

Some Principles for Winds and Brass to Observe in Orchestra Playing

Dr. Cliff Colnot

Nourish the sound from beginning to end. Do not play some notes with vibrato and some without when continuity of expression must be maintained. Of particular importance are the first and last notes of a phrase, regardless of their value. Also, big leaps up and down often suffer from no vibrato which interrupts the line.

Don't play the part in isolation. Determine who has thematic material (most important in the hierarchy) and who has accompaniment. Listen to motor rhythms, repeated note values that constitute a metronome other parts must fit with. Listen for other instruments that are playing the same music and fit with them.

Remember that dynamics are relative. Adjust dynamics up or down one dynamic level depending on the relative importance of the part. Exaggerate dynamic contrasts so that the composition is not performed in varying shades of *mezzo-forte*.

Look ahead, memorize, and look up. Buffer upcoming measures in your memory and look up for visual cues. When there is a structural turn or "corner" in the music, especially when accompanied by a *ritard* or an *accelerando*, watch the conductor. Semi-memorize passages when practicing in preparation for rehearsal, looking at the music briefly, then looking away and playing.

Learn to play *legato*. In Italian, *legato* means BOUND TOGETHER. When playing *legato* there should be NO *diminuendo* right before one changes valves or keys to move to the next note. The volume at the very end of one note should be identical to the beginning of the next note REGARDLESS OF THE NOTE VALUES.

Further, there should be no accent on the new note. It is particularly difficult to play *legato* when there are large leaps up or down. (It helps to precede each large intervallic leap with a small *crescendo*.) And when playing a real *legato*, one should feel very physically engaged.

Project your musical ideas into the audience. The inability to project the sound past your own chair is one of the most challenging problems for wind and brass players. Playing slightly softer but *LEGATO* helps a great deal. And in most repertoire, brass players should go fairly quickly from the consonant to a SUSTAINED vowel. Loading up on the consonant (i.e. the front of the sound) provides a temporary surge of volume, but does not result in a truly projected sound. Finally, remember that the dynamic of your part must be adjusted based on its musical function. If you have the main voice and it is marked *piano*, you must make the adjustment and play louder (and *vice versa*).

Know what note of the chord you are playing at all times, and whether you are in prime unison, unison octaves, two-part harmony, etc. When the winds and brass are playing without a substantial string accompaniment, major thirds and dominant sevenths should be played lower in pitch to achieve consonant overtones and better intonation. Whenever you have a lower octave, play at least one dynamic louder. (This helps the balance and the pitch of the upper octave.) If you are not the main voice and are in prime unison, playing with a little *vibrato* or no *vibrato* is often a good strategy.

ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE PHRASE AND THE POETRY.

