

Starting Sound and The Art of Soft Playing

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Starting Sound

Our goal with starting sound needs to be efficiency and simplicity. Any physical effort above what is absolutely necessary will be reflected in your tone, as well as unreliable articulation. Immediate, full, and easy tone is what we are after.

- Breath
 - Full, relaxed breath
 - Imagine saying “WOAH” backwards
 - Open throat
 - Low tongue
 - Fill lungs from the bottom up
 - Two 2-liter Coke bottles
 - Sit if you become light-headed!
- Embouchure formation
 - Think the sound “mmmmm” ie. Campbell’s soup commercials
 - Diamond: nose, chin, mouth corners
 - Corners are your ‘tent pegs’, keep them tight and secure
 - Keep the chin down; no mashing
 - Aperture
 - Supple lips
 - Closed lips
- Sound production
 - Freebuzz ie. No mouthpiece
 - Breath, form embouchure, then....
 - ‘Release’ the air
 - Imagine the syllable “POO” as the air hits your lips
 - No tongue
 - Let the air blow the lips apart and into vibration
 - As this becomes more natural, try to freebuzz exact pitches/scales/tunes
 - Introduce mouthpiece to above steps
 - Keep thinking “POO”, still *no tongue*

- It should sound like you are tonguing
 - Immediate tone, not air leakage *then* tone
- Add tongue
- Introduce instrument to above steps
 - “POO”, *no tongue*
 - Add tongue
- Repeat all of these steps frequently and diligently to make sure your sound production remains simple, efficient, and immediate.

The Art of Soft Playing

Soft playing presents a challenge to most brass players, especially younger players and those lacking the previously addressed fundamentals of starting sound. Before venturing into the realm of extreme softs, make sure that you have fully addressed the aforementioned principals. The foremost concept in your mind while playing soft should be sound quality. Piano, pianissimo, pianississimo, etc. should be just as tonally secure and full of life as louder dynamics. Basically, the sound cannot be starved.

- Why is soft playing challenging (to most)?
 - Improper air support
 - Over-involvement of specific muscles ie. ‘forcing’
 - Inefficient embouchure strength/usage
 - Lack of practice
 - Lack of confidence
- Benefits of soft practice
 - Build embouchure strength and consistency
 - Higher awareness of proper air support
 - Greater performance confidence
 - Wider dynamic palette
 - Increases your loud playing
 - Won’t upset your neighbors
- Start with what you do well
 - Graduated air attacks
 - Start in a comfortable range and dynamic
 - Play one note at a time, gradually decreasing dynamic
 - Dare to go so soft that nothing comes out
 - Buzzing
 - Create a freebuzz with as little energy as possible
 - Hold it for as long as you can
 - Do it again, but at ½ the dynamic
 - Keep going until nothing happens

- Mouthpiece
 - Same as above
 - Incorporate scales/arpeggios/melodies
 - Introduce tongue
 - Remember, air starts the sound, not the tongue
 - Keep it light and quick
 - Tongue placement
 - Not between the teeth!
 - Everyone's mouth is different, so tongue placement may vary
 - Experiment and use what sounds the best
- Sound concept
 - Pure tone
 - Piano > should sound full and rich, not starved and unfocused
 - Establish great sound before pushing softer
 - Aim for the back wall
 - We know how to do this at FFFF!!
 - "Like a laser beam." – Jay Friedman
 - Steady sound
 - Proper air support
 - No quakes in sound
 - Listen to great chorales and copy the sound
 - Brahms 1 and 4, mvt. IV
 - Schumann 3 "Rhenish"
 - Smetana's "Moldau"
 - Mahler 2
- Exercises
 - Long tones
 - Shifting/simple slurs
 - Start with smaller intervals and slide distances
 - Increase difficulty
 - Scales
 - Legato + pianissimo
 - Marcato + pianissimo
 - Etudes
 - Ensemble playing
 - Push each other to play softer
 - Keep sound focused or tuning will greatly suffer!
- Recommended study material
 - "Daily Exercises for Trombone" by Eric Klay/Richard MacDonald
 - "Special Legato" by Gerard Pichaureau
 - "Daily Drills" by Max Schlossberg (orig. for trumpet)
 - "The Singing Approach to the Trombone" by Charles Vernon
 - Chorales (especially for ensemble situations)

- Any Arban's or Rochut at soft dynamic

Thanks for coming to tonight's class, and I hope you are able to benefit from this material. As always, if you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me. I do intend to do another class soon, and hope to see you there.

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