

by Karl Sievers

As a college trumpet professor and active professional performer, I encounter a broad variety of performance situations. In addition, in my work with high school programs, I try to help younger musicians deal with their performance challenges. Considered altogether, there are many different scenarios we face in the performance experience. However, there are a few techniques that all of us can use.

In this article I will share some thoughts that should help you experience a higher rate of performance successes, and make the performance experience more satisfying in general.

The first bit of advice I will offer is that there is no substitute for preparation. This means that you know your material inside and out, and that you are in great shape. Being in "great shape" must encompass physical and mental conditioning, because we simply cannot separate the two. Our chops must be strong, and our minds must be strong. Bill Adam (Indiana University Trumpet Professor, retired) told me a story about the great trombonist Tommy Dorsey. He asked Tommy why he practiced so much, and Tommy replied, "I'm working on my confidence." Tommy Dorsey was already a great player, but he accepted two indisputable facts: (1) great brass playing takes maintenance, and (2) going through your material on your own solidifies your thinking and results in the development of great confidence.

If you practice diligently, with your head somewhere other than where it should be, you won't get very far. Where should your head be? Practicing is a combination of training the physical self and the mental self to be able to respond with a very high degree of excellence on a consistent basis. This leads me to "bit of advice number two," which is actually an amplification of number one! Practice everything as if it is music. This includes warm-up drills, multiple tonguing, etudes, high notes, low notes, you name it. Those who perform with a great sound and with a

high degree of musicality pursue those skills each time they take the horn out of the case. Those who only try to "turn on" those skills when an audience is present will have a very tough time. It is no fun to listen to someone play who can get a lot of notes but makes no music.

Certainly there are times in our practice sessions when we must work out difficult passages, use a metronome, and employ other techniques that might not lend themselves to feeling very musical. However, once we have a piece of music coming along fairly well, we must always use "bit of advice number three" and that is to practice performing. This means we imagine being on stage (or wherever!), there is an audience present, and it is "for keeps." We imagine an atmosphere of some nervousness, combined with excitement. We imagine the entire piece, all the way through, in the recital hall (or wherever) sounding great, with the greatest sound possible. It is unrealistic for most of us to expect to be wonderful in performance if we have not done it many, many times. However, performance can be practiced in the practice room if we use our imaginations! The great performers are able to lock into the music that is in their imaginations to such a great extent that all excess baggage falls away.

When I am preparing for a performance, I will literally spend time alone, in quiet, imagining the performance going incredibly well, in great detail, from beginning to end. When it is time to actually do it, I will have cultivated the mental imagery to such a high extent that it becomes reality for me on stage.

Practicing while imagining being in a performance can make us nervous even in the practice room, but only at first. We learn to not fear being nervous. Nervousness is a natural element of performance. Fear does not have to be. Preparation can help us banish fear, which allows that nervousness to become energy, which we can use to help us play to our highest potential.

If we know we are well prepared, know we are in great shape physically and mentally, and know that our imaginary scenario is very solid in our minds, we can walk out on stage with great confidence, knowing that we are about to have a great performance experience (and we will)!



About Karl Sievers



Karl Sievers serves as Professor of Trumpet at Wright State University (Dayton, Ohio), as well as directing their jazz band and brass choir. He holds bachelor and master degrees from Indiana University, and is currently working towards a doctorate at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. Major teachers influencing Karl's performance and teaching styles include Leon Rapier (principal trumpet Louisville Orchestra, deceased), Louis Davidson, Bill Adam and Charles Gorham (while at Indiana University), and Keith Benjamin (University of Missouri in Kansas City). Karl performs on the standard Bach Stradivarius 180-37 (medium-large bore) trumpet.

For more information on a clinic or master class by Karl Sievers at your school, please contact The Selmer Company.