

Melodic Flexibility

An easier way to better playing

When something is accepted as new, others may point out that this revolutionary concept has been around for decades. With this in mind, I would like to say that what I am describing is new to me and I would like to share it with you.

Several months ago, I became bored with traditional methods for improving lip flexibility and finger coordination. As an older and supposedly more experienced teacher of the brass, I had enough with the Clarke Technical Studies and every lip flexibility book available to me. Practicing these repetitive patterns was like trying to take a bad tasting pill every day. I knew the exercises were of benefit to my playing but I was also bored out of my mind with these monotonous patterns and for that reason I began writing my own exercises to fill the need for both finger and lip exercises and that was how Melodic Flexibility began.

What is Melodic Flexibility?

Melodic playing has always been the most important phase of any musician's development. The melody coming from the front of our instrument defines our ability as a musician. If we are unable to demonstrate fine melodic skills, few will be interested in hearing us perform. To perform a melodic line musically requires many independent elements such as, an acceptable tone, intonation, flexibility, endurance, knowledge of key signature, dynamics and all the other elements of fine musicianship. Melodic flexibility would encompass every element of musical playing. Unfortunately the exercises we have repeated over the past history of brass playing have been far from melodic. Most of our lip flexibility books sound like primitive bugle calls and possibly the finest finger exercise studies (Clarke Technical Studies for the Cornet) is only slightly melodic in nature. Even though we respect the vast library of books dealing with both lip and finger development, how wonderful it would be to combine both the lip and finger development into one exercise and reap both benefits as well as save time in our practice routine. In my opinion, Melodic Flexibility succeeds in this venture.

As with both traditional lip exercises and finger exercises, Melodic Flexibility requires repetition. The difference between the traditional and my exercises is that Melodic Flexibility is based on well known and/or recognizable melodic patterns. When performing a melody which is known to you, it is more like reading a story than just pounding out short, repetitious patterns. A melody has a beginning, middle and an conclusion. Traditional patterns have no plot, no story and are consequently boring. Each time I play an exercise from the Earl Iron, "27 Groups of Exercises" or the Walter Smith "Lip Flexibility" book it is like taking short jabs to the face. I know they are good for me, just as medicine is good for me, but these patterns are as far from music as anything could get. The same is true for the finger development exercises. After playing every day out of these books for most of my life, I have decided to stop. For me, Melodic Flexibility is a better way to spend my time.

How to Begin Melodic Flexibility

By combining the basic concept of repetition used in traditional methods with well known melodic phrases, I feel every musician would gain more in a shorter amount of time by using this approach. I am not here to sell my method for the concept is so easy anyone can develop their own material and begin experiencing the benefits. If you have a program such as Finale, Finale Songwriter or any similar music writing software, you are ready to begin.

