

## Observations of psychology

### *i) The Individual sound ideal*

***“It is impossible to change the basic nature of one’s innate instrument. A singer cannot, for instance, decide for himself whether to be a bass or tenor. Nor can a singer – in contrast to a violinist or a pianist – go out and buy a more expensive and better instrument if dissatisfied with the quality of the one he possesses. The singer must learn to live with the innate instrument such as it is, as well as with its shortcomings, and improve this innate material as best he can by means of training.”*** - The Human Voice, Susanna Eken

Just as people are different, their voices are different, their musical expression varies as well as their individual level of aggression and ability to express that aggression through various means is vastly different. To a certain extent, it is what we have come to call “personality” and it must, to a certain extent be accepted as an unchangeable element of a human being, much like their eye color.

Some people have strong opinions and are good at expressing these through healthy aggression. We usually consider these people natural leaders. Others have strong opinions but lack the development of self-worth and confidence to be able to express them through healthy aggression and revert to passive aggression. This is due to recurring experiences of healthy aggression being denied or rejected by others. These individuals are very often extremely frustrated and suffer anxiety, depression and a generally complicated existential state. Whether it be because of childhood trauma, relationship crisis or any other cause, a musical instrument, like the trumpet, can be a very powerful tool in helping them develop a more healthy underlying psychology. Ironically it is often these people that gravitate towards such an instrument as the sub-conscious realizes that the possibility for uncensored expression of aggression is up for grabs!

***The above description of the "survival singer" lists characteristics that a psychologist would perhaps call neurotic or nervous. There are many psychological definitions of "neurosis," and what it is or is not, and experts are far from agreement on this point. In the present context, I choose to adhere to the view that a nervous disposition is not an illness, but an expression of the way in which a human being as a whole reacts to a particular life situation. Certain people are born with a highly-strung sensibility that makes them particularly susceptible to the various influences of life. Fortunately, this sensitivity also endows them with particular potential for increased artistic experience and expressiveness.*** - The Human Voice, Susanna Eken

A third group of individuals are those lacking in a strong opinion and therefore a lack of the need to express opinions through aggressions. These people are easiest to teach in a way that conforms to a tradition as they readily accept an established aesthetic and are not consumed with creating their own.

When it comes to a sound ideal, to a certain extent we have to accept the flock mentality of the society we live in and gravitate towards a musical genre that accepts our personal choice of the sound ideal. However, it is interesting to examine certain highly celebrated musicians who have developed the ability to manipulate their sound ideal to fit the style they are playing or the player they are trying to emulate. To a certain extent, these players are instrumental impressionists. This is a very cool skill but it does not facilitate the development of the individual's own expressive voice and subsequent sound ideal.

***A singer may specialize in whatever genre they prefer– but cannot choose what is a healthy and expedient use of the voice. Every individual is subject to certain basic physiological laws, which must be respected. Even as you cannot be a ballet dancer and a marathon runner at the same time, even so, you cannot sing Heavy Rock one evening and Mozart the next. The muscles simply cannot manage the required accommodation. If one chooses to express oneself within a “modern” idiom, for instance in rhythmic music, certain specific musical and functional demands are made upon the voice. The choice to express oneself by means of classical music places other demands upon the voice.*** - The Human Voice, Susanna Eken

Although I can see the potential for psychological complications and trouble compartmentalising approaches and aesthetics in drastically different styles, my belief is that if attention to stylistic control and nance is taken, as well as the expedient use of the physiology, then particularly as trumpet players, we are able to move past the above limitation. It is at least my dream and vision, and the greatest players in the world have achieved this in my humble opinion.

In my experience, the classical music environment is not particularly accepting of individualism and thus not a particularly healthy environment for people with strong opinions and the need to express them through sound and music. It is, however, a good environment to develop discipline and the ability to conform to a flock norm. Like the word, “classical” would suggest.

Jazz and popular music are much more accepting of individualism and new and open-minded thinking and performance practice as the abbreviation “popular” would suggest. This world is very liberating for those who have struggled to develop the use of healthy aggressions to express their desires and intentions to the world around them. It is however when one delves deeper into the idiom and environment a victim of the same human pshycological tendencies and pit falls. The flock norm and a “common language” dictate that certain techniques, styles and nuances are more correct than others. I don’t accept this. I see it as a case of creation or reproduction. They are two very different things and ironically in a genre that prides itself on its improvisatory nature, the approach to Jazz can often become as stuffy as Classical preservation of aesthetic.

In my personal case, I am a classically trained trumpet player, with an incredibly focused and projecting the sound ideal. These two worlds have often collided and for a long time, it was a great sorrow for me to be told time and time again that I played incorrectly and should change, for all intents and purposes, my personality. When I began to explore jazz and popular music I could begin to accept the compromise I needed to make when playing classical music due to the acceptance of my personality within an alternative musical sub-culture. I will discuss how “finding ones place on the spectrum” is vital for our technical development, musical expression and development of an individual artistic identity, later in the book.

### ***ii) The Circle of Breath and Valsalva maneuver***

In my understanding, there are two types of brain functions in humans. Either predominantly left brain or predominantly right brain. Depending on which type of brain function predominates in us as individuals there will be different approaches and understandings that lend themselves to either great success or a total fiasco. A very important one in Brass pedagogy is “the circle of breath” and its implications on our perception of the voluntary or involuntary use of the Valsalva maneuver. The premise of

the circle of breath being that there is no stop between the inhale and exhale of air. This is a very good example of an abstract approach and therefore right-brain dominant compatible principal which allows people to create the most efficient transition from inhalation to exhalation. The fixed(mouthpiece/trumpet) and dynamic(embouchure) resistances with which the exhalation must interact are not irrelevant in this case but for now, I will ignore them as this is a psychological observation. Whilst this approach works well for an individual who is right-brain dominant, it is often very detrimental to left-brain dominant individuals. The important distinction to make is that left brain dominance lends itself to a much more logical and scientific approach to problem-solving. With this said, if we briefly consider the laws of physics with regards to acceleration and change in velocity of fluids, we understand that there will be, however momentarily, a point in time at which the direction of flow of air within the respiratory system is neither moving inwards, nor outwards (inhalation phase and exhalation phase.) It is this everyday paradox that is in its essence the root cause of either voluntary or involuntary use (or overuse) of the Valsalva maneuver. It is here that the application of the teachings of Arnold Jacobs comes undone. Telling a student, who predominantly is of a left-brain orientation, to breathe in and blow without a stop, will inevitably cause problems. Not only because of the attempt to NOT do something being a neurological trap that many teachers and students fall foul of but also because it is an abstract principle that does not resonate with the student's predominantly left brain (and therefore logical/ scientific) approach and understanding of the world around them.

### ***iii) Self Confidence vs. Self Worth***

In most people I have met, the depth of insightful thinking needed to understand, register and develop their individual concepts and values of Self Worth is not present. Nature gives us the unconditional love of our parents to help develop this very important part of our Psyche. But unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, many children do not have the stability and quality of unconditional love they require to fully develop this. These people are forced to either "sink or swim" as adults. The development of coping mechanisms, addictions, and other mental illnesses will either make or break the life quality of the individual in question. Through the development of a passion and pursuit of understanding an abstract principle, the depth of insightful thinking necessary for the personal development of Self Worth can be achieved. Now the "easy" part is done, we must work with ourselves to understand and identify the trauma, reactionary behavior, coping mechanisms and, potentially, addictions we have developed to compensate for our lack of Self Worth.

In many people I have met, taught and discussed this topic with, I have experienced that in the absence of sufficient self worth, the most common symptom or problem is anxiety. Whether this anxiety manifests itself, in the primary stages, psychologically or physically depends very much on the individual in question. Most of the time people do not associate the physical symptoms they suffer with their mental state and the state of their underlying imbalance in Psyché. They seek medicinal or physical therapeutic solutions to their problems instead of addressing the cause. Whilst the medicinal and physical therapy route may be required in order to lower the base line of anxiety to a level where the individual is able to identify and deal with the causes of the imbalance in their Psyché it is not an independent solution to their problems. Without talk therapy and psychological evaluation the individual's problems will likely return as soon as they stop taking the medicine or receiving the physical therapy. In this way the medicine and physical therapy ,to a certain extent, enables the lifestyle and imbalance in Psyché that cases the psychological or physical manifestations of the anxiety of the sufferer.

Many people develop a very materialistic lifestyle requiring things to give them the level of Self Confidence and recognition from their peers, that they need to compensate for a lack of Self Worth. This can be experienced with highly motivated and driven people recognizing only material wealth as a measurement of success. It is a particularly easy to spot and unattractive personality trait. A result of this kind of imbalance is what people often call “a big ego”. The ego is however not something itself that is a negative thing. It is actually only when the ego is not in balance with reality that we perceive or notice its presence. The fact that humans are flock animals means that despite ones own ability to realize their own level of competence within any given field, without the appropriate Self Worth, and resulting the perception of reality, they rely heavily on the recognition of others as a measurement of their competence and a form of validation for their existence. The “addiction” to instant gratification, that the release of dopamine gives us when we receive a gift, purchase a precious object or receive praise from others is just as much an enabling mechanism to cope with the imbalanced Psyché. As a musician and teacher, it is particularly important that we consider this aspect of psychology. As members of the cognitive elite, we have a responsibility to our fellow humans and society to consider this and allow the developed insight to influence our approach as educators.

#### ***iv) Focal Dystonia and General Dystonia***

The difference between a Focal Dystonia or a “Ordinary” Dystonia is the task-specific or non task-specific nature of the symptoms. In brass playing most “Dystonias” are focal and therefore are task specific.

When we consider the psychosematic causes of a task-specific dystonia, we need to understand the difference between self-confidence and self-worth. Self confidence is the belief in one’s ability, that is specific to the task in question. Self-worth is a much deeper seeded belief of an individual’s right or value of existence. This is not specific to a task but completely linked to the very existence of the individuals’ Psyche.

Often Focal Dytonias in brass playing only begin to rear their ugly heads when we are expanding into a range, dynamic or other physically/ technically demanding element of our playing. This is due to the fact that the base level of self confidence required to initiate the start of a task is not present. Many call this coming out of our comfort zone. If we spend too much time out of our comfort zone, we can eventually begin to lose belief in our abilities within our comfort zone. At the same time, if we spend too much time within our comfort zone, we stagnate, plateau and do not develop.

Another very debilitating symptom of spending too much time outside of our comfort zone can occur if our self confidence serves to over-compensate for our lack of self-worth.

#### ***v) Process based approach vs. Product based approach.***

It is important to embrace both of these two approaches in almost any pursuit of learning and developing a physical skill. The nature of process leading the way when learning to do something previously unknown to an individual. This is automatic as a child due to the fact that everything is unknown to us. Children just want to try and try again until they undoubtedly stumble upon the means to do something. After this “eureka” moment we all know so well from “learning to ride a bike” many move immediately to the product based approach. This is something much more common in adults than children and due almost exclusively to the requirements by society of achievement and prestige. We become able

to do something and immediately see a reward for refining and improving a skill instead of remaining curious to learn new ones. It is easy to develop a kind of psychology that creates a need to control everything and that promotes a logic that by using time to learn new and unrefined skills before we have mastered already learnt skills is not efficient.

#### ***vi) The Mentor***

To develop the capacity to be a mentor for someone, it is important first to develop credibility. Without the trust and belief in the validity of the direction the mentor guides the mentee, the relationship will not succeed and optimal progress will almost certainly not be made. Some teachers develop this credibility by becoming great players and are recognized as people to approach for mentoring based on their ability “to do”.

Unfortunately the world is full of well-intentioned professionals that have not gathered the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to teach others what they themselves are able to do. It is here where it is incredibly Important that as teachers we examine our moral obligation towards those under our mentor-ship and for want of a better phrase “in our care”. It is important to qualify that as a student it is important to ask yourself the following two questions:

1. Does my teacher genuinely care about me as an individual and a professional?
2. Does their credibility make me trust them unwaveringly?

If the answers are “no” to one or both of these questions, or develop into no over time, then that teacher is probably not a good match for you at this point in your development. That isn't to say that the teacher isn't a good player, musician or teacher, just that two very important factors for the success of your mentor-mentee relationship are not present. It is the students personal responsibility as the “customer” in the transaction to make sure they are satisfied with the services being provided.