions on what not to do are: 1. Don’t think about the old times and what you used to be able to play- those days are gone. 2. Don’t think about the times when you suddenly couldn’t play anymore. 3. Never compare yourself to others or your old self- it’s irrelevant. 4. Don’t think about the long way ahead of you until you become your old self because you will never be that person again. 5. Accept any help, however small. 6. Do not be angry with yourself or ask questions like ‘why me? or If only I had...?’ They are a waste of time.

His advice on how to help oneself are 1. Praise yourself! However small the progress may be. It could be just one particular note which sounds nice today. 2. Allow fear to be present. Fear of the future, of what the conductor might say, or your colleagues’ reactions. 3. Be open. Talk to people and don’t hide yourself. 4. Find a place to practise where you are left alone. At least there you don’t have to feel watched.

He has been back to work as usual since the season 2004/2005 but claims that, even if others do not notice, his horn playing “isn’t like it used to be”. Moreover he is convinced that his lip problems were a mirror of other, deeper issues. Georg is an avid jogger, and enjoys cycling. He arranged to take his bike with him on tour to France with the orchestra this summer, as he cannot imagine going so many weeks without it. Sports are an essential part of his daily life. As well as the philosophy that, “you have to let go of absolutely everything”.<sup>27</sup>

## **Helmut Sprenger**

Former Principal horn Giessen Philharmonic Orchestra

After many years of experience, four years on Principal horn with the Giessen Philharmonic Orchestra and 16 years with the Bremen Philharmonic Orchestra, things suddenly started going wrong. Helmut remembers the sequence of events very clearly. It began with a cracked solo fortissimo entry in a big piece with eight horns which planted the first seed of doubt in his mind. Then came a bout of trembling in the lip on second horn in Bruckner Symphony No. 8. He started thinking to himself “what’s going on?” And instead of just letting it go, he carried on in the hope that the problem would sort itself out. Soon afterwards he had increasing back pain which culminated in a slipped disc and a back operation. He says, “My backpack of self-confidence fell off. That great feeling of ‘the world’s my oyster’ was gone. Too much self-observation”.

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<sup>27</sup> G. Schreckenberger, email (abridged) 23.5.07

Helmut recalls his first performance on returning to work after the operation on 3rd Horn in *Die Fledermaus*. According to him it was “a total embarrassment”. Then fear of potential unemployment kicked in. His lip became numb and “as solid as a rock” and so he was off work again. With the help of good teachers including Marie-Luise Neunecker and Christoph Kohler in Luebeck and the Farkas method, he became well enough to go back. But Helmut says that it was too early. Unfortunately he was thinking too much by that stage and a kind of “duel” was going on in his head. His lip went for the second time and once more he could not get a note out. Once again Helmut sought the help of a good teacher, this time the trumpet professor Klaus Schuhwerk, Großostheim, Aschaffenburg. By using unconventional methods such as lying on one’s back and playing long notes, he was able to get his first notes out of the instrument again.

Among other therapies and relaxation techniques, he had dance therapy during a stint in the psycho-somatic clinic in Bad Segeberg. However, according to Helmut, the key to recovery was re-programming his mind and thoughts. He claims that it is all in the mind and to do with the ego; the only person blocking you from your dreams is yourself. When asked to give concrete advice he says that if something starts to go wrong do not wait for it to go away but seek help immediately. And stresses two things. Firstly, realise that we are only humans and not machines so we have to accept that there are good times and bad times which can even last a few weeks. Be kind to yourself and just try to do it better next time with a patient attitude. Secondly, find some kind of hobby to balance out the pressures of the job and take time to do relaxation techniques to cope with the anxiety, be it Autogenes Training, Alexander Technique, anything at all. It doesn’t matter. He also points out that it is the particularly ambitious students who are the most susceptible to crises.

Helmut is now able to play everything in his own home but has not yet returned to the orchestral section. He pursues a musical career as a free-lance conductor and teacher of the French horn to all levels of students including professional players undergoing crises. Helmut has great satisfaction from being able to successfully pass on his experience.<sup>28</sup>

A picture is now beginning to emerge. Set against the backdrop of research into health problems among professional musicians in general, as well as the recorded tendencies detected in brass players and music students, the personal experience of those horn players above provides us with some clues as to where a cure can be found. Enough sleep and healthy eating, fitness or Alexander Technique, a complete change of mindset, correct practising and practice hours within reasonable limits only as well as a hobby to take one’s mind off things were all deemed helpful, if not essential.

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<sup>28</sup> author’s notes, meeting with H. Sprenger 22.2.07

They also provide us with some of the missing pieces to our puzzle. Firstly, the areas which, for horn players, are most likely to be affected health-wise are those related to posture, such as pain in the neck and shoulders and, most notably, back problems right down to the coccyx. The second area is problems related to technique, in particular embouchure. And there appears to be a strong correlation between the two. The most devilish hazards to look out for among the horn playing community are focal dystonia, occupational stress as well as the first signs of eventual burn-out and anxiety as their knock-on effect. And last but certainly not least, the issue of stage fright is a prime candidate for inspection by players of the French horn. Particularly by any aspiring principal study teacher! Because according to the research, not only may the player himself be faced with such difficulties as a student or professional, but when approached by his own afflicted students later on as a teacher, he will be expected to suggest an appropriate practice and fitness regime made to measure. A tall order, I hear you say? This may well be so. For if the student's teacher did not experience difficulties of this nature personally, he may not be in the position to pass on self-confirmed experience or knowledge as inspiration for any teaching ideas. In turn, the student may not have any answers up his sleeve to help others at a later date. One big vicious circle. So where should he turn for help?

### **1.3 The threatening three**

In addition to the above evidence, both empirical and personal, the opinion of experts who have had copious practical experience in dealing with top performers and their performance-related issues provides any horn player with valuable guidelines. So before embarking on our winding road in search for solutions, let us lean on the above sources and explore our three potential health threats in more detail; the less well-known concept of **focal dystonia**, which applied to three of the case studies above, general day-to-day **occupational stress** which relates directly to the music profession itself, and the stress or **performance anxiety** which individuals experience on stage.

#### **1.3.1 Focal dystonia - an unsolved entity**

Known sometimes as 'occupational cramp'<sup>29</sup>, focal dystonia is a neurological disorder characterised by sudden loss of movement or co-ordination, and can affect any part of the body. In brass players, and particularly horn players (due partly perhaps to the concentration of so many tiny muscles confined within the unusually small area of a horn mouthpiece), the part of the body generally affected is the embouchure, and the muscles surrounding it. It goes without saying that loss

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<sup>29</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 45

of physical function is particularly distressing for any musician because his body is essentially his instrument, and peak performance is highly dependent on fully-functioning groups of muscles. So when things stop working naturally, or subsequent vibration of the lips is hindered in any way, the psychological impact can be devastating. As Andrew Evans puts it, “any technical or physical malfunction hits at the heart of the musicians’ confidence”.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as depicted in three of the case studies above, the onset of focal dystonia more often than not puts a musician’s entire career in danger. Interestingly, the musician will only perceive the effects of dystonia while playing and not while doing other every-day activities, for example washing up or whistling. What is more, the condition tends to creep in slowly, and does not always cause pain and so can go unnoticed for some time. For these reasons it can take a long time for it to be officially diagnosed. In brass players, typical early signs of focal dystonia are for example shaking, sudden split notes or technical problems in one particular register. The condition is still not fully understood. It was not until 1986 when, as stated earlier, the first musician was known to be diagnosed with this particular medical disorder - the pianist Gary Graffman who was reported in the New York Times to have focal dystonia. An entry dated 1999 in PubMed, a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine, reveals that the condition was thought to be closely connected to the musician’s actual engagement in playing:

“A professional pianist developed career-ending focal dystonia. There is a possible relationship between the pianist's syndrome and his past playing history. Although the patient has derived very little benefit from various treatment modalities, his candor regarding his impairment indirectly led to the establishment of performing arts medicine as a recognized subspecialty of occupational medicine.”

Twenty years down the line, dystonia still remains the most difficult condition to treat in musicians due to the lack of understanding as to its precise causes. One key factor seems to be practice. Over-practising in an attempt to restore the insecurities of the embouchure has often led to a worsening of the problem because the brain is reiterating incorrect muscular procedures.<sup>31</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that incorrect practice regimes are a cause unto themselves. In a survey of 58 musicians with dystonia carried out by Brandfonbrener in 1995, 17 musicians had suddenly increased their practice or had embarked on sudden intense practice after a break. Interestingly enough, 8 cases had recently undergone a change in technique or instrument.<sup>32</sup> In addition our case studies show that bodily tension and increased stress levels may well add insult to injury. Georg Schreckenberger reports of symptoms such as tension perceived as a ‘block’ in the region of the diaphragm as well as anxiety, issues to be discussed later on.

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<sup>30</sup> A. Ewans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London, A & C Black, p. 156

<sup>31</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 45

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

Separating the symptoms from the cause is not an easy task. But improvements, for some players, are known to be made through the relearning of use-dependent cortical networks. Muscular relaxation techniques such as basic yoga or Feldenkrais have also proved valuable to help reduce the acute stress in which these musicians find themselves.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless medical research continues to search for further answers, as a letter sent out by the Deutsche Orchestervereinigung e. V. on 30. April 2007 to brass players in all the professional German orchestras testifies. The letter states that “The medical phenomenon ‘Brass player dystonia’ is by no means fully understood”. And its attached questionnaire gives insight into which areas require further research: Part A asks general questions about a brass players’ person, instrument, orchestral position and job requirements, as well as practice habits and whether he or she takes breaks, days off or has any hobbies away from work. B focuses on the symptoms that may appear, such as technical problems, and suggests possible reasons for them such as increased practice, a change in warm-up, one’s general attitude to playing and personal reaction to any problems experienced. The final section invites individual players to take part in a more detailed investigation. Let us hope that the majority say ‘yes’.

### 1.3.2 Occupational stressors

The orchestral musicians surveyed by FIM were asked to make a list of the 10 greatest stressors in their everyday lives.<sup>34</sup> A conductor who saps confidence was ranked top of the list, followed by for example having problems connected with the instrument, playing an orchestral solo, medical problems which affect work and making mistakes during performance. A survey carried out through the Musicians Union in Britain documented in 1988 by Wills and Cooper<sup>35</sup> revealed that there are three types of career stress applying to musicians. These were:

- a) professional factors such as worrying about the lack of work or financial benefits, taking on work whenever it is available, thus causing difficulties with holidays and within family life, and conflicts with management.
- b) situational or environmental stressors such as having rehearsals during the day and a concert at night, a long tour or performing with inadequate rehearsal time.
- c) personal stressors such as feeling isolated in a new city or while on tour and the stress put on personal relationships.

Without a doubt the greatest stressor of all was feeling the need to reach the levels of musicianship that musicians tend to set for themselves. It seems that musicians, then, are their own worst enemy.

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<sup>33</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 47

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, p. 46

<sup>35</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 133

The French horn is an instrument where all of the above issues can feature significantly, particularly in the hands of a player on Principal horn. Let us take first its physical demands. While some instruments weigh more than others, perhaps in all cases the demands of co-ordination and strength which our muscles have to meet in order to maintain playing posture for any amount of time are not to be underestimated. The horn is certainly one of those instruments where the player has to make allowances. We were not born with a natural horn player's hand to fit the bell, nor is it necessarily natural to turn one's body or head around to reach the mouthpiece. The physical strain alone of holding the instrument which weighs a considerable amount for hours on end, not to mention the constant carrying it around from one place to another can easily lead to injury if players do not take measures to counteract the strain. Some instrument cases for instance are lighter than others, and can be carried on one's backs for comfort. A number of successful horn players have taken measures to have their instruments tailor-made so as to considerably reduce muscular aches and pains. Pip Eastop has invented his 'Pip-stick', a brass rod resting on the thigh, which helps to support the instrument and reduce strain in the left arm. Andrew Joy and others in Britain have had the mouth-pipe bent at an angle, so as to fit their playing posture rather than having to adjust the body to the instrument unnaturally. Andrew also uses a FreeNeck weight carrying system to hold his horn. And Katie Pryce is happy playing her Paxman as opposed to an Alexander because that particular model is lighter.

While such measures may seem a little extreme to some and may not apply in the beginning stages, awareness at least of these issues should in fact be encouraged from an early age, so as to avoid bad habits that may lead to problems later on. Young players can then learn to develop their own strategies of dealing with the physical strain of playing their - hopefully beloved - instrument. Parry's advice to all musicians is not only to do a technical warm-up, but more importantly a physical warm-up for the body before playing.<sup>36</sup> This can include stretches of all kinds, arm circling, knee bends, trunk rotations and deep breathing. Five minutes alone can work wonders. Regular breaks in between sessions are equally important, with arm stretching, deep breathing and walking around to keep flexible. No sportsman would dream of putting his body under equivalent strain without counteracting the tension. And after long periods of orchestral rehearsals where the player is restricted to the confines of his chair, his body if not his mind will be crying out for relief.

Making mistakes when performing, orchestral solos and living up to conductors' expectations are certainly issues which any player of the French horn simply must learn to come to terms with. A nickname in the German language of Glueckspirale says it all: playing the horn is a gamble. That spiral instrument which sometimes appears to have a mind of its own needs to be handled with abandonment and courage. It is no good playing safe or beating ourselves up about the mistakes we

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<sup>36</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 55



just made, because then we can slide into that spiral of caution, of self-doubt and eventually fear or even injury. As Julian Baker has written, “we can guarantee the next note as soon as we disregard the result of the first”.<sup>37</sup> And if he cracked a note, Derek Taylor always used to play the next note louder, whatever the dynamic markings, simply to get his confidence back (much to the strange looks of some conductors).<sup>38</sup> We have all been in the position where a conductor will want it even quieter or rehearse that particularly exposed horn solo time and time again until we feel we can play no more. But if we are to rise to these pressures, we must learn not to allow any external opinion or result to get the better of us. This calls for a need to develop nerves of steel. And a sound mind.

Helmut Sprenger believes strong nerves to be crucial.<sup>39</sup> Relaxation techniques can certainly help. So can, as Mr Parry points out, a good diet and time to relax as well as to pursue other sporting and cultural activities. Particularly while on tour. The need to keep mentally and physically on top of things is all the more crucial when away from home. Only too soon can musicians slip into an unhealthy routine of irregular meals, lack of sleep and perhaps too much alcohol. Something that seems at first to represent an escape from loneliness, in the end can exacerbate the loneliness itself. Which would be a shame if it robbed the musician from enjoying the riches of playing music and having the chance to travel, with all expenses paid!

Of course every chosen way of life or career brings with it a proportion of built-in stress factors, and we can not have things our way entirely. But we can obtain satisfaction by developing strategies for coping with these factors so that they do not in themselves have to affect our work adversely.

### **1.3.3 Performance anxiety**

Stage fright featured prominently in both the RCM study as well as the above case studies. And according to David Grimshaw, Clinical Associate Professor at the Michigan State University College of Department of Osteopathic Medicine and Michigan School of Music, performance anxiety causes the most concern for young musicians and is therefore at the heart of Michigan University’s teaching on healthy musicianship.<sup>40</sup> Andrew Evans goes so far as to view one of the main causes of burnout in experienced players to be untreated prolonged performance anxiety.<sup>41</sup> There seem to be a myriad of ways to cope with anxiety, as Aaron Williamon points out. One survey in 1989 by Wolfe revealed that out of 200 musicians, a grand total of 478 strategies were reported. Two-thirds of these strategies were emotion-focused and one third were problem-focused. Steptoe has divided the various

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<sup>37</sup> J. Baker, email 20.1.07

<sup>38</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with D. Taylor 16.3.07

<sup>39</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with H. Sprenger, 6.6.07

<sup>40</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with D. Grimshaw, 30.3.07

<sup>41</sup> A. Ewans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 151

possible coping strategies of anxiety as follows: 38% deep breathing, 28% distraction, 23% muscle relaxation, 22% alcohol, and 12% medicinal. Some would use a combination of two or more.<sup>42</sup>

When talking to professional horn players, the majority will admit that they have, at some point or other in their careers, been confronted with one or more of its symptoms, be it loss of breath, dry mouth, racing heartbeat, nausea, loss of memory and concentration or even loss of hearing. The practical advice of professional musicians on how to combat such evils varies enormously.<sup>43</sup> From lying down on the floor or reading a book directly before a performance so as to clear or occupy the mind, focussing ones attention on a spot on the wall or dissolving aspirin under the tongue beforehand, or even popping a beta-blocker well in advance as a precaution. Derek Taylor's favourite tip is to take on a glass of water for moral support. However he generally goes by the paradigm that the level of our anxiety is a reflection on our general attitude towards playing. He comments that it was those times when he did not take a glass of water on that he actually needed it, for example for that one performance of the Britten Serenade filmed by BBC cameras. A memorable performance indeed, he recalls! The next evening was perfect. And so he emphasises the necessity mentally not to build up towards any performance but to take each one as it comes, just "go and play the melody, sort of thing".<sup>44</sup> Some days are simply better than others. Alan Vezzutti on the other hand claims that "experience is the real key"<sup>45</sup> and the only way to get over stage fright is to practise playing repeatedly in front of an audience, any audience.

### A biological reaction

The general consensus of opinion however is to focus on the music and get the symptoms into perspective by taking stage fright for what it is - a biological reaction. Andrew Joy, for example, with a pinch of Australian humour chuckles, "Imagine two zebras in the bush in the middle of mating. When they see the lion, ..."<sup>46</sup> In his book provisionally titled "Thoughts and Essays on Horn Playing", Julian Baker rather more politely refers to our ancestors who would run away from a tiger in the jungle as fast as possible but alternatively, if they saw a rabbit, attack and kill it for food.<sup>47</sup> Whichever way we look at it, symptoms of stage fright are a physical manifestation of the 'fight or flight' response, which we as human beings have inherited. If we think we are under threat or in a confrontational situation, our bodies go into alert mode and in a flash the strategically minded part of our brains is shut off, making way for that part which is fuelled by instinct. Our adrenalin levels

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<sup>42</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 11

<sup>43</sup> author's personal experience

<sup>44</sup> author's notes, phonecall with D. Taylor 13.1.07

<sup>45</sup> A. Vizzutti *The Allen Vizzutti Trumpet Book 1* Alfred Publishing, p.6

<sup>46</sup> author's notes, phonecall with A. Joy 15.3.07

<sup>47</sup> J. Baker, email 20.1.07

shoot up when we are in a state of arousal. Blood rushes away from the digestive system and extremities, and energy is propelled into the major muscles ready for attack. Unless the situation is handled carefully, this process inevitably makes us tighten up or even shake, possibly lose focus and become anxious.

The first crucial step we as performers need to take is to differentiate between the physical reaction and our emotional interpretation of the situation and, perhaps most important of all, our thought patterns. If we can allow the body to relax, we should be able to accept or even welcome the adrenalin involved in the physical reaction rather than fight it. When we are calmer we can channel our thoughts into positive beliefs, and find it possible to play *through* the nerves. Some players believe that it is our perception of the performing situation itself that is causing the adrenalin response in the first place. If only we can change our perception of the situation from an environment of potential danger to a haven of safety, then performance anxiety cannot rear its ugly head. Bruce Lipton, author of “Biology of Belief” which attests to the theory that our perception alone is the one factor responsible for cell growth, explains,

“Similar to the role of the receptor protein, the hypothalamus<sup>48</sup> receives and recognizes environmental signals; the pituitary’s function resembles that of the effector protein in that it launches the body’s organs into action. In response to threats from the external environment, the pituitary gland sends a signal to the adrenal glands, informing them of the need to coordinate the body’s “fight or flight” response....In response to perceptions of stress registered in the brain, the hypothalamus secretes ...CRF [corticotropin-releasing factor], which travels to the pituitary gland. CRF activates special pituitary hormone-secreting cells causing them to release adrenaocorticotropin hormones (ACTH) into the blood. The ACTH then makes its way to the adrenal glands, where it serves as the signal to turn on the secretion of the “flight-fight” adrenal hormones. These stress hormones coordinate the function of the body’s organs, providing us with great physiologic power to fend off or flee danger....”<sup>49</sup>

In Lipton’s terms anxiety is the antithesis of growth and both, growth and fear, cannot take place at the same time. Derek Taylor’s belief in the necessity to “think positively all the time”<sup>50</sup> and not only in the performance situation correlates with this theory.

Further psychological strategies to help deal with stage fright are to reshuffle our perception of our listeners, for example from an expectancy-driven mass of criticisers waiting for us to make mistakes to a bunch of jolly over-earners wanting to be entertained on a good night out. Or visualise the performing situation in terms of the drama triangle<sup>51</sup> of rescuer, victim and persecutor thereby

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<sup>48</sup> Wikipedia: The hypothalamus is a portion of the brain that contains a number of small nuclei with a variety of functions. One of the most important functions of the hypothalamus is to link the nervous system to the endocrine system

<sup>49</sup> B. Lipton (2005) *The Biology of Belief* Santa Rosa: Mountain of Love/Elite Books p.148

<sup>50</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with D. Taylor, 13.1.07

<sup>51</sup> A. Ewans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 129

avoiding the victim role which is inextricably linked with emotions of fear and vulnerability. This technique may be particularly helpful in preparation for an audition or exam situation. We can on the other hand adopt a practical technique of deconstruction. By identifying those elements of the music which are our main cause of worry, we can consciously rationalise what will truly happen if we get these isolated musical events wrong. Otherwise a challenging fast passage or a particular high note may loom over our entire performance if we so allow. But will the effects really be so devastating? A truly positive thinker will replace the irrational belief with a positive one, or just take the emphasis away from that particular event completely. So remind yourself that you can play the notes before and the notes after without any difficulty. And do so - confidently.

#### **1.4 Personality**

One approach, an example of an emotion-based strategy to combating anxiety, is based on the assumption that the problems performers have on stage with their real audience are simply the mirror images of the relationships they have with parts of their own personality. Therefore as a therapeutic exercise we can play out the arena of the performing stage with aspects of our own personality. Katharina von Held outlines this procedure in her article entitled *Mein Inneres Publikum* (My Inner Audience).<sup>52</sup> In a nutshell, the coach works together with the performer in a coaching session to create an imaginary stage which is a projection of his or her inner world. Individual aspects of the personality, for example, 'Fear' or 'Confidence', are clearly presented. The performer is then invited to "surround the dragon", namely observe the different relationships between these aspects of his or her personality and get a feel for any inner conflicts. Then the conflicts can be resolved one at a time with the help of the coach, either by means of dialogue or dance elements, or a combination of both. The principle is for the performer to feel what is going on emotionally, so as to then be in the position to make a fundamental change to his emotional state, for example to send 'Fear' into a corner at the back of the hall. Thus inner calm is re-established.

This approach may seem far-fetched for some. For others, the idea of dissecting one's own personality to get to the bottom of any playing problems is an overwhelming prospect or may seem irrelevant. Some horn teachers however view addressing issues of personality as intrinsic to their teaching. Frøydis Ree Wekre commented in one horn lesson, "A lot of it comes down to one thing... Personality."<sup>53</sup> She claims to have "seen, over the years, that so much of the actual progress that can happen is strongly linked to the personality of the individual student. Of course, this personality can be influenced in a positive direction, and here I really think the teacher is extremely important".<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> K. von Held, "Mein Inneres Publikum" in B. Bader (2004) *NLP Konkret im Selbstcoaching und Projektmanagement* Bargteheide: psymed-Verlag

<sup>53</sup> author's notes, horn lesson with F. Ree Wekre 27.11.06

<sup>54</sup> F. Ree Wekre, email 2.8.07

Jeff Snowdon, horn teacher at The Nottingham Boys High School remarks that, even at an early age, “you are up against all aspects of their personalities”.<sup>55</sup> Kristina Mascher-Turner is of the opinion that if there are deep-rooted emotional issues involved which are getting in the way of performance, then there is no way around it; these must be addressed and resolved.<sup>56</sup> Indeed it seems that the author was not the only student who has benefited from teachers’ gentle hints and ideas on the subject of the ‘head’ or general sense of direction. After her master-class in Banff with Frøydis Ree Wekre July 2007 one student wrote: “I have been quite scattered in my thoughts since returning...Your presence and words have a wonderful way of grounding me and get me back on track. I had not realized how far away from my path I had strayed. I still have a lot to figure but I wanted to thank you for helping me slow down and start making decisions rather than just reacting to the things around me.”<sup>57</sup>

Needless to say, particularly when difficult ‘baggage’ from childhood is concerned, it is probably best to leave these issues in the hands of a well-trained psychologist, music kinesiologist or personal coach, at least for the purposes of this dissertation. Besides, where would it take us? Julian Baker for instance once took a personality test, which concluded that only 3% of his “type” were performing artists.<sup>58</sup> This did not stop him from having a successful career though, even if he was more musically rather than psychologically suited to the profession. But an overindulgence in self-analysis may well stop a budding horn player from getting on with the job! Relevant though it is to know who you are and to “sort your head out” as Katie Pryce put it, perhaps there comes a point when we have to accept who we are. The more we involve ourselves with issues of personality, the greater the danger of becoming embroiled in concerns of the self rather than the task in hand, namely of objectively playing the music. Thomas Jöstlein, winner of the American Horn Competition, for one is adamant on this point. If we are to take his advice, then we must “make sure it is never about you.”<sup>59</sup>

It would be understandable if some confusion were to creep in at this point before we have even set off on our journey. Because, paradoxical though it may seem, what Thomas calls “being about you” is precisely what keeps those who have lost confidence going. They embark on a quest for something they have lost, and will not rest until they have found it. The search for a solution to horn playing soon turns into a voyage of self-discovery as they explore one technique after the other, not able to fully trust any of them, and find themselves going deeper and deeper. Until they get to the bottom of their problems and find the will to resurface again. This paradox in mind, let us continue in the shoes of a travelling horn player who goes in search of her own answers.

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<sup>55</sup> author’s teaching practice 18.6.07

<sup>56</sup> K. Mascher-Turner, email 3.3.07

<sup>57</sup> F. Ree Wekre, email 3.8.07

<sup>58</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with J. Baker, 17.3.07

<sup>59</sup> T. Jöstlein, email 5.3.07

Our studies suggest that poor technique is at the bottom of many a horn player's health problems, and was consistently rated in the above surveys to be the second most common cause of health problems among musicians. So developing a sound technique is apparently no peripheral issue. If a horn player suffers from performance anxiety, for instance, he may well find one or more of the above strategies helpful in learning to cope with symptoms on stage. However, the tools he uses may only reach the top of the ice-berg. According to Thomas Jöstlein, any real long-lasting solution to anxiety is intermeshed with a player's overall technique.<sup>60</sup> Thomas puts his earlier instances of performance anxiety down to an ailing technique, whereas when it came to performing for the American Horn Competition, he was confident he would succeed. Thomas associates his success with his overall approach to playing, and claims that while books and theory can help to a certain extent and even produce a "temporary fix",<sup>61</sup> it is one's commitment to a sound technique which ultimately does the job. Julian Baker confirms that it is knowing we are good players and being able to rely on our ability which will pull us through in the end.<sup>62</sup> And Katie Pryce confirms in her story that it was not until she knew she was a good player that she saw the light. Andrew Evans also states that hoping it will be alright on the night will not do: "Confidence is *knowing* that it will."<sup>63</sup> He suggests that a performer's anxieties can only be successfully overcome in the long term by developing a strategy which includes putting one's technique on firm footing.

## 2.1 The constant self

This strategy is built around what Evans calls "The constant self"<sup>64</sup>, i. e. placing the notion of technique in a broader yet stable context. He argues that something which is stable and constant by definition counteracts the very nature of anxiety. Metaphorically speaking, anxiety is in itself an unstable entity and tied up with internal and external variables such as fear of the unknown, being vulnerable to certain aspects of our personality, our mood changes or our surroundings, and the unpredictability of life events. "The constant self" on the other hand is firmly rooted in stable assets such as our playing ability, talent and our ability to cope with life events. Since the constant self is centred, it can quite literally withstand the impact of these internal and external variables. They do not knock us off balance. Imagine for instance a musician who is grappling with technical problems and is not convinced of his own playing skills even in the practice room; he will inevitably feel all the

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<sup>60</sup> T. Jöstlein, email 24.3.07

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*

<sup>62</sup> J. Baker, email 12.3.07

<sup>63</sup> A. Ewans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 55

<sup>64</sup> A. Ewans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 59

more insecure when expected to make a display of them in public. Thus most players and teachers agree that any technical faults or “niggling difficulties”<sup>65</sup> as Mike Purton put it, must be well sorted out in advance. Pip Eastop in London for example states that his teaching is devoted mainly to “working on technique until it disappears so one can get on with the music”.<sup>66</sup>

Is it not ironic, then, that while most teachers are putting hours of time and energy into teaching students the mechanics of mastering their instrument, it is precisely the players’ lack of technical know-how which is causing them the most problems. So where is the problem? What in fact constitutes a technique which can be relied on? Finding an answer to this question goes hand in hand then with building a stable foundation or “constant self” which combats anxiety.

### **2.1.1 Embouchure – the answer to our problems?**

It is generally understood among the world of brass players that good breathing and accurate use of the lips are the two ‘musts’ for a good performance. Probably the most disputed issue amongst players however is that of the embouchure. Horn-talk will typically come round to the topic of ‘the lip’ sooner or later, and our ‘chops’, as they are sometimes called, may be the subject of scrutiny by our next-door neighbour in the orchestra. Many a teacher will home in on his new student’s facial ‘set-up’, and any book or manual about playing the horn will most certainly include a section on usage of the facial muscles. Small wonder then that this is the first place that players tend to look, in their search for a reliable technique. The manuals differ on details of embouchure, however, and there seems to be no single definitive solution. Take Philip Farkas’ book, *The Art of French Horn Playing*, for instance. He testifies to the vast number of different embouchures which make it “one of the most difficult things in the world to describe”.<sup>67</sup> His ensuing attempt essentially contrasts the so-called smiling embouchure with that of the whistling type and concludes that somewhere between the two lies the correct setting, that of a “puckered smile”.<sup>68</sup> He also displays an array of photographs of different players’ embouchures to underpin his opinion that the majority of professionals place the mouthpiece more or less in the centre of the lips horizontally, while vertically covering two-thirds of the top lip and one third of the bottom lip.

On further investigation however this ratio appears to be the only common denominator among embouchures of players around the world, and even then we do not need to go far to find an exception to the rule. Dave Claessen for instance can quite happily live with his off-set embouchure because according to him, “it is all about flexibility”.<sup>69</sup> When it comes to other questions such as

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<sup>65</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with M. Purton, 28.3.07

<sup>66</sup> P. Eastop, [www.pyp.f2s.com](http://www.pyp.f2s.com), 26.3.07

<sup>67</sup> P. Farkas (1956) *The Art of French Horn Playing* New Jersey: Summy-Birchard Music, p. 19

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20

<sup>69</sup> author’s meeting with D. Claessen, 18.11.06

whether the lower lip should be rolled in or not, the distribution of pressure between the two lips, the positioning of the teeth, the mouthpiece's angle to the face, the size of aperture and the use of facial muscles inside the mouthpiece, opinions differ widely. Concerning the use of the muscles outside the mouthpiece, two opposing schools of thought emerge: the more static setting of the muscles where any movement takes place within the mouthpiece, thought by its disciples to provide a player with strength and a solid base to work from, as opposed to what Frøydis Ree Wekre terms the "rubber-face-concept",<sup>70</sup> which is more flexible and dynamic in nature. While outlining the advantages of both in her manual she states her own personal preference for the latter.

So if embouchure is such a personal thing, how can it be learned? First of all, let us consider whether it is at all possible to accurately communicate muscular procedures, which are based on perception, to another person in plain English. The sequence of instructions on how to form an embouchure mapped out by John Ridgeon illustrates this point:

"It is of prime importance to establish the correct relationship between the jaw and the upper teeth before proceeding. The average player's teeth overlap at the top and it is necessary to realign them by thrusting the jaw forward...it is now safe to shape the relevant muscles into the embouchure."<sup>71</sup>

Or in the description which surrounds the above in a second quotation:

"Thrust your bottom jaw forward, biting your front teeth and closing the lips on the supporting framework of the teeth. Commence the contractions with the nose muscles by flaring the nostrils and by squinting to activate the eye muscles. When you have pulled the cheeks into a broad grin you will have completed the first stage of creating the embouchure. At this point observe that the split between the red membranes follows an upward curve towards.... The embouchure is now ready for launching."<sup>72</sup>

Hardly surprising, is it not, if the result ends in information-overload, confusion or fear of even breaking something.

Secondly, if everybody's facial shape is unique by birth, can a teacher rely on his teaching method to suit all his students? Farkas for instance points out that any of his explanations and suggestions on embouchure are based largely on his own experience and work for him and several of his students but may not work for others. This suggests that any one particular method may work for one player and teacher but simply may not suit the student. If so, prolonged sessions of practice in front of the mirror while doing long notes or arpeggios in response to instructions such as 'keep your chin down', 'make more of a double-reed shape' or 'push your bottom lip forward' will prove fruitless. A player who attempts to eradicate the slightest hint of movement around the mouth but

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<sup>70</sup> F. Ree Wekre (2005) *Thoughts on playing the Horn well* Oslo: Prografia AS

<sup>71</sup> J. Ridgeon, (1975) *How Brass Players do it. A book of lip building and flexibility exercises* Rutland: Belwin Mills, p.7

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*



who in fact is more suited to the rubber-faced approach may end up feeling desperately frustrated and even forget all about the other important aspects of horn playing in the process.

In the context of finding a solution to crisis via the embouchure, Georg Schreckenberger criticises the lack of flexibility and willingness among some teachers to go beyond their own technique and find a new solution in a joint effort with the student himself:

“The problem with going to an experienced teacher is that he uses a tried and tested method which has proved successful for many students, even those with embouchure problems. But with dystonia things like flexibility exercises, long notes to build strength and endurance and scales for clearer tonguing are of no help whatsoever. Everything the teacher has tried on students so far suddenly has no effect. Not a pleasant situation for the teacher. What should he do? Send the student away? Let him carry on with even more useless exercises? Or – and only very few manage to do this, and maybe it is too much to ask – rethink. Think around the corner. Forget everything which has gone before teaching this student, because in this case the student is the expert, not the teacher. Develop a method together which brings results very soon. It sounds crazy, but in my opinion this is the only way. Otherwise Prof. X<sup>73</sup> who is the most successful teacher in Germany as far as getting students into orchestras is concerned, would have healed at least one case of dystonia. But he didn’t, and is not likely to either for the above reasons.”<sup>74</sup>

Our player has reached a dead end. Her belief that playing problems stemmed from the embouchure led to nowhere. So what are we supposed to do now if even our teacher cannot find answers to our embouchure enigma? There is still the option of trying out the many gadgets available on the market to ‘strengthen’ the muscles, be it a B.E.R.P device for example, the non-pressure spring device made in Germany or even a simple pencil held between the lips. One or the other may prove to be useful. Yet they probably will not provide a long-standing solution. So having tested one tool or technique, the player lacking confidence moves on to the next in the hope of a fix which does not hold in the end, thus finding himself in a vicious circle of frustration and despair. The reality is that, in a word, he has lost his way.

Yet not all is lost. Some recent horn manuals show that there are teachers who point out the dangers of focussing on embouchure. Frøydis Ree Wekre begins her discussion on facial muscles with a word of warning about the danger of identifying oneself with one aspect of technique only. She points out in her manual that,

“it is, for example, easy to forget how important air and support are...many horn players develop problems because they spend too much time thinking and analysing their techniques. If you have

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<sup>73</sup> to remain anonymous

<sup>74</sup> G. Schreckenberger, email 10.6.07

good high and low registers, a full range of dynamics, the desired sound, good tonguing technique, accuracy and great endurance, you can concentrate on music and interpretation.”<sup>75</sup>

This implies that a good technique is not made up of embouchure alone. Andrew Joy goes one step further. He believes that the embouchure is the last place to look if a student is experiencing technical difficulties. Although he himself has since applied and benefited greatly from Jerome Callet's ideas and Jeff Smiley's ideas and exercises, he still agrees in principle with his own writings. In the chapter on lips and facial muscles in his manual, “Playing the horn is easy”, his message is simple:

“The lips, for me, are like a caretaker or janitor. They have one job to do; open and close. And like a caretaker, if they are asked to do more than this, they complain or even strike...Most problems experienced with the lips are symptoms only.”<sup>76</sup>

The fact that horn players who suffer from focal dystonia are so difficult to treat is further evidence to support this argument; while the condition in a horn player generally manifests itself in the embouchure, the very fact that the problem is usually exasperated by over-practising and focus on the lips speaks for itself.

Focussing on embouchure seems only to be adding to the confusion. What seems clear is that the best way for a player with or without problems is to find a teacher who is not only an expert, but more importantly, one who is wise and open enough to treat each student as an individual, in terms of both character, judgement and skill. Yet according to players who have experienced crises, such role-models are not always easy to find. And while some rules can be followed and believed in, in some cases these may be best avoided or even left alone altogether. For each and every embouchure is – and this is one thing for certain – unique.

### **2.1.2 Breathing**

Perhaps breathing will make our travelling horn player all the wiser. If finding an embouchure is not the key to building our “constant self”, maybe the more stable piece of equipment to hang on to is our breathing apparatus. Phrases like ‘it’s all in the breathing’ or ‘just take a big breath and blow’ are commonly voiced words of wisdom in the world of brass playing. Judging by Vizzutti’s’ advice on performance anxiety this is in fact the only area we can rely on if in doubt: “Breathe deeply and project the air confidently through the instrument. This is the one fundamental you should always fall back on when you find your confidence faltering.”<sup>77</sup>

But what if somebody feels he does not know how to breathe in the first place? Or is looking for his own way of breathing which he lost on the way? Yet again, that player may become swamped

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<sup>75</sup> F. Ree Wekre (2005) *Thoughts on playing the Horn well* Oslo: Prografia AS, p. 30

<sup>76</sup> A. Joy “Playing the Horn is Easy” [www.andrewjoy.com](http://www.andrewjoy.com), 25 March 2005, p. 9

<sup>77</sup> A. Vizzutti *The Allen Vizzutti Trumpet Book 1*, Alfred Publishing, p. 6

with changing opinions. While most players agree that to play the horn we need to inhale as much air as possible and then blow it out again, there seem to be a host of ways in which to do this. Philip Farkas suggests that deep inhalation is achieved by simultaneously “contracting the diaphragm, pushing the abdomen forward and expanding the ribs outward”.<sup>78</sup> While one player may demonstrate that good breathing starts at the bottom and ends at the top like filling up a bottle of milk (Julian Baker), another may suggest inhaling as if through a garden hose (Helmut Sprenger). Others again may be of the opinion that in order to get enough breath in, one good way is to expand the rib cage (Derek Taylor) or imagine it being stuck to the lungs (Theo Wiemes). Some may forbid their students to raise their shoulders while others may encourage them to stick out the chest. Frøydis Ree Wekre points out the down side of any such taboos in her article, “Thoughts from the North.”<sup>79</sup> While the old school says breathe from the stomach and do not raise your shoulders, a player who is of slight build simply may not get enough air in this way and will need to expand in all directions, including upwards.

The use of the diaphragm on exhaling is a particularly controversial issue. Farkas for instance explains “diaphragm pressure”<sup>80</sup> as upward pressure applied from beneath the diaphragm and the slow and steady contraction of all the muscles around the waist while exhaling. Indeed many players and teachers come up with some description of ‘support’ when questioned. In his article, “Atemtechnik. Begriffsverwirrung ‘Stütze’ ” (Breathing Technique. Confusion over ‘Support’) Robert Kreuzer tries to unravel the mystery of the term ‘support’. He asserts that while most players agree that the notes should not be forced in order to make for good sound quality, the actual putting into practice causes no end of problems.<sup>81</sup> There seems also to be a divide between Europeans who may talk about ‘pushing’ of some description and those in the USA, for example Arnold Jacobs and disciples of the Chicago philosophy, who prefer a more gentle approach based on song and wind. Some may suggest holding the ribcage out while exhaling to allow for better control of the stomach muscles whereas others may prefer the idea of deflating a ball, or just ‘pushing out’. There are breathing devices galore on the market from a black rubber balloon to a ping pong ball in an air-tight container as well as some, albeit carefully thought-out, reading and video material such as *The Breathing Gym* compiled by Sam Pilafian and Patrick Sheridan.

And yet this abundance of tools and techniques may be part of the problem. Anyone who finds it difficult to breathe may only find temporary repose in each. He may even become totally dependant on the tool, and convince himself he can only do a rehearsal if he has blown into the bag a certain number of times or he only has enough lung capacity if he has done the breathing gym that morning. These are all loopholes for finding another reason to lack confidence.

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<sup>78</sup> P. Farkas (1956) *The Art of French Horn Playing* New Jersey: Summy-Birchard Music, p. 28

<sup>79</sup> F. Ree Wekre (2004) “Thoughts from the North Horn playing and the inevitable aging” *British Horn Magazine*

<sup>80</sup> P. Farkas (1956) *The Art of French Horn Playing* New Jersey: Summy-Birchard Music, p. 29

<sup>81</sup> R. Kreuzer “Atemtechnik Begriffsverwirrung “Stütze” “*Das Orchester* 2/05

Or even worse, for want of too much trying or ‘pushing’ he may add to any tension which is already there. Those bodily tensions perceived by players to be ‘blocks’, as in the cases of Georg Schreckenberger and the author, are what Alexander Lowen refers to as chronic muscular tensions.<sup>82</sup> In bio-energetic terms, based on Reichian theory, we protect ourselves from those emotions we perceive as threatening by “armouring”<sup>83</sup> ourselves through such tensions. And disruptions in the flow of a person’s respiratory movements are a clear indication as to the lack of integration within his organism. According to Lowen, the most common disruption manifests itself in a dissociation of the upper half of the body from the lower half which blocks the free flow of energy between the head, the genitals and the heart, thereby cutting off the person’s feeling of life-force. And this manifestation of tension can often be found in the diaphragm. In which case, *if a horn player focuses on pushing from the diaphragm he may be pushing that life force further and further away.*

However, theory is theory. It cannot be touched, breathed, truly made tangible. Indeed, knowledge about the mechanisms of breathing from a theoretical point of view can even be counter-productive, as Ingrid Holck and Mogens Andresen point out in *Kunsten at puste Breath Building*. Tension manifests itself on a completely unconscious level, so thinking about it will not make it go away. They write, “If we are to acquire good breathing our knowledge of the breathing function does not really help very much...we cannot consciously control every single muscle and the above-mentioned unwanted tension often crops up quite involuntarily. Attempts to analyse and intellectual control can easily lead to paralysis!”<sup>84</sup>

The book goes on to demonstrate how it is possible to utilise the breathing muscles without actually moving any air and therefore the way we feel must be overruled by relying on the moving air. In these authors’ opinion, the body can lie. Thomas Hemsley similarly points out in his book, *Singing and Imagination*, that singers (from whom we horn players can learn) have been known to even develop a dread of breathing due to the inappropriate and unnecessarily attention-arousing instructions of a breath-obsessed teacher. Helmsley is grateful for not having had the slightest difficulty with breathing throughout his forty-five years of professional singing and counts himself “lucky enough to have been spared the attention of teachers who might have persuaded me that it was a problem.”<sup>85</sup> Arnold Jacobs, whose teaching approach will be looked at later on, equally taught by the motto that analysis leads to paralysis.

Evidently, concentrating too much on one skill involved with horn playing – in this case breathing – is as bad for any travelling horn player as is focussing on embouchure as the sole source of note production. Either way, he becomes temporarily afflicted with a serious case of tunnel vision!

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<sup>82</sup> A. Lowen (1994) *Bioenergetics* Arkana: Penguin Compass, p. 13

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*

<sup>84</sup> I. Holck, M. Andresen (1994) *Kunsten at puste Breath Building* Solrød: Danish Brass Publishing

<sup>85</sup> T. Helmsley (1998) *Singing & Imagination. A human approach to a great musical tradition* Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 102

Perhaps he should take a leaf out of Thomas Hemsley's book and realise that if efficient breathing were as difficult as we are often made to believe, then we would all be dead. Or perhaps he needs a rest. Breathe a sigh, or yawn a yawn and go to sleep. For it is in these perfectly natural physical phenomena that he may find the strength to carry on and, incidentally, find the essence of his breathing. Life generally looks brighter when the sun is shining in any case, as it did in the case of the author while playing Brahms in sunny Spain. Enjoying favourite repertoire in the relaxed, bare-footed atmosphere of a Spanish orchestra suddenly brought that desperately sought-after breathing back - as if by magic.

### 2.1.3 Posture and the point of no return

We ascertained from research that poor posture was rated the highest symptom of performance-related problems among musicians, and was considered a major contributor to poor technique. Thus here is our final port of call for our desperately seeking horn player. While Andresen and Holck maintain that the body can lie when it comes to breathing, Lowen argues the exact opposite when it comes to posture. According to him emotions are "bodily events"<sup>86</sup>; "The body doesn't lie. Even when a person tries to hide his true feelings by some artificial postural attitude, his body belies the pose in the state of tension that is created."<sup>87</sup> So do our emotions lie at the bottom of it all? Is our crippled technique the result of tensions resulting from a crippled postural attitude which are in turn emotion-based? It certainly seems clear from research that our horn player's discovery of a sound technique is highly dependent on finding a good posture. Moreover, if a player is to find a way of holding his instrument which can quite literally stand up to the pressures of performance, then surely he needs to be in the position to adjust and improve his posture automatically, depending on how he feels.

And here we come to the crunch. We have reached the point of no return - that point in the journey where we come to a crossroads and do not know where to turn. *Because we do not possess any sense of internal sensory integration.* Our horn player has completely lost all sense of direction. Her whole system, horn playing and otherwise, is in a state of imbalance, and she does not even know where the centre of gravity is anymore!

Research by Dommerholt et al (1998) confirms that the majority of musicians are not aware of their own misalignment.<sup>88</sup> So where is the information which focuses on technique as a bodily function? Publications and research projects concerning kinesiological and biomechanical issues involved in music making amongst the piano and strings circles do exist, for instance a 4-year study

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<sup>86</sup> A. Lowen (1994) *Bioenergetics* Arkana: Penguin Compass, p. 55

<sup>87</sup> *ibid*, p. 100

<sup>88</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 48

by Rolland at the University of Illinois in America.<sup>89</sup> Not so in the world of horn playing, although a publication titled “The biomechanics of playing the horn” would presumably be met with open arms. It would be wrong though to assume that the problem had gone unnoticed altogether. There certainly are teachers who are aware of kinaesthetic concerns, view them as integral to a sound horn technique and integrate them into their teaching programme. Edward Daniecki for instance is careful to keep a watchful eye on his student’s posture. If a player is seen to have a habit of being ‘crouched’ in the shoulders, that student will doubtless be corrected.<sup>90</sup> Andrew Joy is especially unconventional in this respect. As explained in his manual, he prefers to get to the bottom of students’ problems by starting with the feet.<sup>91</sup> And most recently he encountered the benefits of having his Atlas vertebrae realigned, while he claims that Kinesiology has miraculously restored his brain function that was impaired or even shut down by stress. Performing is once again FUN and enjoyable.

And yet, while a simple change in the positioning of the feet or a more erect playing position may initially work wonders for a player’s sound, the alteration alone may not withstand the test of time. Such simple advice or even physical realignment can not suffice if the problem is lurking deeper below the surface. This truth came to light in a case study documented by the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America of a 20-year-old violinist. Having been brought up on the Suzuki approach to violin playing, at college she observed that others played more freely than she did, but her teacher had never spoken about tension while playing so she presumed that her own stiffness was normal. After a summer course she developed wrist pain which worsened despite physiotherapy and doses of ibuprofen. Two attempts to overcome the problems did not work and so she became desperate because “her primary vocational goal and her source of income were being threatened”<sup>92</sup> and “she felt her body had failed her ...creating a mind/body disconnect that escalated the intensity of her crises at the crossroads of health and vocation.”<sup>93</sup> She had to muster, over a long period of time, a great deal of courage and patience to go through the procedure of relearning from scratch how to listen to her own body and slowly “develop a sense of internal rightness about posture and control of movement.”<sup>94</sup> The article reports the crucial role of posture in the violin player’s recovery, stating that “all members of the team agreed in retrospect that this ability to be aware and sense the internal rightness of posture and position was the single most important aspect of this patient’s successful outcome... An added benefit was more confidence in her own sense of internal control, which then manifested as better posture.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Grimshaw, D. N. and Palac, J. A. (2006) “Music Education and Performing Arts Medicine: The State of the Alliance” *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America Performing Arts Medicine*, Vol. 17, p. 878

<sup>90</sup> author’s notes, horn lesson with Edward Daniecki, 6.1.07

<sup>91</sup> A. Joy (2005) “Playing the Horn is Easy” [www.andrewjoy.com](http://www.andrewjoy.com)

<sup>92</sup> D. N. Grimshaw, J. A. Palac (2006) “Music Education and Performing Arts Medicine: The State of the Alliance” *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America Performing Arts Medicine*, Vol. 17, p. 884

<sup>93</sup> *ibid*

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, p. 886

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*, p. 887

Moshe Feldenkrais would certainly have empathised with her plight. His theory states that incorrect usage of the body is the product of experiences which may stem from early childhood and become so ingrained in the person's organism that a reorganisation of cortical networks is no easy task. This theory possibly goes a long way to explain why focal dystonia patients are so difficult to treat, and only respond to a total reorganisation of the cortical networks in the brain. He writes, "The earlier the fault occurs, the more ingrained it appears, and is. Faulty behaviour will appear in the executive motor mechanisms, which will seem later, when the nervous system has grown fitted to the undesirable motility, to be inherent in the person and unalterable. It will remain largely so unless the nervous paths producing the undesirable pattern of motility are undone and reshuffled into a better configuration."<sup>96</sup>

From a horn playing point of view, the answer is staring us in the face - *avoid getting into such a dangerous predicament in the first place*. This means learning the right patterns as a young horn player, a right technique from the very beginning and building on it to build confidence. But how can this be done? Despite our journey of searching, we still have not found the answer to what actually is a sound technique. We have rather seen that by dissecting technique into separate elements or adhering to any one person's principle, tool or technique to build one of our own can get us into sticky situations. Even if that teacher's suggestion was in itself quite valid. Feldenkrais maintains that the nature of the tool, whether it is good or bad, is irrelevant. He writes, "I contend that rigidity, whether physical or mental, i.e. the adherence to a principle to the utter exclusion of its opposite, is contrary to the laws of life. For rigidity in man cannot be obtained without suppressing some activity for which he has the capacity. Thus, continuous and unreserved adherence to any principle, good or bad, means suppressing some function continuously. This suppression cannot be practised with impunity for any length of time."<sup>97</sup>

So if it is not the particular method or tool we can rely on to build a technique which is inherent to our constant self and thus gives us the stability and confidence we are looking for, then there must be something else which is more reliable; something more fundamental, something much deeper below the surface we have not yet found. Or have we simply been trying too hard? Too much thinking and discussion of the whole subject, while valid in itself, can become quite exhausting - as the reader may agree.

## **2.2 Dis-ease versus Ease**

So let us go back to the beginning. Perhaps we have missed something on the way. Something we overlooked when talking about breathing maybe. Or embouchure? There just has to be

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<sup>96</sup> M. Feldenkrais (2005) *Body & Mature Behaviour* Berkeley: Frog Ltd, p.56

<sup>97</sup> *ibid*, p.18

a necessary ingredient. It all started with Philip Farkas' theory. Where does his theory end? Let us retrace our steps and be reminded of the last sentence in his manual so well-known to the horn world: "Perhaps the first artistic requirement of the horn player is the judgement needed to properly mix his embouchure components to produce the results that his musical ear demands. When this has become habit through long hours of diligent practice and through the intuition which simply must exist in a real musician, he has requirements number one of the horn player- an obedient embouchure."<sup>98</sup>

And there it is. *It has been there all along.* That bit of musical intelligence or sense of judgement Farkas calls intuition. All this groping around in the darkness tripping up on one tool after another, hanging on to this technique or that, but not able to find a way out into the light is precisely because players have lost their inner sense of direction, their sense of self. They feel uncomfortable, ill at ease. A feeling of disorientation or, for want of a better word, dis-ease. As in the case of our violinist. Her case study goes to show that faults in postural alignment are merely symptoms in themselves, and that having a clear sense of one's inner compass is crucial to regaining self-confidence.

We said at the beginning that all problems of ill-health among musicians are preventable. And if ill-health or disease is about feeling disorientated and uncomfortable, then surely all we have to do is learn to feel at ease again. Which answers the question as to where the dis-eased horn player should go next in search for health and technique. Surely there is only one road to recovery left to explore. Let's take the easy road!

#### Frische Fahrt

Laue Luft kommt blau geflossen,  
Frühling, Frühling soll es sein!  
Waldwärts Hörnerklang erschossen,  
Mutger Augen lichter Schein;  
Und das Wirren bunt und bunter  
Wird ein magisch wilder Fluß,  
In die schöne Welt hinunter  
Lockt dich dieses Stromes Gruß

Und ich mag mich nicht bewahren!  
Weit von euch treibt mich der Wind.  
Auf dem Strome will ich fahren,  
Von dem Glanze selig blind!  
Tausend Stimmen lockend schlagen,  
Hoch Aurora flammend weht,  
Fahre zu! Ich mag nicht fragen,  
Wo die Fahrt zu Ende geht!

Joseph von Eichendorff<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> P. Farkas (1956) *The Art of French Horn Playing* New Jersey: Summy-Birchard Music, p. 27

<sup>99</sup> Poem in original German language to reflect alienation – and a glimmer of hope; the sound of the horn on the horizon. For English translation "Brisk Journey" see Appendix p. 72



### 3.1 The English-speaking world of horn playing

Having lost heart, and acquired a cluttered mind, there had come a point when the author too decided to turn back. To seek refuge in the English-speaking community of horn players she grew up in, and to access that pool of support with which she felt most akin. Wherever the journey was to end, there was a need to take a trip down memory lane and, at least metaphorically, to go home. Because there were no two ways about it- she had lost touch with her mother tongue, and at the same time her authentic self.

So what did this circle of experienced horn players and teachers have to say? Here are just a few examples of their reminders, both spoken and written:

“Learn to listen. And sing while you play.” The author’s many ‘buts, whys and wherefoths’ were silenced with the simple statement, “The results may be instant!” (Julian Baker)<sup>100</sup>

“I believe that thoughts manifest themselves physically. Therefore I choose to think that playing the horn is easy...Most fears associated with playing the horn are based on irrational thoughts which you can choose to replace with rational, positive and constructive thoughts.” (Andrew Joy)<sup>101</sup>

“My sole focus is singing the pitches in my mind as I play them on the horn and that’s it.” (Thomas Jöstlein)<sup>102</sup>

“Now imagine that you have a canvas with various shapes outlined and very specific colors assigned to those shapes, exactly like those “paint-by-number” sets you may have used as a child. What are your chances now of producing an appealing finished product? Playing a brass instrument is much the same as painting by numbers. Instead of having areas marked off for you to paint, however, you will have each individual note “marked off” in your head while you are playing it. Much like a great painter has a clear idea of what he will paint, a great brass artist does the same. If he can only focus on his message, the brass artist can attain anything he would like on his instrument. This approach may seem too easy, too simplistic for it to work. However, through personal experience I have determined that this is the only way to be successful.” (Thomas Jöstlein)<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with J. Baker, 15.11.06

<sup>101</sup> A. Joy “Playing the Horn is Easy” [www.andrewjoy.com](http://www.andrewjoy.com), 25 March 2005

<sup>102</sup> T. Jöstlein, email 16.1.07

<sup>103</sup> T. Jöstlein (2003) “Painting by Numbers”, Omaha, unpublished, email, 24.3.07

“Pay no attention to any of the following: what it sounds like coming from your bell, what to do with your air, where your tongue strikes, the note you just missed, the high note coming up, standing a certain way, what the pianist is doing, dynamics, intonation, phrasing, or especially your history of playing a certain note or phrase...the only thing these thoughts can do is distract us from our sole job: to sing the notes in our head!” (Thomas Jöstlein)<sup>104</sup>

“My system for playing is so simple, any child can do it, yet many adults cannot. A simple-minded person can do it, yet many brilliant and analytical ones cannot. What exactly, then, is this system? It is one based on the notion, “if you can sing it you can play it.” (Thomas Jöstlein)<sup>105</sup>

“All you have to do is make the best sound you can on every single note.” And in reply to the rather desperate question of what to focus on, the reply, “It may sound strange, but don’t focus on anything!” (Derek Taylor)<sup>106</sup>

“What about your heart?” (Fergus McWilliam)<sup>107</sup>

It seems that all the above players are saying what amounts to the same thing. While Andrew Joy maintains that there is no point in playing a single note if we do not have a clear, positive picture of ourselves and image of what it must sound like in our heads, Thomas Jöstlein focuses on the pitches as a basis for sound and everything else on top. Julian Baker very much advocates following the music note by note with both our eyes and the singing part of our brains. Thomas also suggests that it is our mental singing voice which leads the way. And Fergus McWilliam teaches by the paradigms ‘if you can sing it, you can play it.’<sup>108</sup> Derek Taylor on the other hand, suggests that the pitching and singing comes automatically when a certain state of relaxed concentration is reached. So whether it is the sound, the pitch, our singing voice or positive thoughts, horn playing can apparently be easy if only we can programme ourselves to listen. And sing. Not only in our minds, but in our hearts as well if we are to bare witness to Fergus McWilliam’s heartfelt question.

When questioned in a further phone-call<sup>109</sup> about the subject of listening alone, Derek Taylor confirmed that all these elements are rolled into one. He went on to maintain that the greatest problem in horn players is that they do not listen. They think they do, but in fact they do not. He mentions the example of a former student who had recently come back for a horn lesson after many years of experience as a professional player. The student maintained that the best horn lesson he had ever had

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<sup>104</sup> *ibid*

<sup>105</sup> T. Jöstlein, (2003) “Zen and the Art of Horn Playing” *Endurance for Brass Player*” Omaha, email, 24.3.07

<sup>106</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with D. Taylor, 13.1.07

<sup>107</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with F. McWilliam, 15.12.05

<sup>108</sup> author’s horn lessons with F. McWilliam, 1994

<sup>109</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with D. Taylor, 21.6.07

was the one when Derek had spent over one hour harbouring on the point of listening. Only much later in his career did that player actually understand what his teacher had been harking on about!

Interestingly enough, Julian Baker also attested to the fact that he seems to have matured alongside his own teaching approach. His book in progress addresses more complex issues of confidence and anxiety than it would once have done, as well as containing details of warm-up and practice exercises. It goes into the ins and outs of how to gain embouchure stability, discusses tongue position, chin flatness and the muscles in the top lip, to the side of the nose, and in the cheeks. Nevertheless, his latest advice was surprisingly simple. It was to learn to listen. In addition, a piece of A4 paper was delivered by email which included the following words and phrases Learn to listen, Sing, Always Breathe and Blow, Stop Thinking - Play to Entertain, Tell the Story (all in large print) and entitled, “The New and Improved Baker/Rieband Method of Horn-Thinking”.<sup>110</sup>

If all the above players are in mutual agreement, surely it must be true that they inhabit a world which is not only reserved for the very fortunate and gifted few, but that this is a world open to us all? Apart from feeling fortunate to have experienced the generosity, teaching and guidance of such personalities, there was one other overriding issue which gave the author courage: Above all, their horn playing was, and still is music to her ears. And it is this simple fact which urged her to keep going down Easy Road. Thus let us explore the link between sound, simplicity and technique in more depth, turn into Listeners Lane and explore the Wonderful World of Sound.

### **3.2 Confidence comes naturally**

First of all, the voices of the above players suggest that there is something intrinsic to our being which requires our attention if we are to keep things simple. The importance of ease, naturalness and normalcy as a vehicle for confidence has also been acknowledged in the writings of fellow musicians, psychologists and performance experts. Sam Pilafian and Patrick Sheridan constantly remind us to “keep it easy”,<sup>111</sup> Arnold Jacobs does physiotherapy on his students away from the instrument to “establish patterns of normalcy”,<sup>112</sup> particularly with breathing, and Lowen brings us back to our ‘first nature’, that attitude free both physically and psychologically from the structures we have learned which over time become second nature. For him, “it must be a nature that retains the beauty and grace that all animals are normally endowed with at birth. It is my deep conviction that a healthy life and a healthy culture can be built only on man’s first nature.”<sup>113</sup> Andrew Evans also strongly urges us to take the easy road. He too proposes that the easiest and best way for a performer to develop performing confidence is to base everything he does on his natural tendencies

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<sup>110</sup> J. Baker, email 11.11.06

<sup>111</sup> S. Pilafian, P. Sheridan (2002) *The Breathing Gym* Focus on, DVD

<sup>112</sup> B. Frederiksen (1996) *Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind* United States of America: WindSong Press Limited, p. 91

<sup>113</sup> A. Lowen (1994) *Bioenergetics* Arkana: Penguin Compass, p. 104

and characteristics. This will also help establish a positive self image - naturally. He encourages the performing personality to identify his own “musical map”<sup>114</sup>, in other words to tune in to what is going on musically in our heads and recognise the systems we use to locate musical entities. Evans suggests improvising freely<sup>115</sup> to help us build a relationship with our own musicality and free ourselves from the sounds and influences of other, sometimes idolised, players. Thomas Jöstlein, as shown above, on the other hand emphasises the necessity of working on our sense of pitch. Pitching, that crucial skill which must light up the path for any orchestral horn player, can be practised. Either by joining a choir, by singing to ourselves, humming out loud or in our heads, whistling, or playing a phrase loudly on the mouthpiece before trying it on the horn. Whichever comes easiest.

### 3.2.1 Innate talent

Some teachers may at this point exclaim, “but not everyone is musical” and argue, “What if somebody cannot sing in tune in the first place?” The question of whether there is such a thing as musical ‘talent’, whether it is inherited or an acquired skill is an ongoing topic of research amongst music psychologists. People generally believe, including some music psychologists such as Feldman or Gardner, that some players simply ‘have it’, others don’t. But John A. Sloboda, internationally acclaimed for his research into the psychology of the musical mind, advocates that this commonly referred-to wordly good, the musical ‘gift’ or innate ‘talent’ in fact does not exist.<sup>116</sup> Ample evidence suggests that no particular skills can be singled out in musicians as opposed to people in other fields<sup>117</sup>, that so-called perfect pitch can be learned, and even in the case of child prodigies, outstanding accomplishments always go hand in hand with colossal amounts of practice and hard work. Moreover, by the age of ten, any given child is in fact fully furnished with all the mental patterns of perception he needs to develop his musical ‘ability’ and flourish on his chosen instrument.

Sloboda draws an analogy to the skills involved in learning a language.<sup>118</sup> An able musician “makes sense”<sup>119</sup> of musical sounds as does a linguist of syntactical and grammatical structures. The musician detects and grasps these patterns in such a way that he is able to mentally rework them. A child who is making sense of music will easily be able to single out and remember diatonic melodies, to repeat given melodies with only minimal and harmonically acceptable deviations from the original, and react to musical sequences which are not in keeping with our cultural codes, such as

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<sup>114</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 25

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>116</sup> J. Sloboda ((1994) “What Makes a Musician?”, *EGTA Guitar Journal* No 5: 18-22

<sup>117</sup> Howe, Michael. J.A. and Davidson J. W. and Sloboda, J. A. (1998) “Innate Talents: Reality or Myth?”, *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 21: 399-442

<sup>118</sup> J. Sloboda (2005) *Exploring the Musical Mind: cognition, emotion, ability, function* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 175-188

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, p. 301

dissonance and unfinished cadences.<sup>120</sup> According to Sloboda, a person who deems himself ‘unmusical’ or tone deaf is under an illusion.<sup>121</sup> The issues leading to that belief lie elsewhere than in the realms of some inborn talent. This in turn suggests that true technique can be learned.

What a wonderful source of hope for the disheartened! Brian Frederiksen’s reference to the “greatest teaching problem”<sup>122</sup> is a case in point. He describes the success of an Arnold Jacobs student who was apparently tone deaf but who went on to enjoy a fulfilling career in a professional orchestra. Whereas the student could not sing the same note back initially, with the gentle guidance of Arnold Jacob’s patient teaching approach and the help of a keyboard, a tape recorder and twelve-window electric tuner, the student’s pitch recognition was restored back to health. This example goes to show that good teaching can help to develop the necessary underlying skills of perception at the most fundamental level which a child needs to progress musically. It is the careful nurturing of these mental patterns coupled with positive experience, the right opportunities and a deep sense of motivation which will forge the way and allow a child to blossom.

### 3.2.2 Motivation and musical meaning

Hopefully that child is one of the lucky ones. Maybe it grows up in a safe, stable and comfortable environment conducive to musical, emotional and spiritual growth. Perhaps it is even brought up in a musical family. Or the development of artistic creativity lies at the very heart of the child’s parenting. If so, not only will he be whistling quite naturally to the tune of self-confidence along the way; he will probably be exposed to the kinds of motivational experiences which, according to experts, form the linchpin of a musician’s future development. An autobiographical memory study of 70 adults conducted by Sloboda in 1989 unveiled some of motivation’s driving forces. Its most powerful source was found to lie in early musical experiences of so-called ‘internal significance’.<sup>123</sup> One subject recalls,

“I was seven years old, sitting in morning assembly in school. The music formed part of the assembly service...a clarinet duet...probably by Mozart. I was astounded at the beauty of the sound. It was liquid, resonant, vibrant. It seemed to send tingles through me. Listening to this music led me...to achieve my ambition of playing the clarinet.”<sup>124</sup>

Similarly the acclaimed pianist and teacher Madeline Bruser, in her book, *The Art of Practising*, relates her own first listening experience:

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid*, p. 187

<sup>121</sup> J. Sloboda ((1994) “What Makes a Musician?”, *EGTA Guitar Journal* No 5: 18-22

<sup>122</sup> B. Frederiksen (1996) *Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind* United States of America: WindSong Press Limited, p. 96

<sup>123</sup> J. Sloboda (2005) *Exploring the Musical Mind: cognition, emotion, ability, function* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 182

<sup>124</sup> *ibid*, p. 183

“My own memory is of sitting in the darkness of a concert hall as a child and staring up at the pianist on the stage. As he played, I knew that the magic emanating from the piano was not just something outside myself, but that it was part of me. I felt that the spotlight shining on the performer was also shining into my heart, illuminating a musical world within me.”<sup>125</sup>

The accomplished pianist Kenny Werner also recounts, “I remember my first time. I was mesmerized”<sup>126</sup> And Julie Landsman, winner of the Principal horn auditions at the Metropolitan Opera House much to the amazement of the auditioning panel after the screen came down, explains that, when she was a child, “The sound drew me in and kept me there.”<sup>127</sup> As seen in our case study, the author too was enraptured by the sound of the horn when taken by her mother to that concert at the age of five. And vividly recalls her godchildren’s blissful expression of enchantment over 25 years later when listening to an orchestra for the first time.<sup>128</sup> If sitting next to a horn bell in a rehearsal of Bruckner 6 did not blow one of the girls away physically, it certainly did mentally and emotionally. She was positively rooted to the spot!

Clearly the essence of motivation is deeply embedded within the realm of emotionality, and such experiences strike an emotional chord which can be strong enough to resonate over an entire playing career. Memory studies also help to quantify the meaning of music in terms of the profound effect it has on individuals. After all, for a horn player or for any performer for that matter, is it not ultimately this emotional level of communication with our audiences which we are aiming for?<sup>129</sup> For the musicians themselves, experts certainly agree that to reach their peak performance levels, intrinsic motivation or the “rage to master”,<sup>130</sup> a burning desire to play which fulfils an inner need, is an indispensable basic ingredient. Given room to grow, it guides the musician to finding his most natural and appropriate practising strategies, to musical excellence, healthy musicianship and, ultimately, performing confidence.

If on the other hand our levels of motivation are blocked, then we will sooner or later reach a dead-end, for our path will be blocked also. In fact experts propound that the effects of emotional imbalances on a motivational level which stem from childhood are not to be underestimated.<sup>131</sup> These range from a deep-rooted fear of losing parental love or approval, jealousies among siblings, or self-defeating beliefs. They can all poison our self-confidence, and have a damaging effect on both performance, our feeling of self-worth, and ultimately our well-being. Seen from this perspective,

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<sup>125</sup> M. Bruser (1999) *The Art of Practicing. A guide to making music from the heart* New York: Bell Tower, p. 7

<sup>126</sup> K. Werner (1996) *Effortless Mastery. Liberating the Master Musician Within* New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc., p. 14

<sup>127</sup> [www.signonsandiego.com/news/features/20070622-9999-1c22julie.html](http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/features/20070622-9999-1c22julie.html), 03.03.07

<sup>128</sup> B. Williams (2007) “Life as Narrative” *European Journal of Philosophy*, p. 1-10

<sup>129</sup> J. Sloboda (1999) “Where cognition and emotion meet” *The Psychologist*, Vol. 12 No. 9: 450-455

<sup>130</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 31

<sup>131</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 34-36

ease is not just an option. It is a necessity. A musician needs to nurture his own world of safety, comfort and ease for both his own and performance' sake.

Having said that, taking the easy road does not mean shutting yourself away in a bubble untouched by the outside world. We need to live in reality, in relationship, and cannot keep blaming our environment for our emotional welfare. Whatever our family situation, good or bad, it should in the end be taken graciously, thought about and, with gratitude and forgiveness at heart, we then need to move on. It is entirely our individual responsibility to make of our heritage what we can. If a support system simply cannot be found in the family home, or was swept from under our feet after bereavement, we must replace it by building a trustworthy network of friends with whom we can share, and look to the future with confidence. First and foremost however, the cultivation of our safety network must begin in private and in the practice room, to be visited in the next chapter.

### **3.2.3 Our inner voice**

We have already established that a sound technique cannot materialise if we are not listening properly, both to our inner motivation and our natural selves, in other words our inner voice. Of course this does not mean listening to our “internal critic”,<sup>132</sup> that menacing devil which is responsible for the running commentary we experience during performance anxiety. Not the argumentative voices during the mental duel Hermann Sprenger experienced on stage. Nor the Self 1 Timothy Gallwey refers to in ‘The Inner Game’<sup>133</sup> or what Kenny Werner defines as “the ungrateful consciousness of good gigs/bad gigs, out-of-tune pianos, low fees, ungracious audiences, and so on.”<sup>134</sup> On the contrary, these voices need to be silenced so as not to interrupt performance. Or simply tolerated. The voice I am referring to here is neither self-seeking nor aggressive. It is the inner voice of calm, it is self-accepting and peaceful. We can hear it resonating, each and every one of us, if we listen carefully enough. This is the voice we need to listen to. I contend that it is this voice which speaks to the children tuned in to early musical experiences. For not only is it the voice of true confidence- it is the voice of authenticity. Which speaks the language of the heart. Children respond to the sound of this voice with a warming of the heart and a keen desire to learn.

### **3.2.4 Singing voice and intonation**

If only we left them to it. According to Kenny Werner, they would learn to emulate the sound naturally, and be guided by their own intuition. He imagines a child who learns to develop different

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<sup>132</sup> *ibid*, p. 36

<sup>133</sup> W. T. Gallwey (1986) *The Inner Game of Tennis* London: Pan Books

<sup>134</sup> K. Werner (1996) *Effortless Mastery. Liberating the Master Musician Within* New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc., p. 14

relationships with the different sounds on the instrument, and becomes curious to learn more and more, quite of its own accord. It is “the unfolding of a natural process”,<sup>135</sup> an experience bursting with wonder, excitement, momentum and joy. But what he calls “the death knell of education”<sup>136</sup> soon reverberates, other motivations begin to take the upper hand, and the child tunes out. Does this mean, then, that we need to cherish a childish sense of naivety within us in order to progress? Paradoxical though it may seem, the answer seems to be yes. Madeleine Bruser explains that musicians can inadvertently lose that crucial connection between their instrument and the ear.<sup>137</sup> They tune themselves out. And sure enough, their playing is out of tune.

Rosina Sonnenschmidt and Harald Knauss also attribute poor intonation to the lack of being in tune with both the instrument, and the Self.<sup>138</sup> And Derek Taylor comments that the surest way to knock the confidence of a horn player is to attack his sense of intonation.<sup>139</sup> If the player believes it, he will be knocked off-balance completely and wonder what hit him. Until he opens his ears and learns to sing again. Since singing is the most natural thing in the world, practising singing the melody can help enormously to put the out-of-tune musician back on track.<sup>140</sup> And all of a sudden the sounds are able to arrange themselves effortlessly in our minds, send simple signals to our muscles, and the muscles can simply do what they do - with ease. When in a lesson<sup>141</sup> one boy was learning to play the Hindemith Horn Sonata (1939), the slur in bar 23 of the first movement from middle b to the b above was causing him problems. He practised an exercise of octave slurs in the Arban tutor, but the passage still presented a stumbling block. It was not until he sang it correctly beforehand that the problems suddenly vanished. He was back on track, and back in tune.

### 3.3 Sound teaches technique

The more we sing, the more we become attuned with our sound. Arnold Jacobs’ teaching of beginners sheds light on the simplicity of sound as a natural vehicle for learning technique: “Even in the most elementary stage, a very young player should not be focused on learning to play the instrument. Rather, he should learn how an instrument should sound. In the act of learning the sound, he is learning the instrument.”<sup>142</sup> Because the child is shown excellence in terms of results and not in terms of muscle technique, his brain works out the patterns it needs to emulate that sound. The more technical aspects can be built in later once this crucial connection is established. In fact Jacobs argues

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<sup>135</sup> *ibid*, p. 28

<sup>136</sup> *ibid*, p. 29

<sup>137</sup> M. Bruser (1999) *The Art of Practicing. A guide to making music from the heart* New York: Bell Tower, p. 167

<sup>138</sup> R. Sonnenschmidt, H. Knauss (2006) *Musik-Kinesiologie Kreativität ohne Streß im Musikerberuf* Kirzharten: VAK Verlags GmbH, p.72

<sup>139</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with Derek Taylor, 16.3.07

<sup>140</sup> author’s personal experience

<sup>141</sup> author’s teaching practice, 25.6.07

<sup>142</sup> B. Frederiksen (1996) *Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind* United States of America: WindSong Press Limited p. 95



that our relationship to sound is the secret behind every working embouchure. He says, “Continuous sound in itself is embouchure building and when it is carried throughout the range of the horn, we will certainly bring about embouchure strength.”<sup>143</sup> He teaches the principle that our lips respond to simple messages. The message is the simple result of how it should sound. Which is all that is needed to kick our muscles into action. And all of a sudden we have a beautiful, harmonious working relationship between the concept and the result itself.

And Harmony is the operative word. Or, as Joachim-Ernst Berendt leads us to believe, Sound is of the essence. His book, *The World is Sound Nada Brahma*,<sup>144</sup> reverberates with the sounds, tones and chords of our entire universe. While Pythagoras already theorised about the planets and harmony connection with the circle of fifths and the length of pieces of string, Berendt argues persuasively from a spiritual perspective. He demonstrates that the overtone scale of the harmonic series of the horn, when translated into mathematical equation, correspond exactly to the elliptical orbits of our moving planets.<sup>145</sup> Also that there is a direct correlation between the vibrations of the microcosm and harmonics and between every part of the human body and a musical interval. Each cell is a cluster of vibrations, the earth is one big chord and even every flower, every leaf is, in essence, a representation of pure sound. He sites the works and theories of Goethe and Kepler, German musicologist Wilfried Krüger and French nuclear physicist Jean E. Charon, weaves in the work of Max Planck, founder of quantum mechanics, and the thought of Hans Kayser and many more to create a cacophony of voices which sing to the tune of Nada Brahma: the world IS sound.

Berendt is not alone in his view that music is entrenched in spirituality. In their publication on music-kinesiology; creativity without stress in the music profession,<sup>146</sup> Sonnenschmidt and Knauss contrast our Western society with other, less materialistic Asian cultures to provide the setting to their teachings. Similarly, Sloboda emphasises the importance of our social and cultural environment for musical ability to come to fruition. All traits of ‘making sense’ of music are culture-orientated. He points out that in other cultures where musical activity is an intrinsic part of society and family life, musical accomplishment is much more prolific.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps it is also the deep sense of spirituality intrinsic to such cultures which provides fertile soil for the musical seed to grow.

In Asian societies, musicians are taught to play from the soul from the outset. A cellist will learn that healthy sounds can only materialise from a healthy and relaxed spine. From the moment he tunes his instrument, he must also tune in to the energies of Susumna, Ida and Pingala flowing

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<sup>143</sup> *ibid*, p. 123

<sup>144</sup> J.-E. Berendt (1991) *The World is Sound: Nada Brahma* Vermont: Destiny Books

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60

<sup>146</sup> R. Sonnenschmidt, H. Knauss (2006) *Musik-Kinesiologie Kreativität ohne Streß im Musikerberuf* Kirchzarten: VAK Verlags GmbH

<sup>147</sup> J. Sloboda (1999) *Cognition, Emotion, and Performance: Three Lectures on the Psychology of Music*: Warsaw: Fryderyk Chopin Academy of Music, p. 12

through his spinal cord.<sup>148</sup> Highly accomplished musicians and prodigies in our Western society, particularly in the world of jazz for example Miles Davies, are perceived to ‘be in the groove’ or ‘play from the heart’ or to ‘have a feeling for the music’. Many of them are tuned into relaxation or meditation techniques as well as the historic roots of jazz music found in spirituals, blues and gospels, and their outlook on life is drawn from other cultures and religions. So for some, music and meditation are one and the same. We can only conclude that they are listening. Not only to the music, but to themselves, and to the world of Sound.

### 3.4 Technique IS sound

If the world is sound, and we are made up of sound, then it only stands to reason that if we listen well, then all will be well. We need to carefully tune in to the melody - the melody of the orchestra, of our selves and our environment. When we smell a rose we can be reminded of the essence of who we are. And when we play, allow ourselves to resonate in harmony with the Sound. If we are in tune with who we are, open our hearts and attend to every single note, we are giving the seed of confidence a chance to grow. Only then, and with the right kind of practice, will our technique take care of itself. In other words, “Motor planning without sensory integration is a lost cause, and yet much time and energy is spent putting the cart before the horse in therapy. Let us return to our roots.”<sup>149</sup> Perhaps if musicians returned to their roots, then therapy would never become an option.

According to Thomas Hemsley, building technique means training the mind and imagination to give the body clear impulses, and training the body to react to these impulses with life-lustre and precision. In his book *Singing & Imagination*, in relation to singers he writes that, above all, “they must possess an instinct for music...every time a student makes a vocal sound which is not guided by the imagination, and which is devoid of élan vital and emotional content, he is separating singing from its source, and therefore conditioning himself to make vocal sounds which are not appropriate to singing in our best tradition.”<sup>150</sup> Unfortunately however, the mechanics of ‘technique’ all too often get annexed off from instinct, imagination and that life-force which gives us the motivation and impulse to express ourselves. And this is where the problems begin, because these things are the very foundation. These are what makes it easy and keeps it authentic. Any “technique” which is not accessed from this solid foundation is instable and can potentially fail. *For without it, we and our music are but the empty echo of life itself.*

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<sup>148</sup> R. Sonnenschmidt, H. Knauss (2006) *Musik-Kinesiologie Kreativität ohne Streß im Musikerberuf* Kirchzarten: VAK Verlags GmbH, p. 73

<sup>149</sup> Michigan State University School of Music (2006) “Thoughts on “how to live” *dng*, March 2006, p.3

<sup>150</sup> T. Hemsley (1998) *Singing & Imagination. A human approach to a great musical tradition* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 9

### 3.5 Intuition

When we are in tune with our inner voice, our motivation and our inner sense of pitch, we are well within the boundaries of our constant selves and we are centred. As centred individuals we can keep in command of our musical intelligence, or what Farkas calls “intuition.” This allows for flexibility and freedom because we have the confidence to experiment and rely on our intuition to differentiate between those techniques that are helpful for building our Sound and those which do us harm. We therefore know how to react to any teachers’ or manuals’ advice on technique. Derek Taylor claims that we should listen to what people have to say, and then either clearly accept it or dismiss it.<sup>151</sup> Parker J. Palmer is equally unequivocal about the fact that there must always be coherence between the method and the self. If we can learn to protect our own integrity or in Palmer's words “discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not”,<sup>152</sup> then we are able to “choose life-giving ways of relating to the forces that converge within me.”<sup>153</sup> When we protect what is truly ours and follow our intuition, we can incorporate good teaching and learn through practice to cultivate a technique which is enduring, because it is authentic.

*So do not miss the point.* While analysis will most definitely lead to paralysis, the lack of attention to significant detail – the quality of the sound – will keep us safely bound to the constraints of our comfort zones. And away from the Easy Road. As Philip Farkas writes, “let us not lose sight of the fact that we are trying to attain a beautiful, characteristic tone.”<sup>154</sup> Not only must we not lose sight of this fact; *we need to courageously abandon ourselves to it.* To the magical healing powers encapsulated in our own inner voice. The author discovered that our voice can, and must, lead the way. Her journey home back to the roots became a spiritual journey to find peace in just being. And listening. To the sound of the horn on the outside, and the word of God on the inside. There, at these crossroads, she found her way back to a sound technique. Because a sound technique, for want of quoting the well-known verse of Erich Fried, “is what it is”.<sup>155</sup> A sound technique IS sound! In the truest sense of THE WORD.<sup>156</sup>

“Kto ma uszy do sluchania, niechaj slucha...”

...The seed is the word of God. The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, they persist until they bear fruit.” (Luke 8, 15)

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<sup>151</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with D. Taylor, 2.4.07

<sup>152</sup> P. J. Palmer (1998) *The Courage to Teach* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p.13

<sup>153</sup> *ibid*

<sup>154</sup> P. Farkas (1956) *The Art of French Horn Playing* New Jersey, Summy-Birchard Music, p. 20

<sup>155</sup> E. Fried 1999 *Es ist was es ist* Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach

<sup>156</sup> Good News Bible- Today’s English Version (1976) The Bible Societies Collins/Fontana

## Chapter 4 PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT (!)

It is time to put our theory of ease and sound into practice and enter the practice room. Our research showed that incorrect practice should be avoided at all costs. And we have already established that this is the place where we can nurture the seed of confidence and build our safe haven. Evans also emphasises that practice is the key to self-esteem and performing confidence and so we should always practice confidence rather than stress.<sup>157</sup> Aaron Williamon confirms that, “The direction and quality of one’s practice are integral to performance enhancement, whether for the fulfilment of short-term goals (e.g. performing well in an upcoming concert) or the realisation of long-term ambitions.”<sup>158</sup> Pip Eastop, too, believes that practice is the key to achieving our goal. He writes that “the playing characteristics of any horn player are precisely defined by what and how they practise. Thus, getting the practice regime right is crucial. If a player does not play well, technically or musically, it is because they have not been practising well. So, in my teaching, rather than simply teach someone how to play I tend to work with them on how they practise - how they learn how to play. In other words, I teach them to teach themselves.”<sup>159</sup> Tuba player Roger Bobo could not agree more; “Private practice... is the time to develop instrumental self-confidence, security, and musical thought. It is also a time that can be wasted or even be destructive if not carried out with thought and planning. Practice is the art of being your own teacher”.<sup>160</sup> k

And this is the good news. What delicious freedom! Because it means that we have a choice. We either work calmly and confidently towards our goals with ease, or we work against them and tighten up. Thus our freedom of choice in the practice room is a golden opportunity. We can either choose to make life difficult for ourselves, or be kind to ourselves. It is a choice between wasteful struggle and harmony, between war and peace. For the sake of every single note. Yet many learners still have not figured it out, and become unstuck when left to their own devices. They have not yet made that choice, discovered the wonders of keeping it easy. And simply feel at a loss as to what or how, exactly, they should practise. f

This is perhaps understandable because there is no one recipe on how to practise. Studies show that there are as many practising strategies as there are colours of the rainbow, and horn players do make use of them all. From the strictly abided-by framework of someone like Andrew Joy, where each week, each day and even every minute of practice time is planned, including days off,<sup>161</sup> to a less routine approach by someone like Katie Pryce who claims, “I am a rather unstructured kind of

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<sup>157</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 66

<sup>158</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 5

<sup>159</sup> P. Eastop, [www.pyp.f2s.com](http://www.pyp.f2s.com), 30.3.07

<sup>160</sup> R. Bobo (1988) “Being Your Own Teacher” *The Instrumentalist*, Dec 1988

<sup>161</sup> author’s observation, horn lesson with A. Joy, 20.4.07

person. Some days I will just do half an hour, on others four.”<sup>162</sup> And every shade in between. Similarly, every French horn player’s warm-up is different. Just by taking a glance at the suggestions made by Frøydis Ree Wekre in Oslo compared with Eric Penzel’s Eric Penzel Plan in Germany, Julian Baker’s warm-up in England, Edward Daniecki’s method in Poland, and Hans Clebsch’s exercises in Cleveland, we can see that there is no one definitive solution.

#### 4.1 Approaches to repertoire

When it comes to practising repertoire the text books and of course good teachers do offer some encouraging ideas and information. They may not work for you, but it may be worth giving it a shot. Evans recommends us to include technical practice, pleasurable practice and enough breaks in any one practice session, and to avoid a compulsive sense of duty at all times.<sup>163</sup> Who said that practice should be torturous anyway?! Jørgensen (1998) presents the diverse practising strategies in terms of a) planning and the preceding personal beliefs, b) execution and c) evaluation or self-reflection, all of which are interrelated and interwoven. He emphasises the necessity for evaluation in particular, and regrets that only 21% of music college students in 1998 used self-reflection to renew their plans accordingly.<sup>164</sup> Andrew Joy believes our positive learning curve strongly hinges on the quality of our evaluation, and encourages players to make a practice plan the night before. His advice is to make use of a practice journal that will be bursting with constructive, positive feedback. Record everything about that day’s practice that was good. Or even better excellent, or more preferable still, outstanding. Go on, praise yourself. Be kind to yourself. Avoid thoughts such as ‘that sounded terrible’ or ‘you stupid fool- you should be able to do that by now’. Replace the negative thought with a positive one, and in fact wipe out any negative words from your vocabulary altogether. Take your time - rethink. The phrase you just played was.....interesting! Now I wonder how that happened?<sup>165</sup>

Studies show that some musicians are guided by their expressive ideas while technical work initially takes a back seat, others develop a plan once the technical work is complete, and some have no preconceived plan at all but let the piece of music evolve of its own accord.<sup>166</sup> There are also three possibilities for execution; practise it in bits, practise playing the whole, or use a combination of both. Julian Baker says that playing a piece through, whatever happens, is vital for building self-

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<sup>162</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with K. Pryce 19.5.07

<sup>163</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 67

<sup>164</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 96

<sup>165</sup> author’s notes, lesson with A. Joy, 20.4.07

<sup>166</sup> A. Williamon (2004) *Musical Excellence. Strategies and Techniques to enhance performance* Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 89

confidence.<sup>167</sup> Logic pleads that at least this way we eradicate one basic fear - our lack of stamina. Which is why the author took his advice to heart when preparing for diploma exams and later on concertos. Others may argue that playing through is a waste of time if the technicalities have not been mastered, that this in itself will cause us to tighten up. Yet again, we are in a quandary, and need to experiment. But remember the golden rule. Ease and naturalness are what we need.

Barry Green offers a helping hand. He advises us to establish whether we as individuals have an “analytical” or “global” preference for doing things, and encourages his readers to take the “Test for analytical or global preference”<sup>168</sup>. Having established our natural tendencies, we then have the opportunity to either cash in on the side that predominates, or settle the imbalance by experimenting with approaches from the opposite preference. Roger Bobo states that the main problem with the way students practise is that they do not concentrate enough on isolated problems and use intelligent thought processes to sort the problem out.<sup>169</sup> Burton Kaplan also encourages a technique of picking the ‘berry’ out and working on it systematically.<sup>170</sup> Whatever the approach, the majority, musicians and experts alike, will agree on one thing. We need to formulate our overall intentions in our minds before the practice session begins. Even if the intention is simply to enjoy ourselves.

## 4.2 Realistic goal-setting

In fact, according to John Renesch, clarity is the key. He highlights the importance of writing down and formulating our goals rather than thinking about them, which can just take up all our energy and remain fruitless. His motto is, “Writing down your desires is the single most valuable action you can take to accomplish what you want!”<sup>171</sup> He says that the clearer people become about what they want, the more control they gain over their lives and the more self-assured they become of the potential energies they possess. Surely there is nothing difficult in that? The parallels between establishing and heading for our life goals on a larger scale and as a musician learning a new piece or technique on a smaller scale become crystal clear. Planning our practice and sticking to it deepens our sense of accomplishment. Nevertheless, goals must not be set too high. They need to be attainable, rather than too easy or too difficult, so after working hard we can enjoy that feeling of success. Renesch wraps up his fifth chapter with the positive message, “Finally, ...I want to stress that you can always have fun with your goals! Your goals are agreements that you make with yourself. It is possible to pursue goals with a light heart and with an attitude of pure joy!”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with J. Baker, 5.4.07

<sup>168</sup> B. Green with W. T. Gallwey (1986) *The Inner Game of Music* London: Pan Books p. 197

<sup>169</sup> R. Bobo (1988) “Being Your Own Teacher” *The Instrumentalist*, Dec 1988

<sup>170</sup> B. Kaplan (2004) “Practicing for artistic success: Empowering the student with self- management skills in the practice room.” *The American Music Teacher*, 54, 31-32

<sup>171</sup> J. Renesch (1983) *Setting Goals* San Francisco: Context Publications p. 59

<sup>172</sup> *ibid*, p. 66

Yehudi Menuhin shares these sentiments entirely. His welcoming upbeat to Madeleine Bruser's book reads, "more and more we realize that it is a refined art that partakes of intuition, of inspiration, patience, elegance, clarity, balance, and, above all, the search for ever greater joy in movement and expression. This is what practice is really about."<sup>173</sup> Bruser unfolds her 10-step approach to reaching this joyful goal after she has outlined the ways in which musicians are prone to struggle and thereby create tension. The first is trying to run before we can walk. Pushing our minds and bodies to play something faster than we are able to causes us to tighten up, both physically and mentally, and actually slows us down in the end. Similarly, fighting to produce a particular dynamic can lead to pushing our muscles, not to mention our nervous system. As a result we produce a tightened, or in the case of the French horn, tinny sound. Or force a loud sound out of clenched muscles. Bruser moves us to patience. We must set realistic goals. The dynamics and results will come gradually if we patiently teach our minds and bodies to do it naturally. At their pace, not ours.

### 4.3 No pain no gain?

Bruser guards us against the concept of practising to the maxim 'no pain no gain'<sup>174</sup> and doing technical exercises until muscles become stiff or sore as a supposed way of strengthening them. We cannot rush our minds and push our muscles without causing our bodies to retaliate. And rob us of our energy. She herself has never isolated technical exercises but will rather use real music to develop technique gently and gradually. This, she argues, gives you energy rather than taking it away, as she writes, "the value of an exercise depends on your state of mind. If you don't find it interesting, then it is not useful. Muscular pain is not necessary, and muscular power is not as important as good coordination."<sup>175</sup> In fact muscular pain, according to Bruser, is the most dangerous form of struggle, and the necessity to feel muscle soreness or go through pain barriers to develop strength and technical way-with-all is "a completely false notion".<sup>176</sup> Julian Baker agrees that the easiest way to complete mastery of the technical demands of the horn, is for the student to focus first and last on the music itself, and to practise skills as a vehicle for reaching a musical and expressive interpretation of the piece. He stresses that all the tried and tested ways for the student to discover his own best way of playing, based on flexibility over the range of the instrument, strength and stamina, must always be results-based. The music comes first - always. Not the other way round.<sup>177</sup> But the student may still struggle with his devilish perfectionism. *A fear of not practising enough due to deep-felt fears of not being perfect in front of an audience can lead to practising too much, or incorrectly.* Over-practising

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<sup>173</sup> M. Bruser (1999) *The Art of Practicing. A guide to making music from the heart* New York: Bell Tower, p. xiii

<sup>174</sup> *ibid*

<sup>175</sup> *ibid*, p.17

<sup>176</sup> *ibid*, p. 16

<sup>177</sup> J. Baker book provisionally titled *Thoughts and Essays on Horn Playing* (unpublished)

leads to muscle over-use and anxiety. Which invites pain or injury. That vicious circle again. And our path to self-confidence is suddenly blocked.

#### **4.4 Embouchure Overuse Syndrome**

So turn off the Road to Hell as soon as possible and take a break. Or have a holiday. We certainly do not need to spend hours and hours labouring away. Practice can be divided into playing time and study time. Fingerings or memory work, and singing to become more in tune with the new piece, can all be done while standing at the bus stop. Or watching Wimbledon on the television with a cup of tea. We are supposed to be enjoying ourselves while practising, remember, not making our lives a misery. And overuse of the muscles, particularly the embouchure muscles in the case of the horn player, is no laughing matter. Lucinda Lewis has in fact devoted two books to Embouchure Overuse Syndrome, namely *Broken Embouchures* and *Embouchure Rehabilitation*. She echoes the sentiments of Georg Schreckenberger and asserts,

“any persistent lip pain, lip swelling, chronic facial fatigue, and playing problems which follow a period of heavy or intense playing that have not improved after two weeks, is embouchure overuse syndrome. It is important to understand that an injured embouchure functions very differently when the symptoms linger over a period of time. An injured embouchure works with less control and energy to accommodate lip or facial discomforts, and this eventually causes one's playing technique to erode and become dysfunctional. As a result, the embouchure becomes too "lax" to be effective in playing, and then range, sound, and endurance are severely impacted.”

What is more, Lewis adds that, “Over the long term, embouchure overuse syndrome does not respond to either therapeutic layoff from the instrument or medical treatment. The only permanent cure is retraining the embouchure to function correctly in playing.”<sup>178</sup> And, as Moshe Feldenkrais already taught us, it will take a lot more than just reading her pages to retrain the brain to attain this new way of using the embouchure muscles. Clearly this is a place where no horn player wishes to go. In fact a trip to the cinema with the horn left safe and sound in its case may be the better alternative if things are not going well. So just stop and think for a moment when you are about to do those mind-numbing, lip-bashing so-called ‘endurance’ exercises. Are they really right for you? Or is concentrating on the music, as Baker suggests, the safer bet for a more successful journey?

#### **4.5 False confidence**

Let us get back in the car and fasten our seatbelts. But mind the pit-holes as you go! In Step 6 of her book, Bruser draws our attention to the pitfalls of riding with psychological attitudes of false

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<sup>178</sup> L. Lewis, email 20.4.07



confidence.<sup>179</sup> Translated to our motoring analogy, these are a) screeching around the corners while clinging on over-passionately to the sides of the car and the music, b) skirting around the edges thus avoiding true contact with the music itself and c) jumping the lights and attacking the music with aggression. All these attitudes breed ungrateful offspring. Whether the psychological overindulgence in a) underpinned by gripping our instruments and hanging on for dear life, b) which results in a dull performance due to playing safe or c) which exudes all the cockiness of a “look-at-me-in-my-shiny-flash-convertible” macho in his sunglasses, the three drivers of all three styles may well get stuck in the mud eventually.

Because their driving is fuelled by panic and fear. Interestingly enough, Lowen maintains that “to live in fear of being fully alive is the state of most people.”<sup>180</sup> Moreover he maintains that any sharp moves in the wrong direction will lunge us into a state of anxiety, and this state needs to be worked through before a person’s heart can be opened again.<sup>181</sup> So go easy on the corners. Bruser cautions all three drivers and directs them back to safety, back on to the straight and narrow. She gently instils in each a change of heart, calmly explains the need to venture beyond these attitudes and just have the courage to be genuine, be simple. She encourages us to make a fresh start and return to openheartedness. This takes courage and perseverance. Bruser writes, “By noticing destructive impulses and not giving in to them, we open a space for a fresh, creative impulse to arise instead of a habitual one.”<sup>182</sup>

Kenny Werner confirms that the only way to our natural, easy selves is through effortlessness. And effortless mastery breathes from what he calls “the space”<sup>183</sup>, a place of selflessness, a calm consciousness of untroubled waters. Free from ego-driven currents. In fact anything which does not come from there is, in his opinion, not worth playing. Werner’s straightforward, soothing advice is to “simply go into the space, and add the horn to it. You get much more from dealing with the cause than the effect; and, because of all else that you receive from this center, your very soul may reveal itself through the music.”<sup>184</sup> Concepts such as “The Zone”,<sup>185</sup> the “Inner Game”,<sup>186</sup> and the “Zen”,<sup>187</sup> techniques illuminated by Andrew Evans, Timothy Galway and Barry Green all flow from the heart of this principal. So drop your attitudes, be yourself, in fact just be. And build it up gently. Whatever ‘it’ is. Because, in the end, *it really doesn’t matter*.

When we have recognised that practice is a very individual thing, we can begin to take our time to experiment. Easy does it. Begin with the warm-up. It may be best to keep things simple with

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<sup>179</sup> M. Bruser (1999) *The Art of Practicing. A guide to making music from the heart* New York: Bell Tower, p. 157

<sup>180</sup> A. Lowen (1994) *Bioenergetics* Arkana: Penguin Compass, p.133

<sup>181</sup> *ibid*

<sup>182</sup> M. Bruser (1999) *The Art of Practicing. A guide to making music from the heart* New York: Bell Tower, p. 159

<sup>183</sup> K. Werner (1996) *Effortless Mastery. Liberating the Master Musician Within* New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc.

<sup>184</sup> *ibid* P.112

<sup>185</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black

<sup>186</sup> W. T. Gallwey (1986) *The Inner Game of Tennis* London: Pan Books

<sup>187</sup> B. Green with W. T. Gallwey (1986) *The Inner Game of Music* London: Pan Books

long notes, easy scales and harmonic patterns. Why stress ourselves? What are we trying to prove? We can use it to warm up our sense of self-confidence and rekindle the mind-body-musician connection within.<sup>188</sup> This choice can be made every day. Between fighting the destructive battle of trying to prove a point, or making peace. And who is it we have been fighting anyway? Surely, standing alone with our instruments, then the only person we have been fighting against is our Self!

#### 4.6 Practice plan

So let bygones be bygones. Perhaps we even need to forgive ourselves, or others. But certainly let us make the most of our freedom of choice and take the plunge: *Experiment!* Draw up your own first practice plan. And if you find after a while that it does not work for you, just throw it away and start again. Make a list of your daily ‘essentials’, the things which you think might work for you. And use other people’s ideas to spark off your imagination. If you do not know what helps, just start somewhere and add or subtract one thing only after a few weeks. Remember: gently does it. As a guideline or starting point, take for example Farkas’ practice table<sup>189</sup> or Frøydis Ree Wekre’s sketch.<sup>190</sup> Fig. 1 gives one of the author’s infant examples from 17.1.07, which includes some elements she now rejects but found helpful at the time. Or alternatively, if you are accustomed to structuring every minute of your day anyway, just pick up your horn and play whatever comes into your head. Whichever the case, do not procrastinate. Digging the channels for creative flow is our highest priority. And, as nobody else can do it for us, ultimately, by following our own intuition, trial and error are our best guidelines.

Whichever way we look at it, *practice makes perfect. If we practise pushing our minds and bodies too far before they are ready, thereby repeatedly practising patterns of pain and anxiety, we will perfect them, which can even lead to total break-down.* But if we make ourselves comfortable, learn to relax, and ease our way into our playing and pieces naturally, we are preparing the ground for establishing a deep-rooted performing confidence and a sound technique which will stand us in good stead on the concert platform. *So make the right choice. Keep a simple approach, on every single note.* And keep your eyes on the easy road at all times. Do not overtake on the fast lane, or go skidding off onto the hard shoulder, then beat yourself up about it. That’s double trouble. As Georg Schreckenberger says, it is better to patiently play one note beautifully rather than bash through an entire study aimlessly. Let it all go. The latter may not only result in injury but may also be painful to the ears. That is, if we were listening. Because planning, in the end, is not enough when it comes to practice. We need to be fully aware of what we are doing. *And above all, learn to listen. Really listen.*

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<sup>188</sup> author’s warm-up, personal aim

<sup>189</sup> P. Farkas (1956) *The Art of French Horn Playing* New Jersey: Summy-Birchard Music, p.44

<sup>190</sup> F.Ree Wekre (2005) *Thoughts on playing the Horn well* Oslo: Prografia AS, p. 61

Fig. 1

**HIGH Bflats ARE EASY FOR ME  
I LET MY HEART SING  
I SUPPORT MYSELF**

- 8.00- 9.15     **Feeling good!**  
- Jumping jacks, Froydis arm-dangle, Standing Y, Diana routine, bent over breathing  
- lips acrobatics  
- mouthpiece buzzing  
- lung expansion exercises x 4  
**Horn, body and mind connection!**  
- long notes  
- slow even arpeggios  
- easy major scales  
- minor melodics up to top  
- lip arpeggio flexy  
- lip trill plus arpeggio
- 9.15-9.45     **EFT (print plan)**  
- Bflats  
- Breathing, excess tension, exam anxiety
- 9.45-10.05    **Bflat work**  
- arpeggios up  
- glissando up  
- slow intervals up  
                  break
- 10.15-11.15   **Strauss first bottleneck**  
                  F-jump (2), 1<sup>st</sup> Bflat (3), 2<sup>nd</sup> (3a) start (1)  
                  break  
                  p.3 first line (4), (5)  
                  Sprinkler
- 11.15-11.45             Break
- 11.45-12.45    **Strauss bottlenecks**  
                  Last line (13), (12)  
                  Break  
                  Slow movement (6), (7)  
                  Sprinkler
- lunch**
- 13.15-14.30    **Cherubini play-through**  
                  1<sup>st</sup> bottleneck (7,6)  
                  2<sup>nd</sup> bottleneck (end backwards)  
                  break
- 14.40-15.20    **Tchaikowsky play-throughs**

**Sprinklers**

Farkas forte low register  
Long notes with crescendo/dim  
Lip trills  
Fergus Bach  
Mouthpiece and tuning machine  
Bending  
Caruso

Having developed a healthy attitude to practice, we are ready to broaden our horizons beyond the confines of the practice room. Practice must be put into context. In order for the seed of sound technique to grow, it needs constant care and attention. In other words, we need to prepare the ground because a sound technique needs a sound support system. A flower only blossoms when its roots are well-watered and flowers when the conditions are favourable with enough light, the right temperature, the right company and a safe environment. It is this integral nature in all things which breeds a healthy consciousness. We need wholeness, not compartmentalisation. The patient can be healed when the doctor sees his body as an integral whole, not just one part of it.

### 5.1 An integrative concept

Or take a famous building. A church for example. Gaudi united science, art and nature in his unique concept of the Temple of the Sacred Family, Barcelona's well-known landmark. 15 types of stone from different stages of geological time are used as materials due to their specific aesthetics, resistance and durability. He claims that "religious buildings, essentially, have to endure, in the same way as the religion that they house."<sup>191</sup> The same goes for any musician. Thus we must apply this integrative concept to the healthy horn player. His mind, body and soul are his temple. Which all need preserving so that the music can flow and withstand the pressures - over time. So how does a horn player create his own support system? One answer to this question is offered by Frøydis Ree Wekre. It is a map in the form of a circle called 'The "inner" Life of a musician' and divided into segments<sup>192</sup> (Fig. 2). The author's own sketch took on rather different contours. Of a horn inside a heart fed by many surrounding commodities (Fig. 3).<sup>193</sup> Each individual of course must find his own map or image. Whoever does not know where to start, may be gently pointed in the direction of integrative medicine. Michigan State University School of Music's teaching course on Healthy Musicianship is founded upon the new paradigm that an integrative approach can lead to the resolution of the unique problems experienced by musicians and performers. It works on the principle of health and wholeness, of commitment to self-care, "based on the fundamental assumption that the body has within it the ability to heal itself".<sup>194</sup> And that all manner of healing and commitment to self-care intrinsically involves our cultural traditions and our relationships. Michigan University values the fact that musicians are highly dependent on their bodies as a vehicle for expression. It

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<sup>191</sup> exhibition, Temple de la Sagrada Familia, Barcelona, 1.8.07

<sup>192</sup> F. Ree Wekre (1991) "The "inner" Life of a musician" Illustration for lecture, "Teaching Main instrument on Conservatory level"

<sup>193</sup> author's notes, 13.12.06

<sup>194</sup> Michigan State University School of Music (2006) "Healthy Musicianship, Integrative Medicine - Finding your Way in the new Medical Paradigm", Feb 2006: 1

is committed to helping musicians develop strategies to sustain health throughout their careers by cultivating good relationships with their thoughts, emotions, physical functioning and environment.

An integrative, holistic approach to medical and musical practice as encouraged in Michigan works with a conceptual construct which divides the needs of a musician into four areas.<sup>195</sup> These are

1. the physical elements such as nutrition, sleep, movement, shelter and protection from harm
2. the emotional elements which include a safe environment, meaningful relationships, meaningful work which is consistent with the individual's beliefs and abilities
3. mental elements such as the belief that our work contributes to the world and can be carried out without censure as well as the creative interaction with ideas and other people
4. spiritual elements such as an evolving understanding of who we are, who we love and our sense of purpose.

If we can develop our own system to cover all areas, eg. establish what kinds of foods suit us best, how much sleep we need, figure out our daily rhythm which is most conducive to optimum work and relaxation, find meaning in all our relationships and goals, attend to our spiritual needs, develop our weekly routine to allow all things to slot into place nicely, we have prepared the ground. All we need do then, as suggested at the very outset, is take care of ourselves by taking care of our daily needs.

## 5.2 The bigger picture

Just as the body effects the mind, the mind the body and a sound technique is all-encompassing, horn playing is only one aspect of living. Horn playing is not just about playing the horn! If we are to approach it healthily, we need to get the bigger picture. Our music-making must be part of the bigger scheme of things. In fact the University of Michigan believes that the livelihood of our society as a whole depends on it. They assert that “our culture is in transition, and art and music education are fundamental ingredients for the healing of our broken world”.<sup>196</sup> A recent article in *The Observer Magazine* draws attention to the life-saving essence of music. El Sistema, a youth project in Venezuela, seeks to save children from the barrios in the belief that if children can be brought away from drug addiction, crime and despair into an orchestra to play European classical repertoire, life can be changed dramatically. One teenaged French horn player is reported to be practising Bizet's *Carmen Suite* at a home for abandoned and abused children. He maintains that if he had not started playing horn, he would be “where I was, only further down the line – either dead or still living on the streets smoking crack, like when I was eight.”<sup>197</sup> Simon Rattle describes El Sistema as “nothing less than a miracle...From here, I see the future of music for the whole world.”<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Michigan State University School of Music (2006) “Thoughts on “how to live” *dnj*, March 2006

<sup>196</sup> *ibid*, p. 2

<sup>197</sup> E. Vulliamy “Orchestral Manoeuvres” *The Observer Magazine*, 29 July 2007

<sup>198</sup> *ibid*

We as horn-playing musicians certainly need to open our hearts. And enjoy life! Derek Taylor advises any horn player not to focus too much on the instrument but to go out and enjoy him or herself.<sup>199</sup> While many of us in Western society are privileged to have so many of life's opportunities open to us, we still seem unable to live it to the full. Alexander Lowen suggests that the majority of people live in a state of fear. Madeline Bruser also advocates that stage fright in the end boils down to the fear of being, of sensing our positive energy, our adrenalin and our heart beat, which becomes so tangible on the concert platform.<sup>200</sup> And Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' ground-breaking work drew her to the conclusion that most people are afraid, not of dying, but of living.<sup>201</sup>

### 5.3 Some horn players' tools and techniques

*So we need to combat our fears.* By applying, during practice and our daily/weekly routines, our own system for walking in confidence, we are on the right track. Part and parcel of our system should also be to find life-enhancing activities which we enjoy, which help us build confidence in ourselves, reduce stress and thus help keep ourselves open, both in the practice room and towards life itself. There are many options, from the more common sports such as swimming, cycling, football, aerobics or jogging to Yoga and Tai Chi, Alexander Technique and Feldenkrais or dance. Or a combination. According to experts, both relaxation techniques and levels of fitness are beneficial for performance and help minimise performance anxiety.<sup>202</sup> As part of their syllabus for autumn 2006, Michigan State University School of Music included the principles of Yoga and Feldenkrais for healthy musicianship. Once again, preferences will differ enormously depending on the individual.

Alexander Technique is meanwhile relatively widespread among musicians and institutions of music education. Many horn players have been known to use Alexander Technique, including Barry Tuckwell, Thomas Jöstlein and Katie Pryce. Pip Eastop and Rachel Niketopoulos are certified Alexander teachers. However it may not work for everyone. Katie finds it helpful before performances, whereas Thomas does not use it in relation to horn playing at all but for every day life (though he admits that the one may well lap over on to the other). Georg Schreckenberger tried Alexander for many months but it did nothing for him at all. He prefers to stick to cycling and jogging. Radovan Vlatkovic rather incorporates elements of Tai Chi into his teaching. And there are other, less common techniques players use such as Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), which was introduced to the author by Andrew Joy, or Reiki. Kristina Mascher-Turner for example is a qualified Reiki therapist. For her, Reiki and horn playing have one and the same source. She explains,

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<sup>199</sup> author's notes, phonecall with D. Taylor, 14.11.07

<sup>200</sup> M. Bruser (1999) *The Art of Practicing. A guide to making music from the heart* New York: Bell Tower, p. 227

<sup>201</sup> S. Haupt (documentary film 2002) "Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Dem Tod ins Gesicht Sehen", Switzerland

<sup>202</sup> William, A. and Thompson, S. (2006) "Awareness and incidence of health problems among conservatoire students", *Psychology of Music* 34: 423

“I can feel after doing Reiki how much more I can reach out to the audience. It is a subtle vibration. Music is the carrier wave through which I can send Reiki and connect with the audience. Through this it is possible to experience and share the healing power of music on a deeper level. There is no gap for me between Reiki and the horn - both create the same space. This is the point where light can come in.”<sup>203</sup>

Many horn players practise meditation techniques. Jens Plücker for instance uses the technique of meditating on a particular note. For him it is F sharp. He stumbled across the principles of meditation in a hotel room while on tour in Japan and has been meditating ever since. He claims that it is always about finding the way to our breathing, and maintains that, “it doesn’t matter what you do. There is only one way. And that is the way to yourself. How you get there is irrelevant.”<sup>204</sup> Jens decides in the moment what he needs, and this can vary greatly depending on the playing situation and what is expected of him. He does not necessarily meditate directly before a performance, because he finds that he needs a certain state of alertness in order to react well. Others may however find meditation before going on stage the key to total relaxation and concentration. It is certainly advisable to find a pre-performance routine which works for you.

In the author’s case, practising Alexander Technique most evenings and sometimes before performance proved helpful for a time, as well as a mixture of the above. However her passion had always been dance. When she switched from ballroom dancing to Flamenco, the benefits for playing the horn proved enormous. It is excellent for coordination, the stamping is particularly grounding and sharpens our sense of rhythm, it strengthens the belief in repetition as a reliable means of learning, opens up the ribcage for breathing, is good for overall posture, and is simply great fun. What is more, it makes use of hip swivelling and circling from the waist which are particularly helpful for anybody who is prone to that life-strangling divide in the midriff. These can even be used before performance as part of a physical warm-up. She also swims and skis for general physical stamina and concentration, and relies on prayer. Beta-blockers did not improve symptoms of performance anxiety on the concert platform, but tension and concentration worsened, and any feelings of being a fraud were magnified due to having to rely on something not intrinsic to her being. She does not believe in taking medication to play a successful concert, but prefers to keep putting trust in her own system.

The system is ever-evolving. But one thing remains constant: Ultimately it is we as individuals who are responsible for creating the right environment, giving ourselves all the nutrition we need. Having recognised this fact, and with an understanding of a healthy approach to technique, we are open to horn playing and life itself. Our path to self-confidence and success is no longer blocked. We can put theory into practice in the practice room, find out how to do the things we need to do daily, and do them *with confidence*.

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<sup>203</sup> author’s notes, meeting with K. Mascher-Turner, 22.12.07

<sup>204</sup> author’s notes, phonecall with J. Plücker, 3.6.07

Fig. 2 The “inner” life of a musician (Frøydis Ree Wekre)

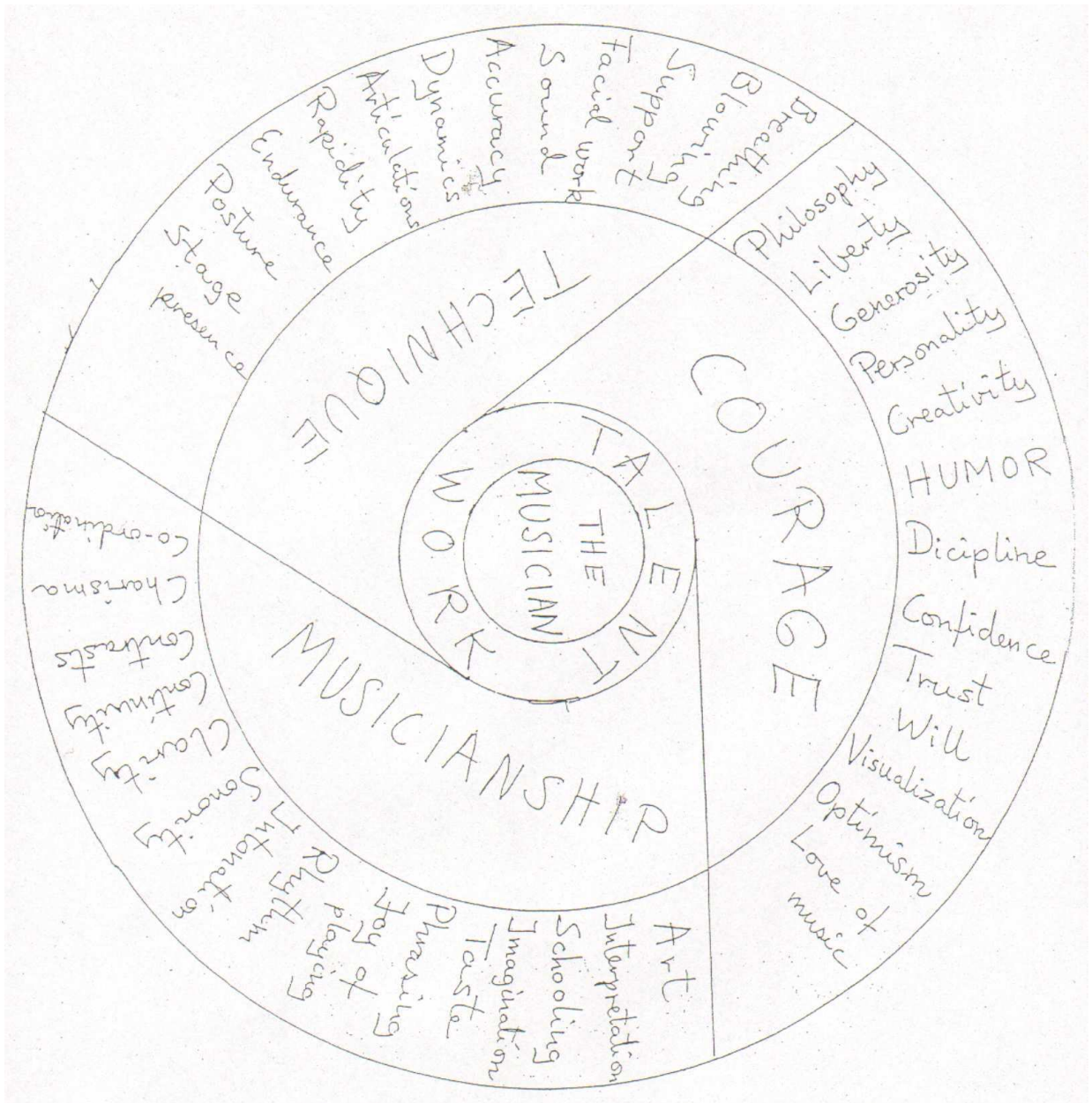
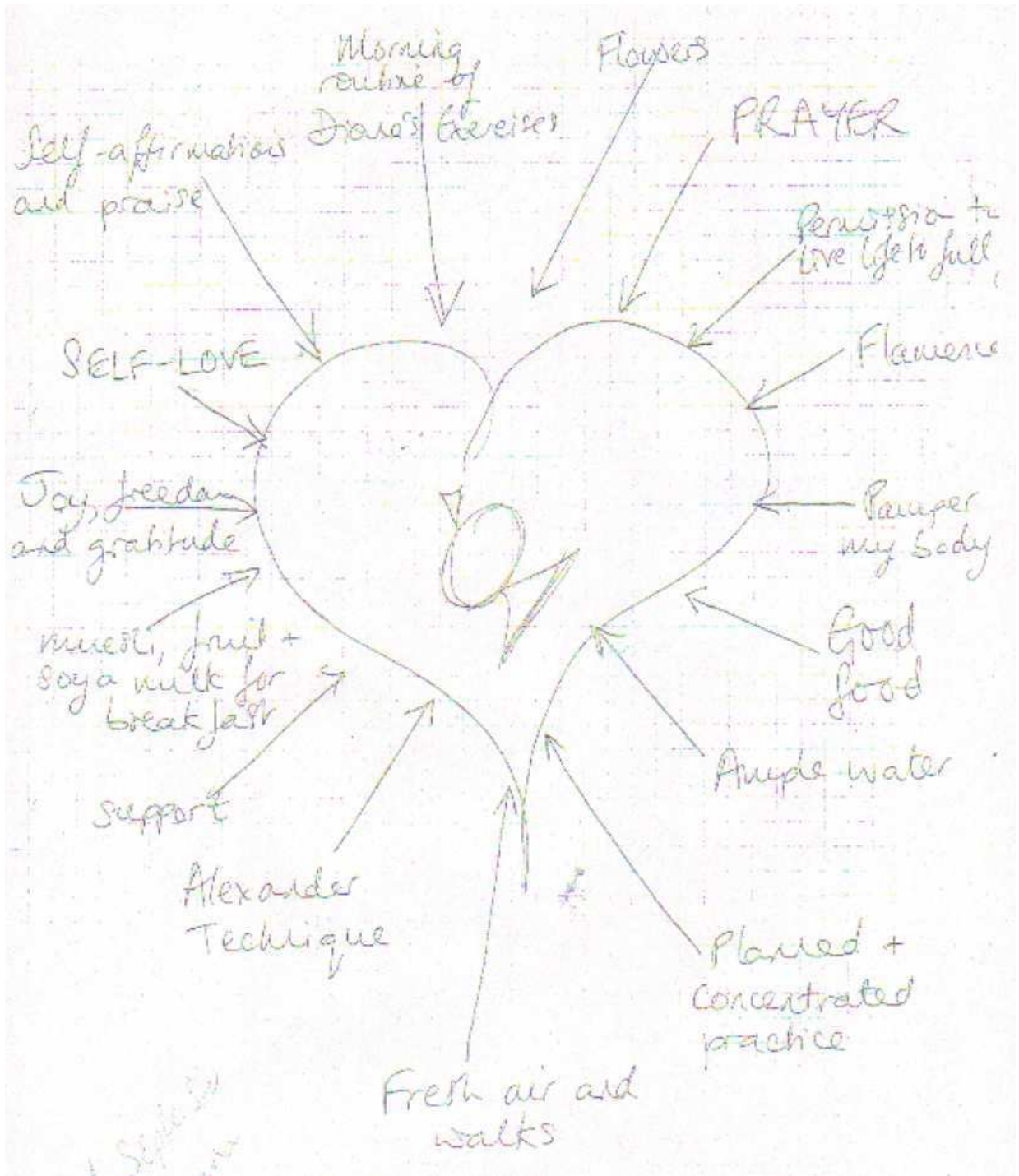




Fig. 3



## CONCLUSION    **The Heart of the Matter**

Not all players of the French horn lack confidence or face performance-related health problems. However, as our research revealed, it cannot be overlooked that there is a small proportion who do. It is to these players that this paper has been primarily devoted. Conventional research into evidence and statistics provided us with a wealth of information and painted a picture of musicians' problems in general. At the same time, however, it unveiled the dearth of hard facts available to players and teachers of the French horn specifically. The evidence presented in the form of case studies by players who had undergone crises themselves helped to identify our prime concerns, namely focal dystonia, stress-related tension and performance anxiety. Since experts are in agreement that confidence can be learned and all such concerns are preventable, we then set out on a journey back to health under the following premise: The above problems among French horn players need not arise, as long as technique is sound, we keep healthy in body, mind and spirit, and do the right practice.

This sounds easy enough! However, the more a horn player lacking confidence goes in search of advice, the more complicated his problems seem to become. First of all, he may be blocked by underlying issues connected with personality and motivation. Andrew Evans asserts that "motivation is the dynamo behind all healthy, self-activated action, goal setting and career planning."<sup>205</sup> Healthy horn playing certainly involves clarifying our motivations, reminding ourselves of why we took up the horn, building a safe environment, and setting ourselves reasonable goals. Secondly, although the student may think he can hear, he may not actually be listening. While all around the globe motivational speakers are making a fortune preaching to manifold audiences, horn players lacking confidence listen to teacher after teacher, after teacher. Is it not the case that the average listener, in a desperate search to fill up the lethargic void within, is missing the message? It is my contention that it is not the voice of the speaker on the outside he needs to hear, but the one of intuition and clarity on the inside. And many a horn player, particularly student, is missing the point. He may be listening to his teacher speak, but hear in a way that undermines his very own sense of judgement. *This is at the very core of why he lacks confidence.*

So we need to build upon what Ewans coined our 'constant self'. If we disregard our inner instincts and intuition, we cannot build a healthy horn technique which is authentic and therefore stable. I am in no way suggesting that we dismiss the literature available to us on French horn technique as useless. All those manuals were written for a reason, and should be granted the due attention and respect they deserve. And by virtue of such rich diversity, there will certainly be something helpful to all of us. But we must respect our sense of discernment which allows us to make

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<sup>205</sup> A. Evans (2003) *Secrets of Performing Confidence* London: A & C Black, p. 28

proper use of them. Moreover our literature need not be restricted to the French horn. I wholeheartedly recommend Thomas Helmsley's delightful book on singing to any student looking for fresh impulses on the essence of a sound technique which does not undermine his own integrity. Neither am I suggesting that listening to ourselves playing long notes for hours on end will be enough to gain complete command of the instrument. Technical way-with-all, as with all things in life, needs to be learned. We have to do the exercises. But we do need to keep it easy and natural. It is the fundamental way we do things which counts.

This means not putting the cart before the horse<sup>206</sup> and, in my opinion, requires a redefining of technique in the common consciousness of many a French horn teacher and player. *Embouchure or breathing alone cannot teach technique.* Without constant attention to sound, without listening properly and allowing our life-force to flow, without an integrative approach which does not narrow technique down to one aspect only, the exercises may well prove fruitless. *We must put our technique on a firm footing, and come back to the basics. A technique which is built upon the stable foundations of authenticity, ease and sound.* The sound of music, the sound of the world around us, of our natural vibration and the sound of our own voice. For as we have seen, a sound technique IS sound! So when it comes to practice, we must take any advice with a pinch of salt. Do the exercises gently, experiment and follow our intuition. *If it helps, do it. If it hurts or causes tension, my suggestion is: do not even think about it.* In fact, try to go beyond any feelings at all, and immerse yourself in the World of Sound. This is the way we need to practise. *As practice indeed makes perfect, we need to learn to practise well.*

Having said that, we have also seen that practice alone may not suffice. Stress is part and parcel of our everyday life as a person, musician and horn player. It is therefore crucial that we learn to counteract stress by developing a self-support system. This in turn provides us with all we need to keep ourselves and our technique sound and healthy. In addition to our daily practice routine, it will include a physical daily warm-up, supporting physical or mental training, relaxation, and stillness and time off. With the help of the tools we use, our will and courage, as well as the assistance of good teachers and experienced therapists and coaches if need be, we can build our own personal system which honours our subjective experience, our ability to be guided by our internal sense of balance and capacity to trust our inner judgement. And because our system is authentic and we are therefore at ease in ourselves, the things we do daily<sup>207</sup> not only build our confidence; they help us withstand any external pressures. As Evans asserts, "The goal from the outset has been to give performers the tools and the understanding to cure themselves of the typical stresses and anxieties of the profession, so that they acquire the confidence of knowing that they can deal with the inner demons."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Michigan State University School of Music (2006) "Thoughts on "how to live" *dng*, March 2006

<sup>207</sup> J. Rohn 2004 Weekend Event, VIP Lunch, DVD 8, CD 15, Track 5

<sup>208</sup> *ibid*, p. 1

Such an integrative approach does not apply to horn playing only. If integration and integrity are a life-force, then when we focus on just one thing, i.e. the horn, or one single aspect of playing the horn such as embouchure, we rob ourselves of our own breath. We are simply not able to embrace life as a whole and this, paradoxically, makes our playing suffer. So we need to relax, have faith, and enjoy ourselves! Healthy horn playing is about feeling totally comfortable in the artistic role and is rooted in open-heartedness. It is about being in touch with nature and the world around us. About playing a part in community and relationships, and actively dancing to the tune of the ancient human dance in which “the old empower the young with their experience and the young empower the old with new life, reweaving the fabric of the human community as they touch and turn.”<sup>209</sup> If we are not able to stand up and play a simple tune to old ladies of the local community to brighten up their coffee morning, then horn playing to my mind is meaningless. But if we can turn that pile of plumbing into the sound of magic for young children, make their eyes light up or even instil in them the desire to play, then what a wonderful gift! It is a self-perpetuating circle. The joy we experience in making music is passed on to others and comes back to us tenfold. This brings true confidence. It flows from the heart.

And it is from the heart only that great teaching can flourish. We have seen that when a player is lacking or has lost confidence and is facing performance-related health issues, both student and teacher can become unstuck. In his exploration of the inner landscape of a teacher’s life, Palmer confirms that while the student is desperate to learn how to trust his instincts, his teacher may lack the integrity, perhaps through no fault of his own, to teach him this very lesson. Palmer views the recovery of inner resources as crucial to good teaching: “The work required to “know thyself” is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight.”<sup>210</sup> In my own personal experience, the teaching which is rooted in self-knowledge does not try to conceal its limitations, nor is it self-righteous or self-imposing. It is open, trusting and speaks with integrity while welcoming any unfamiliar personal experiences with open arms. Its voice effortlessly reaches the hearts of its students. And they in turn have the chance to develop that sense of discernment, a capacity to trust in their own judgement, which is at the heart of true learning. Both teacher and learner are grounded in mutual respect.

Which is where great horn playing can begin. According to Palmer, “Technique is what teachers use until the real teacher arrives.”<sup>211</sup> He emphasises that, “The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts – meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the

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<sup>209</sup> P. Palmer (1998) *The Courage to Teach* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 25

<sup>210</sup> *ibid*, p. 3

<sup>211</sup> *ibid*, p. 5

place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.”<sup>212</sup> Indeed, I strongly believe that, both from the very outset and at higher levels, it is the primary role of the teacher to exercise integrity; to teach from the heart and help a child, or later on a student, nurture his own seed of confidence, his Own Sound. A teacher must not stand in the way by imposing a technique which may not suit that, probably sensitive, student. It is his duty to respect what is intrinsic to that player’s self, what makes that person entirely unique – embouchure, breathing-wise and otherwise.

If musicians were taught to listen and develop their technique easily from the very beginning, as we have seen in the teaching of Arnold Jacobs, they would naturally know how to nurture their authentic sound, have confidence in their stable technique and be less likely to find themselves at a point of crisis. Learning to play the horn would be what Werner described as “the unfolding of a natural process”.<sup>213</sup> The more demanding technical aspects of the instrument would come gradually, without forcing a thing. And with the correct guidance, a player could build on his own support system. A good teacher should first and foremost encourage the student to help himself, and have confidence in himself.

Michigan State University validates the subjective experience of the individual, and points out the missing link in our education system as we know it in Western society:

“There has been a deliberate avoidance of acknowledging how we assess and learn from the subjective experience of living, how we obtain knowledge and internal sense of balance, and how we come to judge the “rightness” of things. These are fundamental to the practice of integrative medicine, and precisely because they are central aspects of this new paradigm in medicine, they have been subject to scepticism, and looked upon with fear and doubt.”<sup>214</sup> *But fear we need not.* This paper has shown that there is a growing awareness in institutions of musical training, and there are teachers of the French horn around the world who have understood, and whos advice is very much worth listening to.

To conclude, horn playing is not about pushing. Neither ourselves nor our muscles. It is an evolving entity which is based on a sound, healthy technique carefully nurtured through healthy musicianship, and above all securely embedded in the nutritious soil of authenticity. To prevent performance-related ill-health from rearing its ugly head, we must carefully protect and base everything we do on our authentic selves. It is when we are not looking after ourselves, stray away from our path, and adopt techniques which are alien to us that problems arise. While a good teacher can help greatly if we sensitively follow his advice, we must take on the responsibility for developing

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<sup>212</sup> *ibid*, p. 11

<sup>213</sup> K. Werner (1996) *Effortless Mastery. Liberating the Master Musician Within* New Albany: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, Inc. p.28

<sup>214</sup> Michigan State University School of Music (2006) “Healthy Musicianship, Integrative Medicine - Finding your Way in the new Medical Paradigm”, Feb 2006, p. 2

confidence in our own strategies, *strategies that are right for us*. And while teaching must be sound from the very beginning, in the end, we ourselves are our own best teacher. As Kristina Mascher-Turner said, sometimes it just takes us a long time to realise it.<sup>215</sup>

Let us return to our opening statement. It is my contention that not only do we need a **sound technique, a fit body and a calm spirit** as Mr. Parry suggests, but these three elements are interdependent and interwoven into a wholesome system which is self-organising. With our own personal system securely anchored in place, we can freely walk in the steps of Jim Rohn. We then not only *know* but *sense* what to do daily to attend to our well-being and develop our self-esteem. We know what is good for us and what helps us practise well. By listening carefully, we can learn to cope with and overcome the voices of distraction inside our heads, and can joyfully and easily live life and music to the full. With confidence.

So to those who have lost confidence, my message is this: “Just pick up the pieces, and play your heart out!” If Shakespeare was right and music be the food of love, and if good teaching comes from the heart, the child who is listening to you, with sound guidance and gentle direction, will learn to have confidence in himself, patiently persevere, take heart and - play on!

**“If music be the food of love, play on!”**  
William Shakespeare

Afterword:

I wish to thank all those who, each in his or her own individual way, helped me find the courage to pick up the pieces, and play on. My special thanks also goes to the horn players, family members and coaches who supported me in writing this paper. According to David Grimshaw and Judith Palac, “Healing from an illness can be tricky. Can the artist go from injury to impairment to understanding to engagement to transformation into something other than what was before, and yet reformulate himself or herself in a way that allows him or her to continue to be an artist? Is that the way of art? It takes hold of people, and they struggle to understand it, learn it, and become a part of it. Like the clay on the potters’ wheel, people are formed into something new. In doing this, they become part of the body of work in their field, which in turn gives them the opportunity to offer something back, perhaps to create something new within their field. Sometimes seemingly unfortunate things like injuries change people, and they find the need to do things differently, because they understand themselves differently. The context of understanding may have widened as a result to the illness, and so one sees another way to be about or do work that was previously not within his or

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<sup>215</sup> K. Mascher-Turner, email 6.5.07

her repertoire. This creative act can be a gift back to the community that changes its course for the better. This is the process by which paradigm shifts change the culture of a field of endeavor.”<sup>216</sup>

In the above lines I found acknowledgement of the validity of my own story as the perpetuating momentum for my work, and at the same time discovered a new purpose. That of sharing my story for the benefit of others. At the beginning of my research I did not know whether I would find any written literature or similar voices to help me weave all the loose ends into one. I also lacked the courage to openly share my experiences. But along the way I bumped into many kindred spirits, both old and new. This gave me confidence. How grateful I am! I hope my ideas contribute, at least in a small way, to instilling confidence in the hearts of other travelling - and perhaps lost - horn players. I also hope that in the future I will be able to make a small contribution to the community through my own teaching.

As for me, it is time to take to the dance floor once again. Not necessarily among the fiery frills and extravagance of Flamenco. But this time with a partner. And in relationship with my family and my mentors, my playing colleagues and friends, my students and my Self. In a Word, with Life. For my personal journey from physical break-down to searching and gradual healing brought me to believe that if we lose our faith, we lose everything. Whereas music-making truly is a wonderful gift!

It is on this positive note, safely at shore in the orchestra and securely anchored in my Mother and Father tongues of English and Polish, that I breathe a sigh of relief.

And lay my pen to rest.

Therefore we are always confident...  
...We live by faith, not by sight.  
(2 Corinthians 5:6-7)

Ufamy więc zawsze...  
...kierujemy się wiarą, a nie widzeniem.  
(2 list do koryntian 5, 6-7)

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<sup>216</sup> D. N. Grimshaw and J. A. Palac (2006) “Music Education and Performing Arts Medicine: The State of the Alliance” Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America Performing Arts Medicine, Vol. 17: 889

## Appendix

Poem translation:

### Frische Fahrt

Laue Luft kommt blau geflossen,  
Frühling, Frühling soll es sein!  
Waldwärts Hörnerklang geschossen,  
Mutger Augen lichter Schein;  
Und das Wirren bunt und bunter  
Wird ein magisch wilder Fluß,  
In die schöne Welt hinunter  
Lockt dich dieses Stromes Gruß

Und ich mag mich nicht bewahren!  
Weit von euch treibt mich der Wind.  
Auf dem Strome will ich fahren,  
Von dem Glanze selig blind!  
Tausend Stimmen lockend schlagen,  
Hoch Aurora flammend weht,  
Fahre zu! Ich mag nicht fragen,  
Wo die Fahrt zu Ende geht!

Joseph von Eichendorff

### Brisk Journey

Warm breezes come flowing in the blue;  
It must be springtime, springtime!  
Horn calls shooting into the forest,  
The bright glow of courageous eyes;  
And the confusion, more and more variegated,  
Becomes a magically impetuous river;  
Down into the beautiful world  
This stream's greeting lures you.

And I don't want to hold out against it!  
The wind drives me far from you;  
I want to journey down that stream,  
Blissfully blinded by its gleaming!  
A thousand voices call alluringly,  
Aurora wafts ablaze high in the sky  
Onward! I don't want to ask  
Where the journey will end!

Joseph von Eichendorff<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> S. Appelbaum (1995) *Great German Poems of the Romantic Era* New York: Courier Dover Publications



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