Essentials of ***Growing Old Gracefully with the Trumpet***

Recollections of Donald Roeder’s 2009 ITG Conference presentation in Harrisburg, PA. with Brian Evans

***1. General Health Issues***

*a. Get into and stay in optimal physical condition --* Join a health club for structured aerobic workouts and strength training. Playing the trumpet is a very physical form of exercise and requires attention to general over-all physical well-being and optimal conditioning, not just training the facial muscles and the abdominal muscles [aka "the core"]. Good physical condition is relative to your own individual needs and expectations.

 *b. Attention to the respiratory system and breathing --* Learn to fill the lungs with air, learn how to use that air most efficiently and effectively. The term diaphragm is a misnomer, it is really the abdominal musculature which controls our ability to use the air we breathe efficiently. Learn how to get air in quickly, and out slowly. The human body is built to do the opposite, inhaling being usually the active process and exhaling the passive one. As brass players, we do the opposite, making inhaling almost a passive maneuver, while making exhaling the active one. This leads to difficulties [see below].

 *c. Yearly check-ups, including chest x-ray, EKG, etc.* Your heart and lungsare at the forefront of your ability to play the instrument. Be sure that they are in optimal condition

 *d. If you smoke,* ***stop*** !! *If you don't smoke, don't start!!* Enough said!

 *e. Playing the trumpet is one of the most un-physiologic challenges to which the hu*m*an body can be subjected.* We trumpet players exhale forcibly through a very small aperture, thus subjecting our cardiovascular and respiratory systems to intrathoracic pressures which are potentially dangerous and which may cause all manner of difficulties including, among others, decreased venous return to the right side of the heart and, as a result, decreased cardiac output. This is the reason we occasionally experience light- headedness while playing our instrument and is the reason some of us have even experienced actual loss of consciousness while doing so. To some extent we learn from practicing our instrument how to avoid this, but this occasionally still happens. Staying in optimalphysical condition can help us to avoid this to some extent.

***2. (For want of a better term) Trumpeting Issues***

 *a. Learn how and what to practice --* There are all manner ofpractice routines. Possibly the best advice I've heard and learned over the years is, "Don't think that playing what you already know and are capable of playing is helping you." A corollary to this is that playing in a band rehearsal [or other similar activities] is not practicing the instrument. You must be willing to challenge yourself! If you don't do that, it is unlikely that anyone else will either.

 b. *Practice time --* I've heard it said that practice time should be divided between warm-up, what I generally refer to as "maintenance [or technique preservation]," etudes, and repertoire. I believe this is true, and I believe that there is a great deal of difference between "playing the instrument," and practicing the instrument. I also believe that we should practice for results, not for minutes or hours.

 *c. Don't forget about scales!!* I once heard Jimmy Burke ask the question, "If you can't play scales, just what can you play?" Know what? He was right. also enough said.

 *d. If you wish to know what I do, it is the following:*

1. Warm-up including long tones [preferably 30 seconds each], slurs and single tonguing exercises.

2. I either use the Arban *"Method"* or the Ernest Williams *"Secret of Technique Preservation,"* [generally the former] for technique maintenance. There are many other books available, but these are what I use. After warming up, I play through major, minor and chromatic scales, choosing at random a particular key for the day's routine. I then play grupetto exercises, intervals and arpeggios using that same key. I follow that with some multiple tonguing exercises, generally from the Williams' exercises. I have found that as I have gotten older, multiple tonguing is an ability which I lose if I don't use it!

 3. After all of that, I work on repertoire if I have the time and/or the need to do so. I've found that with the few students I am privileged to teach that it seems better to try to teach them basics than to teach them how to play "tunes/repertoire." I try to carry this over into my daily practice routine as well. I don't know how others of you fell about this, but I believe that it is better to get them to the point that they can play anything, rather than just one thing. I hope that is not wrong, but in any case it has become my philosophy both for me and for my students.

 e*. Listen to other trumpet players and listen to performers of other instruments and to vocalists.* Long ago my own teacher told me that I should listen to all kinds of music and musicians. He also said that I would come into contact with two types of other trumpet players -- those who were not as good as I was, and those who were better than I was. He told me that I should learn from both. But more importantly, he said that I should always be willing to help those who were struggling to come up to my level if they so desired [and I have learned the hard way that there are some who do not want that]. He also said that I should seek the counsel of those who were better than I, to see if they were willing to impart some of what they had learned along the way to improve my own skills. Good advice then, and just as good today as it was when it was imparted to me sixty-plus years ago.

 *f. Listen to all genres of music, and especially to other trumpet players and vocalists.* We brass players share with vocalists one important similarity. We are the only musicians who use our own living tissue to produce sound and to make music -- and yes there is a difference between producing sound and making music. Some years ago at the ITG meeting at SUNY Purchase, Bud Herseth was asked how he taught students to phrase. His answer? "I tell them to buy every Frank Sinatra recording they can find and listen and learn." I really believe that it is by listening that we learn most. Long ago when I graduated from college and went to medical school, I put away my trumpet for about seventeen years. Fortunately, I reintroduced myself to it -- doing so was another story much too long to relate. I found that when I did so I was extremely frustrated by the fact that I could not do the things I had been able to do many years before. With time and effort, things returned, but I was most surprised that because I had listened to others, I was a better musician than when i had last previously played -- not a better technician, but a better musician.

 g. *Find a copy of Arnold Jacobs' book "Song and Wind."*  Read it and keep it so you can re-read it every so often. I know of no finer nor more accurate way to learn about practical respiratory physiology. And it is the result of Mr. Jacobs lifelong obsession with learning about breathing as it relates to playing wind instruments.

***3. One final piece of advice -- along with listening to others learn to listen to yourself and your own playing.*** Be your own best teacher, be your own best critic, be your own best listener. Play for yourself as if you are your own best audience, and buy all means play as you would like to hear the instrument played by someone else if you were listening to them performing in a concert hall, a jazz venue, or wherever you might be! All of this will help one to gain confidence in one's own abilities and that is our very best hedge against stage fright and other calamities which might adversely affect our playing.

Donald K. Roeder, MD, FACS

Don Roeder is a retired Thoracic Surgeon from Carlisle, PA, who has enjoyed playing the trumpet since 1945, except for a seventeen year hiatus while he was a medical student [Jefferson Medical College], intern [Lankenau Hospital] and resident in surgery and thoracic surgery [both at Bethesda Naval Hospital] and served in the US Navy. He has lived in Carlisle since 1974 where he became a "comeback player." In retirement, he now teaches a few trumpet students at the local music store. He served for thirty years as principal trumpet in the Dickinson College-Carlisle Community Orchestra and still serves as the Cornet Soloist with the Carlisle Town Band. While growing up in Roselle Park, NJ, he studied the instrument privately with Forrest A. Bartlett, and at the Union County Band and Orchestra School under Clarence J. Andrews. Don was a founding member of the ITG Non-Pro/Comeback Players Committee and served on that committee from 2005 to 2013. Don made a great many significant contributions to the group and many trumpets players have benefited from his work. The previous discussion is taken from his presentation along with Brian Evans at the International Trumpet Guild Conference held in Harrisburg, PA, in 2009.