

# **PLAYING FROM THE CORE**

A NEW METHOD FOR FRENCH HORN

TOMMI HYYTINEN, DMUS

 FENNICA GEHRMAN

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# PREFACE

Congratulations to Tommi Hyytinen on his new *“Playing from the Core Method”*! By writing this book he has richly contributed to our literature on instrumental playing. All of his knowledge and experience both as a musical artist and an expert on the Pilates method of exercises are brought together in an original way. Tommi thus manages to explain and show us the benefits of both body and mental exercises in preparation for musical performance. He shares all his wisdom so generously that I have no doubt that all performing artists, especially brass and wind players as well as singers will profit enormously from reading it.

It is indeed a fascinating and comprehensive overview as well as a thorough analysis of all physical functions while playing. We learn about research in the field of anatomy and acquire a deeper understanding of our own body muscles. Correct, efficient and well coordinated use of our body is explained in depth. In order to prevent us from harm and injury there is a “checklist” of pitfalls such as bad posture, poor breathing and a general disbalance between the various parts of our body used while holding our instrument. A set of exercises will help with creating a daily routine.

As we search for more meaning in our daily creative artistic process, Tommi helps us on our way by offering a more spiritual and holistic approach. He emphasises the necessity for more general awareness which will help us fully develop our musical potential and talent. I warmly recommend this work to all fellow musicians and hope you will find as much joy and insight as did I.

Radovan Vlatković

# INTRODUCTION

*Playing from the Core* is not a standard method for the French horn. Having said that, my own path to becoming a horn player was not especially standard either. Sometimes you have to take a few steps to the side in order to be able to move forwards again. In this book I shall highlight some of the observations and discoveries I have made on my journey to becoming a professional musician and a French horn pedagogue. All the exercises outlined in this book are ones that I have developed over the years and found to be very helpful. The majority of them are exercises that I use in my teaching, and I have noticed that students find them helpful with their own playing and the challenges of musical interpretation and performance.

The *Playing from the Core* method is driven by two basic principles. Firstly, the musician's primary instrument is their own body. In my view, instrumental teaching should focus far more – and in a wider sense – on the ways in which musicians can use their bodies more effectively when playing. Good use of the body always helps alleviate the technical challenges of an instrument. The second principle is that mental preparation should always form a part of instrumental teaching. Stage fright, nerves or a lack of concentration regularly prevent musicians from bringing out the best of their talents. A perfect performance is the result of seamless collaboration between mind and body. In order for the musician to bring out the best of their abilities in a performance situation or an audition, the technical work of preparing for the situation should always be accompanied by mental preparation too. Traditionally, however, instrumental teaching focuses too often solely on practicing instrumental technique.

In order to create something new, we must know our history and base our observations on methods that have already proven their efficacy. In other words, we should stand on the shoulders of previous masters. This book takes great inspiration from previous methods for French horn, such as Louis-François Dauprat's *Méthode de Cor-Alto et Cor-Basse* (1824), Oscar Franz's *Waldhornschnule* from the 1860s, Philip Farkas' *The Art of French Horn Playing* (1956), and Verne Reynolds' *The Horn Handbook* (1996). An example of a work that, in addition to its holistic approach to technique, also presents an approach to matters pertaining to the player's body is

Yehudi Menuhin's *The Violin: Six Lessons* (1987). Menuhin enjoyed a long and distinguished career both as a violinist and a pedagogue. What's more, he had a particularly deep understanding of yoga, a matter that comes to the fore in the sections of his book dealing with physical exercises aimed at violinists.

Louis-François Dauprat's *Méthode de Cor-Alto et Cor-Basse* (1824) was the subject of my written dissertation, which formed part of my artistic doctoral degree at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. In his work, Dauprat discusses at length the playing techniques, performance practices, and practice methods for the natural horn. The book also contains a wide selection of exercises and etudes compiled by Dauprat himself. In a show of respect to his predecessor Heinrich Domnich, Dauprat writes: "Though the aim of this book is to provide a new direction in matters regarding the study of the horn, one that we believe is more suitable to the nature, technique and musical functions of the instrument and which we believe will help the student to attain quicker and more secure technical development, it is not our intent to cast a shadow upon those methods already in use for the instrument, least of all Domnich's work" (Dauprat 1824, *Méthode de Cor-Alto et Cor-Basse*). In this regard I intend to continue in Dauprat's footsteps. It is my intention to update certain matters in order to produce a horn method for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to highlight the issues that I consider important in the student's development into a professional musician and horn player in the light of our current knowledge and understanding.

At the beginning of *Playing from the Core*, I present the four guiding principles of my method. The first chapter deals with the principles of the use of the body in horn playing. My observations are based both on anatomy and somatic methods. I describe how to construct the optimal playing posture. In addition, I explain how breathing, support and embouchure function in balance with one another. Chapter Two features practical exercises based on the ideas presented in the previous chapter. The subject of Chapter Three is the symbiosis of body and mind. Here I deal with the physiology of stress and nerves and explain some of the primary causes of stage fright. I explore the idea of mental rehearsal with regard

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

to musicians and examine how presence and imagination exercises can help musicians prepare for a performance. Chapter Four includes imagination exercises to help the student improve and strengthen the bond between mind and body. Chapter Five deals with the notion of balanced practice. Here I deal with the quality and diversity of our practicing, and with how to pace ourselves. Chapter Six includes a wide variety of warm-up, scale and basic technique exercises for horn students. After the exercises is an etude I have composed for the French horn.

One example of a new approach to instrumental study is the idea of 'somatic practice', practice with an awareness of the body, and here I adapt this for the French horn. Also new is the approach to instrumental technique that focuses on the body's deep postural muscles. Playing scales is one of the best ways to get to know your own instrument. One of my objectives is to bring the practicing of scales into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to include Messiaen's modes and the minor modes of jazz. Professional musicians will encounter much contemporary music in the course of their careers, and the music of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries often features far more than simply diatonic scales.

You will notice that throughout this book I am essentially speaking about very traditional aspects of brass playing such as breathing, support, playing posture, embouchure and tonguing. In addition to traditional practice methods, I shall illuminate these technical matters with new perspectives founded on the notion of mind-body practice and anatomical research. An enhanced awareness of matters relating to the body can have considerable positive impact on our learning.

Tommi Hyytinen

This book contains a great deal of information and different kinds of exercises. Some of this information is very specific. However, I have striven to make this book as accessible as possible. As such, each chapter is prefaced with a short **Introduction**, in which I briefly explain what matters will be covered in the chapter ahead. If you wish to acquire a general overview of the information contained in this book, you should read these short introductions. After this the subject of each chapter is examined in the **In a Nutshell** sections. If you then wish to deepen your knowledge further and read about subjects including anatomy or the physiology of stage fright, more in-depth information can be found in the **Deepen Your Knowledge** sections at the end of each chapter.

The instructions and exercises provided in this book are often very specific and individual. This is important in order for them to work and for students to achieve the most effective results. That being said, I have tried to compile the exercises in this book in such a way that each student can use them and adapt them in a way that is suitable to their individual needs.

Patience and persistence are vital qualities in the ultimate successful accomplishment of any worthwhile endeavor.

— Joseph Pilates

# PLAYING FROM THE CORE: FOUR PRINCIPLES

*The Playing from the Core method is not merely a collection of movements and playing exercises, rather the aim of the method is to establish a firm connection between mind and body. The method's four principles are awareness, concentration, core and flow. These principles form the core of the method. Make sure all these principles are present in your practicing. The quality of your practice will improve, as will the quality of your performances too.*

## 1. Awareness

Awareness is the ability to observe, consider and understand the movements of mind and body. It is being present in the moment. Awareness gives us the opportunity to observe new aspects of ourselves and our playing. It makes our practicing more detailed and more precise. By engaging our awareness we can achieve a better grasp of the elements to be practiced. In such precise, awareness practice the quality of the practice is more important than the number of times you repeat something. Listen to your playing and be aware of the use of your body while you play. Let your sense of hearing and proprioceptors (sensory structures that respond to the position and movement of the body) guide your practice. Be aware of your breathing and the moment when the sound begins. Practice informed by awareness fosters controlled playing rich in tone colour.

## 2. Concentration

Concentration is the act of focussing our attention. By harnessing our concentration we can effect changes in our overall control of instrument and body. It makes practice more effective. The *Playing from the Core* method focusses our attention inwards, which helps us better to perceive our mind and body. Concentration is the act of fine-tuning the sensors in the body. The body always reacts better to exercises when the brain is attuned to the correct observations and movements. Practice concentration whenever you are playing. Don't let your thoughts stray but gently guide your mind back to what you are doing. Maintaining the sense of focus while we practice is more important than any individual technical exercise.



### 3. Core

The body's core is the essential element of our every movement and breath. The body works more effectively and in greater balance when movements start from the core. From a performer's perspective, the strengthening of the core can fundamentally revolutionise our playing technique. The body simultaneously acquires greater strength and relaxation, and playing is made easier in a variety of ways. Moreover, the sense of a physically strong core, which supports correct posture, movement and sound production, provides our playing and performances with added self-confidence. One of the central notions throughout the *Playing from the Core* method is that the breath must start from the core. The core also opens up the breath and helps to stabilise the playing posture. When you practice, be constantly aware of how the muscles we use to control the breath work together and make sure that you support from the core of the body. The core is also a spiritual dimension within us. When we are in contact with our core, when we *are* at the core itself, we feel relaxed and trusting. Body, mind and breath are one and the same. When you concentrate on these matters while practicing, you will find the same dimension in performance too.

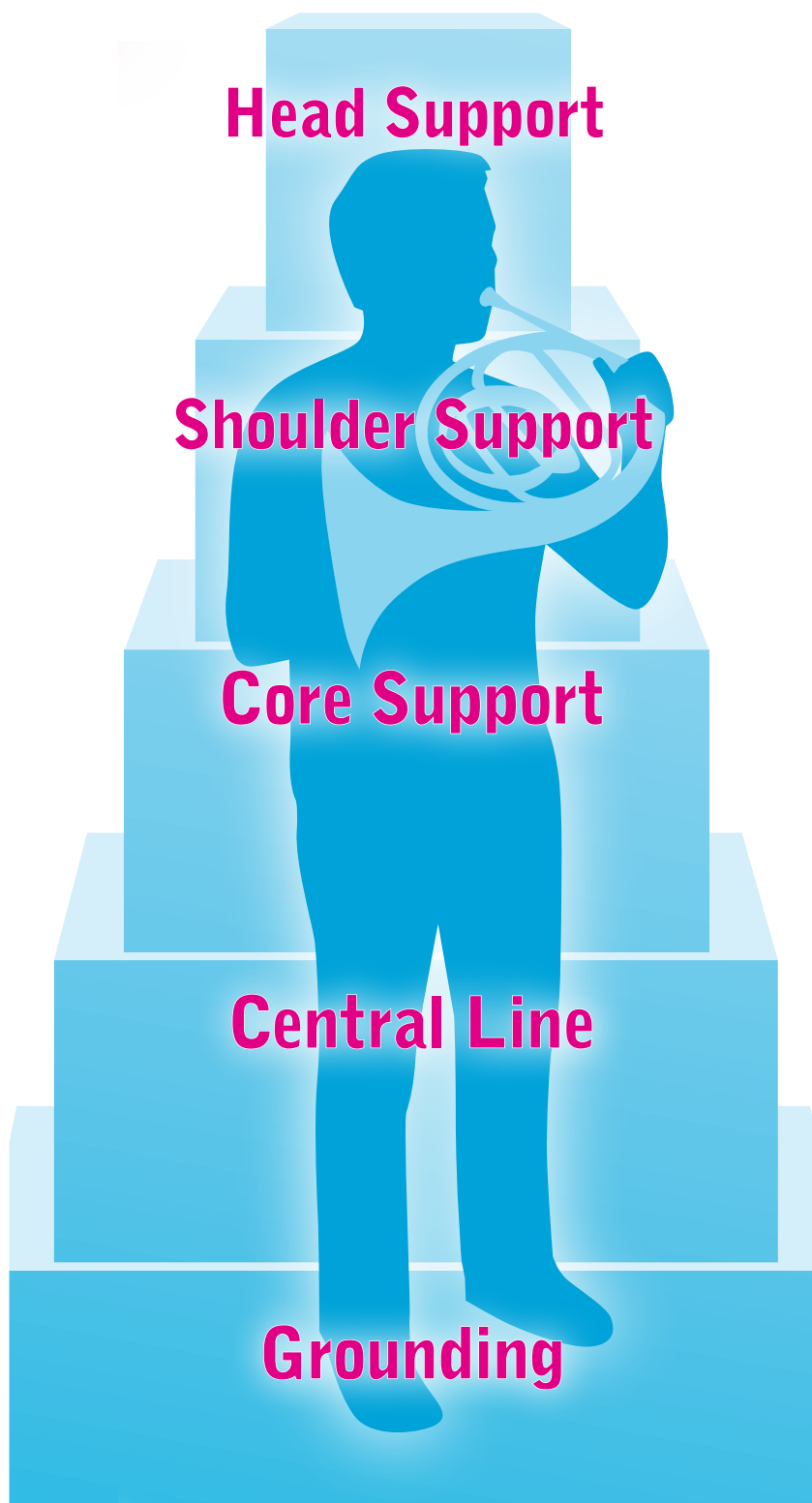
### 4. Flow

The word 'flow' refers to the flow of energy, which brings together awareness, breathing and movement to form a malleable, versatile whole. Practice and performance that contain a sense of 'flow' are motivated; the learning process is positive and at best can be very spontaneous. 'Flow' is also about achieving success that surpasses your expectations. The conscious and flowing movements outlined in the *Playing from the Core* aim to foster a sense of flow. The movements used in this method are designed to be gently flowing, elastic and in constant motion. They should be executed consciously, diligently, like moving through water. The joints should be free and in motion. 'Flow' helps us to maintain our concentration during these movements. The same sense of flow should be applied to the etudes included in this volume.

# BODY

*Good control of the body is at the heart of French horn technique. For instance, the correct support from the body's deep muscles is a basic requirement for the development of correct sound production. We can use a variety of exercises to strengthen and practice using the body's deep muscles. If you have back problems or other health-related challenges, you should consult a doctor before starting the exercises outlined in this book.*

*I will now give a presentation of a musician's use of the body and describe the body's anatomical structures in some detail. It is worth remembering that our use of the body in performance situations should be natural and relaxed. An appreciation of the body's structures and functions helps us to understand the body as a whole entity and teaches us to isolate the causes of challenges that may appear in our playing. Generally speaking, playing can be improved through minor technical alterations. However, this change requires us to understand the cause of the problem and to appreciate why the alteration helps to alleviate the problem, and for this we need to understand the functions of the body.*



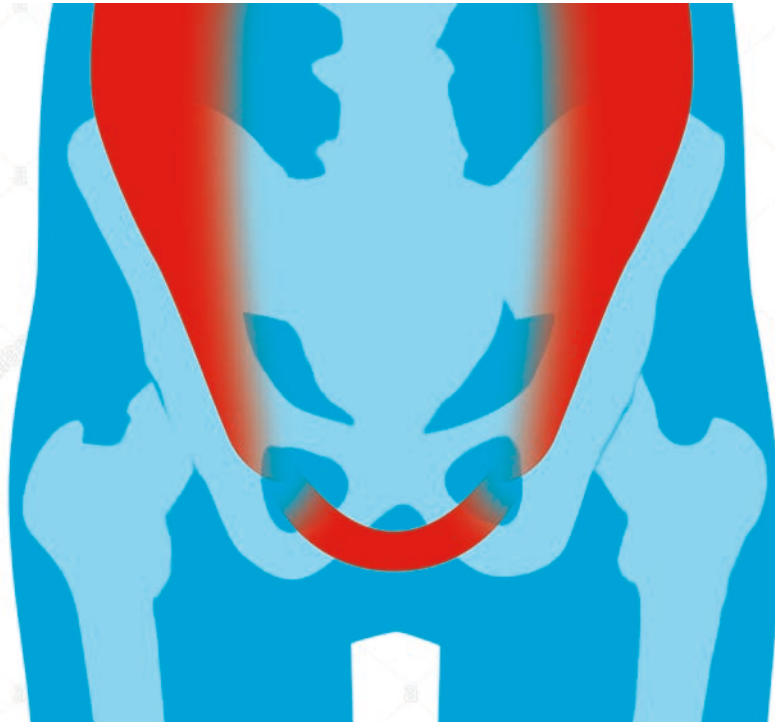
**Head Support**

**Shoulder Support**

**Core Support**

**Central Line**

**Grounding**



## Deepen Your Knowledge

The transverse abdominal muscle (*transversus abdominis*) is the deepest of the abdominal muscles. It sits deep within the abdomen, running around it like a belt. When activated, the transverse abdominal muscle stabilises the lumbar spine, improves breathing capacity and allows all muscles to activate more efficiently. The transverse abdominal muscle should be the first muscle to activate in every movement. When this happens, the other muscles activate in their natural order. The transverse abdominal muscle becomes engaged when we pull our abdomen in towards the spine and slide it upwards towards the rib cage.

At the base of the pelvis there is a layer of muscles called the pelvic floor muscles or *diaphragma pelvis* ('pelvic diaphragm'). These muscles are shaped like a hammock. They form the base of the pelvis, and both support and elevate the weight of the pelvis and organs of the abdomen. The pelvic floor muscles stretch from the pubic bone to the coccyx, and from the side from one ischium to the other. When activated, the pelvic floor muscles rise upwards into a convex shape. The front of the muscles of the pelvic floor are situated beneath the

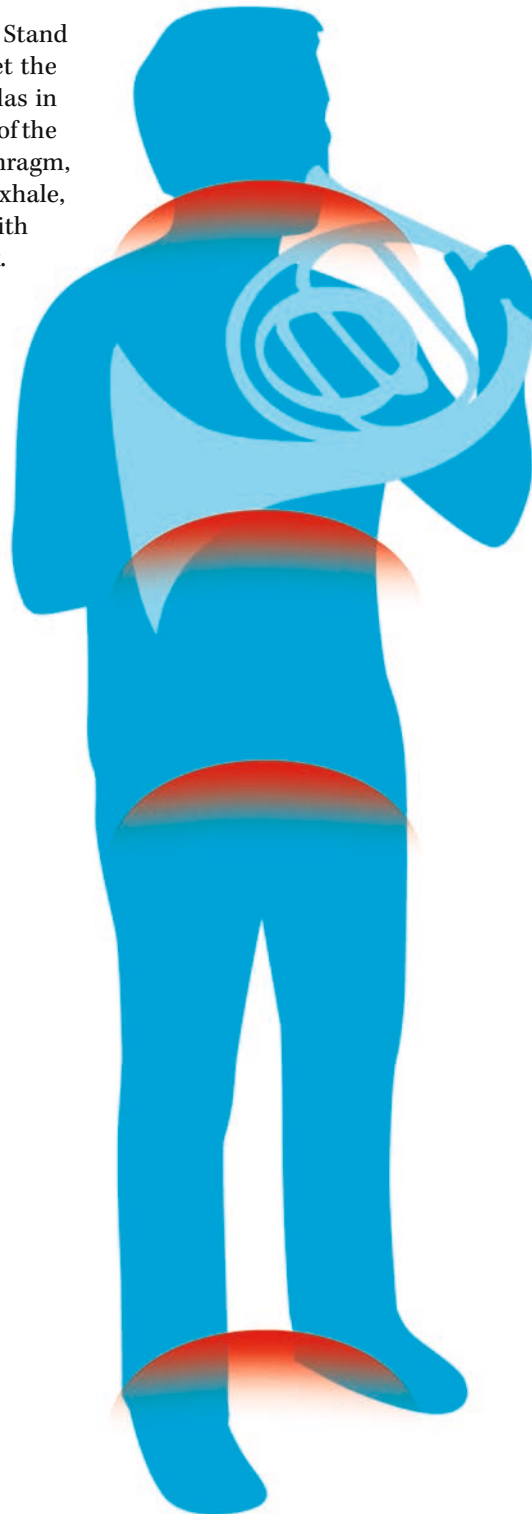
bladder. The sensation of the muscles being fully activated is similar to that of having a full bladder. The muscles of the pelvic floor are linked, through muscle fascia, to the transverse abdominal muscle. The transverse abdominal muscle is always activated when the pelvic floor muscles are activated too. The pelvic floor muscles activate when we pull the ischia closer towards one another and the coccyx towards the pubic bone.

The muscles stabilising the lower back, the back's deep multifidus muscles, work together with the transverse abdominal muscle to support the spine. The multifidus muscles are connected to the same muscle fascia, the thoracolumbar fascia, as the transverse abdominal muscle. When the lumbar spine is in an optimal position and the transverse abdominal muscle is activated, the multifidus muscles also become activated and help maintain the spine in a neutral position.

The multifidus muscles are the deepest extensor muscles in the back. They are involved in all back extension movements, whenever the pelvic floor muscles and the transverse abdominal muscle are active. Thus, the core support muscles work together seamlessly and

## BALANCED STANDING POSITION 2: THE FOUR CUPOLAS

Body posture using the deep muscle fascia: Stand with your body in the central line, your feet the width of the hips apart. Imagine four cupolas in your body one on top of the other: the arches of the feet, the muscles of the pelvic floor, the diaphragm, and the back of the soft palate. As you exhale, raise these cupolas one at a time, starting with the arches of the feet. As you inhale, relax. Repeat five to ten times. Perform this movement from deep within the body, along the length of the spine. In practice, the raising of the diaphragm means engaging the abdominal muscles. Feel the spine and neck lengthening and your breathing opening up. This exercise strengthens the deep frontal line and opens up the breathing.



# THE UNITY OF MIND AND BODY

*The unity of mind and body is the key to relaxed and concentrated playing. In a relaxed and focused state of mind, our playing flows freely and unhindered. In the previous chapter, I examined the balanced use of the body in detail; in this chapter, I will present some of the principles and exercises we can use to make the entity of mind and body work properly. Some of these exercises are designed to be used in preparation for a live performance, because nerves and mental stress are often at their most powerful when we perform.*

## MIND AND MUSIC

“Music activates a wide network of nerves in the brain which regulates the memory, emotions, alertness and attentiveness.”  
—Neural researcher Teppo Särkämö

### Introduction

Of all the stimuli we receive through our senses, music exerts the most widespread effect on our brain. Music can very effectively develop the functioning of the brain. The left and right cerebral hemispheres control different aspects of everything we do. This applies to playing too. In performing music, in which both the analytical and the interpretational aspects of the music are balanced with each other, we need the workings of both sides of the brain.

### In a Nutshell

In recent years, the impact of music on the brain has been studied widely in Finland in the field of cognitive sciences. For instance, researchers Teppo Särkämö, Mari Tervaniemi and Minna Huotilainen have taken part in a research group called Music and the Brain. The observations presented in this chapter about the effect of music on the functioning of the brain are based on newspaper articles and reports that I have read based on their research.

Singing and playing instruments help develop the functioning of the brain. In fact, brain matter can increase through regular musical activity. For instance, playing an

instrument develops our attentiveness. Players have to use their powers of concentration selectively and will immediately receive feedback if their attentiveness is lacking. A musician's corpus callosum is thicker than that of someone who is not involved with music. Music helps to develop those areas of the brain associated with motoric skills and the sense of hearing.

Different aspects of music are processed in different parts of the cerebral hemispheres. As we play, the left cerebral hemisphere processes the length of notes and the temporal order and rhythm of notes. Additionally, we use the left side of the brain, the analytical side, to read sheet music. The right cerebral hemisphere governs aspects of sound memory, analyses sound colour and timbre, and helps us to recognise different notes. We use the right side of the brain, the holistic side, to interpret music. In good playing, the right and left sides of the brain operate in a balanced fashion. A one-sided approach to practice, one that concentrates on the mistakes and wrong notes, easily overloads the workings of the left cerebral hemisphere.



## Deepen Your Knowledge

Hearing is the foundation of the development of speech. Additionally, the hearing is an important sense from the perspective of social and cultural interaction. Our sense of hearing develops as a foetus in the eighth week of pregnancy. What's more, of all the stimuli we receive via our senses, 80 to 90% of them come through the ears.

In earlier times, the passing on of an oral tradition, that is a sung or spoken tradition, underlined the significance of the sense of hearing. In modern times, however, visual stimuli are more prevalent in our everyday lives. In the course of a single day, we receive many different sensory stimuli, and this can lead to somewhat hectic brain activity. For those of us who work daily with sound, music and aural stimuli, it can be a good idea to consciously practice being present through our sense of hearing, as it were, a conscious listening. In addition to calming our mind, this leads us deeper into the music itself.

The work of a musician involves lots of playing from sheet music. Learning to read music is one of the first things we do. When we perform, it is important to be present as much as possible through our sense of hearing and to discover the music behind the notes.

Music exerts a very holistic impact upon us. In addition to activating the auditory cortex, it also activates the motor cortex. What's more, music triggers areas of

the brain governing motor skills, emotions and creativity. Music has a positive impact on the brain's neurotransmitters. Listening to music can also bring about a calm, concentrated yet attentive state of flow.

Music also affects the heartbeat, the breath, muscle tension, and the processes of the central nervous system. The vibrations of music run through the body very effectively, because the bones serve as large vibration conductors and because two thirds of the body and three quarters of the brain consists of water. At an atomic level, everything in the body consists of vibration. We can even imagine that the tissues of the body vibrate at particular frequencies. When these tissues begin to vibrate with aural stimuli, the blood flow and various different metabolic processes become heightened and more effective.

Every time we consciously produce sound from an instrument, it has a variety of effects. In addition to the proprioceptors, the mindfulness exercises contained in this method will help heighten our sense of hearing too. When we are present in our hearing and throughout our body, we can achieve a relaxed, focused state of flow which in turn makes our playing freer and better balanced.

## WARM-UP EXERCISE 2.2

♩ = 60-80

The musical score consists of seven staves of music in 3/4 time, marked *mf*. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 3/4 time signature. The first staff includes a dynamic marking of *mf*. The music is divided into two measures per staff, separated by a double bar line. The first measure of each staff contains a melodic line with a slur over the notes, and the second measure contains a similar melodic line. The notes and accidentals vary across the staves, including natural, sharp, and flat signs. The final staff ends with a double bar line.



# WARM-UP EXERCISES BUZZING WITH THE LIPS AND MOUTHPIECE

Warming up by buzzing with the lips and mouthpiece is useful as long as we don't take the exercise to extremes. At its best, this buzzing exercise is a good way of waking up the embouchure muscles. If done too much or too strenuously, it can tighten the muscles of the embouchure and can 'lock' the embouchure. From the perspective of the embouchure muscles, buzzing is very different from playing. Moreover, it has a different impact on the muscles than playing. When buzzing with the mouthpiece, avoid excessive pressure against the lips and focus on constructing a relaxed, freely resonating sound. Perform this exercise three to four times a week so that your lips can recover and your stamina continues to increase.

## Aims

- Warm up the embouchure
- Improve the vibration of the lips
- Open up the sound
- Develop the upper register
- Improve attack
- Increase agility
- Practice legato playing

## While You Practice

- Engage support and use the flow of air exactly as you would when playing
- Keep the larynx open
- Aim for a resonant sound
- Pay attention to intonation
- Focus on the position of the tongue while changing note
- Support the corners of the mouth from the side
- Aim for a 'puckered smile' embouchure
- Use appropriate vowels in different registers
- Aim the air slightly downwards, towards the bottom of the mouthpiece
- Inhale back and to the sides

## LIP BUZZING WARM-UP EXERCISE

$\text{♩} = 60-90$   
*mf*

The exercise is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of 60-90 beats per minute and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It consists of two staves. The first staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. This sequence is repeated three times, each time with a wavy line above the notes indicating a vibrato effect. The second staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. This sequence is repeated three times, also with a wavy line above the notes indicating a vibrato effect.

## MOUTHPIECE BUZZING WARM-UP EXERCISE

$\text{♩} = 60-90$   
*mf*

The exercise is written in 4/4 time with a tempo of 60-90 beats per minute and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. It consists of three staves. The first staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. This sequence is repeated three times, each time with a wavy line above the notes indicating a vibrato effect. The second staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. This sequence is repeated three times, also with a wavy line above the notes indicating a vibrato effect. The third staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. This sequence is repeated three times, also with a wavy line above the notes indicating a vibrato effect.

# SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS: EXERCISES

A French horn player's daily practice regime should include exercises focussing on scales and arpeggios. Scale warm-up is simultaneously a way of warming up the embouchure, tongue and fingers. Buzz the first note with the lips. Practicing scales up and down with different types of articulation is excellent preparation for the rapid passages in Classical concertos. The scale exercises in this book contain a wide selection of different scales. 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century music contains many different kinds of scales, everything from pentatonic scales to the jazz minor, from Messiaen's modes to the harmonic major scale. Fluency in different kinds of scales helps us approach new works and makes sense of their musical content. Scale exercises are also excellent ways of practicing our basic control of the instrument. We can use these exercises to practice clean, articulated tonguing technique and to coordinate the air flow and the tongue.

The variations included in the scale exercises start with the major modes. The major scale and the jazz minor are two of the most important basic scales whose modes (in the major, the so-called 'church modes') form the 14 possible seven-note scales consisting both of semitones and whole tones.

Pentatonic scales are considered the oldest basic structures of harmony, which have given rise to many other scales of multiple notes. Over time, these scales developed from pentatonic to diatonic and from diatonic to chromatic. As such, the distance between the intervals of the scales has become smaller and smaller.

Many scales used in 20<sup>th</sup> century music make use of symmetrical structures. This means that the intervals between the notes are the same from beginning to end as from end to beginning. Symmetry can also mean that a certain structure repeats within the octave. The scales developed by Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) are divided into two, three or four segments within the octave, each of which has the same intervallic structure. In addition to the major scale and the jazz minor, other important seven-note scales are the harmonic minor and major. These differ structurally from the major and jazz minor in that, in addition to whole tones and semitones, these scales also include an augmented second.

Play each scale in all keys. You can add an element of improvisation to these exercises. Play with the scales and use them to create new melodies.

## Aims

- Sharpens tonguing and attack
- Practices listening and intonation
- Increases stamina
- Develops breathing technique
- Improves control of the upper register and moving from lower to upper register
- Practices fingering technique
- Teaches scales and arpeggios

## While You Practice

- Seek to achieve good coordination of fingers, tongue and breath
- Listen to the intonation of the intervals
- Find an articulation point of the tongue that produces the cleanest attack possible
- Play precise scales, perfectly in tune
- Strive for lightness of tone
- Rise into the upper register using a strong, well-supported breath
- Use lateral breath
- Pay attention to the different positions of the tongue and the vowels
- First think through the scale or arpeggio mentally, then play it with the instrument. Listen internally
- Make sure each note is played with good quality

# SCALE WARM-UP

♩ = 60-120

mf

Sim. Ab, A, Bb, B $\natural$