

The Routine, Why We Do What We Do

Robert Slack

Throughout the world, many lives have been profoundly transformed by studying with William Adam.

Mr. Adam was much more than a trumpet teacher. He was a mentor, philosopher, a life coach and for many a father figure. His wisdom and belief in everyone entering his studio was infectious. To him everyone was important, and each individual deserved his very best. There were no preconceived perceptions based on academic position or age, only the absolute respect of one's effort to improve. He focused on each individual's developmental needs, realizing it might take more time and patience (for some) to develop certain aspects of the mental and physical processes he taught.

Mr. Adam's, "Now go fire it up!" phrase was his not-so-subtle acknowledgement that this method of playing takes a great deal of time, effort and patience if you want to turn the corner. There are no quick fixes.

We are often asked questions about the "routine" and why it's done in a specific order. Mr. Adam generally avoided giving too much specific information, instead he reinforced his concept of goal orientation.

To better explain what follows, I'm including a portion of my **Preface** from "A Tribute to William Adam" His teachings and his Routine. (Compiled and edited by my friend Charley Davis, available from Balquhiddie music).

Through the years William Adam's approach to teaching the trumpet has gone through considerable development. His concepts and his specific methods were grounded in his thorough understanding of physics, physiology and psychology. A great deal of misunderstanding has arisen concerning the "Adam Method"; first and foremost, the Adam method is not one inflexible approach that each student must mindlessly adhere to. Mr. Adam's use of "The Routine" is generally based on established methods carefully applied to address a particular student's individual developmental needs. The notion that the Adam method can be applied by mindlessly repeating exercises is the single biggest misconception to understanding his approach. The fact is that he would carefully weigh each student's performance to determine if there were any inherent weaknesses, then and only then would he begin to assign very particular applications to his method enhancing both development and maintenance protocols. This is the very reason William Adam resisted the idea of penning a method book. His process requires one on one attention. He believed that successful instruction took place when a student was unaware of

any potential problems; then by subtle emphasis on a particular approach to blowing, Mr. Adam's process would affect a positive outcome.

Furthermore, he believed that the vast majority of psychological and physiological problems could be overcome through a positive mental outlook and goal orientation. He strongly believed that the mental aspects of performing must not be overlooked. He often recommended students read Psycho-Cybernetics, The Inner Game of Tennis, and other self-help books to better understand the crucial aspects of self-image. His goal-oriented approach strives to achieve a unity between the mind and body, generating one thought solely focused on the particular sound or style being performed.

Mr. Adam would carefully listen and watch each individual, making subtle adjustments in the way he executed a particular exercise or piece of literature. Vital to understanding his approach was to intently listen to his example emulating his sound. He knew without a doubt, that if he could alter your aural goal, (goal orientation) over time, one's physical system would improve without ever being aware that any change had taken place. This is why he always resisted writing a book. The magic is not in the exercises, it was in the execution of the beautiful, seemingly effortless sound he produced. Those of us that were fortunate enough to study with him are doing our best to carry on his legacy. Each of us takes that responsibility very seriously.

This approach to trumpet playing / musicianship is based on the teaching of William Adam. My interpretations are based on my experiences -

A) Sound or Tone: Our individual sound "IS" our calling card. The sound (core, opulence) must never change irrespective of register, dynamic, speed, or style of music!

B) Technique: Technique must be fluid and connected, never sacrificing sound for speed. Lasting facility (technique) on the horn comes from the methodical repetition of accelerating our breath through the sound.

Velocity and facility come from intently hearing the sound. Our thoughts control the energy and the acceleration of our breath creating the desired sound. Our sound concept is solely responsible for technical facility and must be void of any physical awareness.

C) Tonguing or pronunciation: Imagine playing as if you are pronouncing a word. The syllables float on the breath and are enunciated by the tongue. Here again, the

breath is the driving motivator of our sound, the tongue simply floats on the breath. Our tongue only divides the breath, it never stops the breath.

The pronunciation floats on the breath. Of course, there are literally dozens of different types of articulation, depending on the style and/or period of music you're performing. There is an abundance of information written as to what your tongue should or should not physically do to achieve a particular type of articulation. To that I say, hogwash; a mind is a terrible thing to waste! Simply hear what you want to play and execute! Never ever think about your tongue. Keep your mind in the aural goal of what you want it to sound like.

D) Endurance and range: I believe the most difficult concept to understand is the need for consistent, deliberate practice. The daily deep dive into exhaustive, thorough practice is absolutely necessary in order to truly master these skills. "It takes a great deal of energy to play the trumpet, but it shouldn't take any force," is a direct quote from Mr. Adam.

We must be willing to work through the challenges without getting frustrated or trying some hair-brained idea received from the internet and such. Cyberspace is filled with equipment advice, physical gimmicks, and misguided concepts to improve your trumpet playing. Trust me, few if any of these are going to help!

The human brain is able to intently focus on only one thought at a time. When we divide our goal orientation of sound into sensory perception of lips, tongue or any physical aspect, failure is imminent.

Next is an explanation of how I do my actual practice session -

E) Leadpipe: We never focus on "buzzing" the leadpipe. The concept of "blowing" the leadpipe is to accelerate our breath through the imagined sound with the least amount of resistance. The first fundamental pitch on a standard Bach Bb pipe is concert Eb. We achieve this while clearly hearing the desired pitch as we accelerate the air through the pipe. Please understand, there are a great many physical things that happen when we play the trumpet. Focusing on the sensory aspects of playing distracts our thoughts from the goal of sound. Thinking about buzzing makes us physically aware, so it is vital that this be avoided. Again, the basic idea of blowing the leadpipe is to get our air moving through the desired pitch/sound as efficiently as possible. We then take that "follow-through" to the horn.

F) Long tones or (flow studies): We don't simply blow air into the horn. We must accelerate the air through the sound we are trying to achieve. After we've got the air moving/accelerating through the pipe, we then transfer that energy to the horn. You

might notice that everything in the "routine" begins in the mid-register and works up and down throughout the registers. It is imperative that we never think up nor down; Mr. Adam called this playing "flat out." Flat out does not mean loud. The intent here is to always think linear. This is by design. As we begin to warm up, we continually energize the sound via accelerating the breath through our mental concept (or goal) of what we are playing.

These first exercises are meant to help us achieve a full, resonant sound on the horn. Remember in the earliest part of our day we never play too loud, too fast, or too high too soon. We must allow time for our thoughts and physiology to warm up.

I encourage students to listen intently to great players on all instruments and in all styles to develop a refined sound concept.

G) Clarke #1: Now we begin to smoothly accelerate the air through the fingers as evenly as possible as if we were playing a smooth long tone. Our goal here is to play these slowly, eventually speeding up without losing the core of our sound. Remember, technique must not lose the core of our sound. Like our tongue, our fingers float on the breath driven by our sound concept (remember listening). This approach, through time and repetition, will improve your speed and efficiency if you stay at it!

H) Schlossberg and Glantz studies: As we know, the basic routine contains a great deal of Schlossberg exercises. Take for instance Schlossberg # 31. To get the "Max" benefit of Schlossberg exercises, we must maintain our ideal sound throughout the registers of the horn.

Mr. Adam called this, "playing flat out," not thinking up nor down. Everything is straight out in front of us. We continually accelerate the air/sound in all registers with no change in sound opulence or core!

The Glantz studies (Progressive Technique - Colin) re-enforce all of these concepts and contain so many excellent examples of what we will face in literature: progressively wider intervals, articulation etc. I recommend doing the Glantz studies several times a week, alternating in various keys.

I) Additional scale, chord, flexibility and pronunciation studies: Remember, almost everything we will be required to perform is built on scales, patterns and chords. Mastering these is crucial to our continued growth and maintenance.

Final Thoughts –

The danger in doing anything repetitively is that we may lose concentration. We must always focus intently on every pitch/sound, never allowing our mind to drift. We should always be in a performance frame of mind, not just blowing mindless exercises.

As we practice, if we miss something or make a reading mistake, don't try and fix it by hacking and slashing away at it on your trumpet. Put your horn down and sing the passage until you have it firmly in your mind's ear. Now play through it again slowly, allowing your thoughts to lead the process.

Again, there are a great many physical things that happen when we play the trumpet. Moving our conscious thought away from the sound into the awareness of muscle activity stops the creative process.

There are many misconceptions suggesting we use some technique or apparatus away from the horn to develop the muscles of the embouchure, this moves our thoughts into isometric action and away from the sound. I believe that is not where we want to be. We get our causes and results backwards. As Mr. Adam would say, "That's putting the cart before the horse!"

Whatever version of the routine you use, including supplements, when done properly, develops the resilience, flexibility and strength to play with a beautiful, opulent sound at all volumes and in all styles. There are simply no gimmicks, short cuts etc. Thoughtful, consistent practice with clear goals as to what you are trying to musically achieve will set you free.

J) A few helpful trumpet fundamental books to include in your library:

H. L. Clarke: Technical Studies, Max Schlossberg: Daily Drills, J.B. Arban: Complete Conservatory Method, H. L. Clarke: Setting Up Drills, James Stamp: Warm-ups + Studies, Saint Jacome: Grand Method, Charles Colin: Progressive Technique (Glantz), Charles Colin: Advanced Lip Flexibilities, William Thieck: The Art of Trumpet Playing, Vincent Cichowicz: Flow Studies, Charley Davis: A Tribute to William Adam.

On and on, there are too many to list!

This very brief list does not include the thousands of etudes and vocalises, plus solo and orchestra literature that we must learn to master. Rotating through these must be part of your daily sets!

I encourage students to listen to every possible style of music. Focus on the masters of each style. Trust me, you never know what the future may bring. Being able to navigate diverse musical settings enhances your future employment opportunities.

Now go practice,

Bob Slack

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