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Expressive Articulation in American Brass Music

Brass instruments have been around for thousands of years, and countless musicians have endeavored to play them. All of us brass players through the ages have faced the same challenges: How do you produce a pleasant tone? How do you move pitches higher and lower? How do you articulate the pitches?

In this article, we will discuss articulation as it is used in music that was either played, sung or influenced by Louis Armstrong, genius of American music. Therefore, we are discussing all American music (and beyond) from 1925 to the present.

First, let's check out some important statements made by three of the most influential brass educators of the 20th century.

Arnold Jacobs (1915–1998) was the princi-

pal tuba in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1944 to 1988 and the author of *Song And Wind*. He said: "No music is ever made by connecting the air with the tongue. Music can only be made by connecting the air with the lips. In other words, the tongue contributes no sound. As a result you put it in the category of a minor study, not giving it the same importance as the study of sound."

Dr. William Fielder (1938–2009) was a professor emeritus at Rutgers University from 1979 to 2009. He said: "Articulation is 90 percent air and 10 percent tongue."

Bill Adam (1917–2013) was a professor emeritus at Indiana University from 1946 to 1988. He said: "We are capable of one thing at a time with considerable ease. When we have

to be concerned with two things at a time, playing becomes more difficult, and when we are confronted with three things, it just literally becomes impossible."

Jacobs, Fielder and Adam were keen scholars who analyzed brass playing from all angles. They had extensive knowledge of the physiological and, more importantly, the psychological aspects of brass playing. They analyzed thoroughly, but not while in the process of the ultimate goal: musical expression. That's the whole point. Amass the knowledge, but keep it simple while playing so the song can be sung.

Know Your Tongue

Everyone is built differently. Depending on the size and shape of your tongue, you will have

different strengths and weaknesses. Go to the mirror and stick out your tongue. Examine the front end. Is it wide, narrow, fat, thin? What shapes can you make when you curl the sides?

Test the speed and clarity of your single-tongue. How fast can you single-tongue with a steady beat? Test your endurance—how many repetitions before you get tongue-tied? Test double-tongue and triple-tongue the same way, using every conceivable syllable.

Singing & Scatting

As musicians, we are all singers and drummers. Scat singing involves the same syllables we use in brass playing. The tongue is also our drumstick. Listen to Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie and Clarke Terry sing. Sing along. Do the same with others, starting with Ella Fitzgerald.

Syllables

The human tongue's ability to create a wide variety of syllables is extremely useful in musical expression.

Sometimes students are taught that a "tu" tongue is "proper" and a "stop" tongue is "improper." This limitation is placed on a student when the teacher is only interested in instructing the European classical style. It's completely unnecessary and should be avoided altogether.

Learn, practice and teach all forms of articulation as they relate to all styles of music, while prioritizing a free and open sound.

Here is a list of syllables. Try these examples—listen to the sounds:

- Single without stop-tongue: "Tu Ta toh Tee Du Da doh Dee." Keep in mind that when working with the syllable "Tu" that it was first introduced by Jean-Baptiste Arban at the Paris Conservatory. The French way of saying "Tu" is a different sound than the American "Tu." A quick online search will lead you to recorded examples of the proper pronunciation.

- Double-tongue: For more attack and slower articulation: "Tu-Ku Ta-Ka Ti-Ki Toh-Koh Tee-Kee." For faster and smoother articulation: "Du-Gu Da-Ga Di-Gi Doh-Goh Dee-Gee." My teacher in high school used "Dik-Git" to achieve a clean, compressed double-tongue effect.

- Triple-tongue: For more attack and slower articulation: "Tu-Tu-Ku Ta-Ta-Ka Ti-Ti-Ki Toh-Toh-Koh Tee-Tee-Kee." For faster and smoother articulation: "Du-Du-Gu Da-Da-Ga Di-Di-Gi Doh-Doh-Goh Dee-Dee-Gee." For all of these, you can substitute "Tu-Ku-Tu," etc. for a different effect.

- Single with stop-tongue: "Doot daht doht dit deet."

- Arnold Jacobs vowels: "Ah Oh Uh" for low pitches. "Ti E Ke" for high pitches.

Slur-Tongue Combinations

When playing eighth-note passages, it's important to develop a smooth and singing

effect. Example 1 on the following page is a swing articulation exercise designed to help achieve that goal.

Practice this slowly, focusing on a smooth lyrical line. Do not try to "make it swing." First play it with straight eighths—the placement of the tongue will do the trick.

Once it sounds smooth, work for speed. Ultimately, it will work well with straight eighths at faster tempos, and you can experiment with swing feels at slower tempos.

Alternate Fingerings & Half-Valves

Alternate valves are a way of articulating without the use of the tongue. On the B-flat trumpet, there is an alternate fingering for nearly every note. See Example 2.

The trumpet's pistons offer a wide range of sonic possibilities in the areas in between the open and closed positions. Using first and second half-valves on B's, B flats and F's (low and high octaves) works very much in the player's favor. Also, the third valve is extremely useful in the upper register.

Rex Stewart was one of the pioneers of alternate fingerings and half-valves. Check out "Boy Meets Horn," a Duke Ellington composition featuring Stewart.

Miles Davis used half-valve techniques with beautiful expression. Check out "So What" from the *Kind Of Blue* album.

Growl & Flutter Tongue

Growling involves a "throat-clearing" activity while playing a pitch. It's often done with a plunger mute. Check out Bubber Miley and Cootie Williams. Williams also was known to hum while playing to split the tone, creating a growl effect.

A flutter tongue involves rolling your R's while playing. This comes easily to some and not to others. If you are the latter, just keep blowing (with or without playing) until the tip of the tongue rolls for you. Move it around until you find the right placement.

Doodle-Tongue & the Breath Attack

Clark Terry's way of playing and singing is an art form within itself.

The "doodle-tongue" is a variation on the double-tongue. Rather than using "tu-ku," Terry used: "doodle, daydle, deedle, dodle, doydle, odle," etc. Example 3 is an exercise that will help you find the sound.

Terry likened his concept of articulation to second-line drumming. He said that second-line drummers don't weigh the notes evenly, therefore it brings out a variety of syncopations when playing eighth-note passages.

Breath accents are a very expressive tool in brass playing. Terry used them often with syllables such as: "Hey, Ha, He and hyahoo." The "hyahoo" would be used when playing a turn.

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Try it while playing through Example 4.

Trombonists often utilize the doodle-tongue. Some are quite famous for it. Check out J.J. Johnson, then go to Frank Rosolino.

Dizzy!

Dizzy Gillespie was one of the most influential musicians of the 20th century. Heralded as a pioneer of bebop, he also revolutionized the use of Latin rhythms in American music.

Example 5 is a phrase from Gillespie's solo on "Dizzy's Atmosphere." It's a perfect example of using a combination of slurring, tonguing and alternate fingerings to create, as Gillespie said, "a better buoyancy in the music."

Here is Gillespie's explanation of his famous phrase: "Da-du-ee-da-du-ee-da-du-ee ... attack one, slur two, you see. But I'm not conscious of this because that's the way that I sing." Note that when Gillespie sings the second syllable "du," it is actually the valve change that causes the articulation when played on the trumpet.

Listen To Learn

As a child, I learned how to articulate various styles of music mainly by listening, playing and singing along with recordings. It was a great motivator because it was fun.

In the interest of affirming the validity of that approach, I contacted 10 colleagues and conducted informal interviews with them. Everyone I spoke with learned that way as well. Special thanks to Ronnie Buttacavoli, Dominic Derasse, Freddie Hendrix, Stafford Hunter, Brandon Lee, Joe Magnarelli, Brian Pareschi, Terell Stafford, Scott Wendholt and James Zollar for their valuable contributions to this article.

Although with all of us, it was an approach that was balanced with fundamentals through private instruction and ensemble experience, listening was the ultimate teacher. Simply listening over and over again and playing/singing along—the same way we learned to speak words as a child, by imitating Mom and Dad.

So, it would follow that one must find a "Mom and Dad" in the music—something you love, something you want to sound like. It's an organic activity. Just listen, play and sing, occasionally recording yourself to monitor your progress. In this process, attention to detail is paramount.

Listen to every aspect of the music and listen for the sound in your own playing. Get the air moving and fire it up! Focused repetition and perseverance will get you there. **DB**

New York-based John Bailey is an in-demand musician and teaching artist in all forms of jazz, r&b, pop and classical music. He became a member of the Buddy Rich Band while still in college, and his career has included tenures with Ray Charles, Ray Barretto and New World Spirit, The Woody Herman Orchestra and Frank Sinatra Jr. He has performed and recorded with James Moody, Kenny Burrell, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Barrett Deems and many others. His work with Arturo O'Farrill's Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra won two Grammy awards. Bailey's debut album as a leader, *In Real Time*, was released on Summit Records last year. His new album, *Can You Imagine?*, will be released in July on Freedom Road Records. Visit him online at johnbailey.com.

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5