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Brass Facts Article

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Teaching beginning brass players to breath should be a concise action. Students may breathe correctly on their own with succinct instructions. However, since they are just beginners, it’s important to watch for bad habits in the breathing process. If a student isn’t breathing correctly, breathing exercises can help students to feel how their lungs and abdomen expand and contract with the inhalation. One thing to remind students is to have as little resistance as possible when breathing for both inhalation and exhalation.

When instructing students about forming embouchure, it is a good idea to teach it in correlation or simultaneously with breathing. The air is a huge part of how the embouchure works. Teaching breathing without embouchure is approachable. However, teaching embouchure without breathing does no good as the two ideas coincide so well. An analogy provided in the article is teaching the embouchure without air is like teaching only one hand of violin at a time. Both pieces go together and need to be taught to students that way.

Articulation for beginning brass players sometimes gives the impression that the air stops when articulating. This is inhibiting for students because the air should constantly be pushing through the instrument. Additionally there are many syllables to correctly achieve various desired articulations. Not all syllables are effective however. Students should also be reminded of where tongue position is when tonguing. I believe it’s important to be specific here because neither you or the student can see what’s going on inside their mouth. Making these instructions clear as possible can help eliminate bad habits. Most importantly, remind students the air should keep flowing when articulating any passage.

Acceptable tone quality varies ear to ear. The best way to encourage a good tone is to model the good tone and correct and critique when their tone is less than acceptable. Long tones are a useful tool here as well. The most recommended approach is to provide examples of good tone. The more a student can hear what they’re supposed to sound like, the more they will be able to reproduce that same sound.

In most classroom settings, the level of ability and musicianship will vary among the students. This can prove challenging when choosing repertoire. It is important to focus on musicianship from the start the same way fundamentals are taught. Teach students the importance of listening. This way students are connecting and blending better simply by listening. Express to students the nuances and variations in each pitch. Even if the same pitch is sounding, there may be differences in tone quality such as warmer or darker. Musicianship at a certain point will be harder to teach. Students must have a strong knowledge of basic technical fundamentals to achieve higher level musicianship.

In comparison of singing to brass playing, the similarities and differences aren’t as cut and dry as most assume. Breathing varies for both musicians. inhalation is moderately the same but exhalation is not very comparable. The way vocalists use different vowel sounds to achieve different tones is applicable to brass playing. Changing or altering the oral cavity affects the color of the tone being produced.

Dynamic range among bras players can be developed by discussing the type of air stream. Softer playing means smaller steady air flow, and and loud sound is achieved by a bigger steady air flow. The more attention directed at incorrect dynamics is a highly recommended tool to help students develop a wider dynamic range. Doing so gradually expands their limits. Again, long tone exercises are useful here. Start soft and crescendo and then decrescendo.