

# The Teachings of William Adam

Karl Sievers, DMA

Principal Trumpet, Oklahoma City Philharmonic

[Karltrumpet55@gmail.com](mailto:Karltrumpet55@gmail.com)

# Disclaimers:

- This is my take, only mine
- I had more than one great teacher – Leon Rapiet, Louis Davidson, others, but none impacted me to the degree that Mr. Adam impacted me
- Mr. Adam was very much a whole person teacher – great emphasis was placed on character, but for today's session we will focus on the pedagogy
- Our purpose today is not to tell anyone how to play the trumpet; if you are sounding great and are happy with what you are doing, keep doing it

# Divide into Two Categories

- Philosophy
- Application

# Philosophy

- Work ethic – he led by example
- Zero excuses
- No tolerance for self-pity
- Get causes and results in the proper order
- Kinesthetic response
- "The trumpet is a wind instrument."
- "Keep your mind on the sound."
- You must play enough hours per day, day after day, over a long period of time, in order to develop the face, the breath, and the mental discipline you'll need to play your best.

# 5 Senses

- Trumpet playing must always be in the "aural."
- There is focal and there is peripheral.
- As soon as "feel" becomes focal, aural becomes peripheral. Frustration comes next... stay in the aural (triggers proper kinesthetic responses).
- Frustrated players stubbornly go to the sense of "feel." If it ain't working, you gotta make a change.

# Application

- The "routine," augmented by Arban and other fundamentals resources (St. Jacome, Wurm, others)
- Everything you play is absolutely dedicated to an intense focus on the detail of your imagined ideal sound.
- Everything you play is preceded by a full inhale. The breath is delivered with balanced energy, in freedom vs "muscled."
- The motive power of the breath originates from the "ki."

- Lots of listening, often done socially with friends. Jazz, classical, opera, trumpeters, non-trumpeters
- Mr. Adam was VERY selective as to whom to choose as a model. His big 3 were Adolph Herseth, Doc Severinsen, and Maurice Andre. While he respected others, if their sound lacked the "silver" or "opulence" he wanted us to model, he would steer us back to these three. This goes back to kinesthetic response. The very moment you achieve a sound resembling that of those three, your mechanics adjust accordingly (this is a good thing!).

- If you want to apply this knowledge, you cannot cherry-pick the portions that appeal to you at your current level of understanding and combine that with other concepts that may be contradictory. Success will come with a whole-hearted commitment, and yes, mastery takes time and effort.
- Is this a "method?" No. Mr. Adam would have rebelled at the notion that he had a method per se. He evaluated each person and created a path for them to become free of their limitations, and in so doing enjoy a far more rewarding experience playing the trumpet.



- Mr. Adam's “approach” was very individualized... Yes there are concepts that pervaded every lesson, applicable to every student, but to get from a) where you are to b) where you want to be, took his diagnostic genius, which resulted in a plan tailored just for you, which of course was organic and might take on different nuances as your path evolved.

# Most Important Basic Tenets

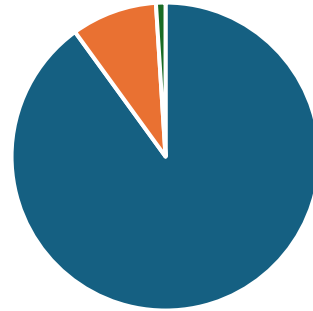
- Causes and Results

- Most have that backwards. Via pursuing "the result" the "causes" are generated in the most efficient and natural order. The "result" is a vividly conceived, ideal sound.
- Only via establishing and pursuing the result can the causes be properly guided. The opposite would be to try to play the trumpet "correctly" and in so doing hope you sound good, or have high notes, or are accurate, or fill-in-the-blank...

Therefore, avoid instruction that consciously manipulates the physical. Rather, adjust the sound to cause the "causes" to evolve and change appropriately.

# The Trumpet Player's Mind

- Mr. Adam created a pie chart which he would often draw for us:



- Imagination of the Sound
- The Breath
- Everything Else

- The imagination of that ideal sound, as Mr. Adam said time and again, "THE sound," is the absolutely most dominant thought.
- There is awareness of the Breath, quantified here as 9%; simply put, it's there, it's important, but is dwarfed by the dominant commitment to "the" sound
- "Everything else" fits into the 1% category. This could mean everything from awareness of so-called "embouchure"(more on that later) to posture to finger position to the hardware to the conductor or the venue or the person sitting beside you, etc...

- In order to know what he meant by "the" sound, we must emphasize the power of modeling, in person or via recordings.
- Mr. Adam modeled nearly everything we did in a lesson. It was rare for him to sit back while we played without him modeling first, other than when a recital or audition was really ready to go.
- Things that were communicated via modeling included his incredible sound, his energy, his posture, his breathing, his enthusiasm, the totality. And it is important to emphasize here...

- This process was almost entirely unspoken. This is a huge point, which leads to the notion of "kinesthetic response."
- Imitation is far more powerful, far simpler, far more intuitive, far less fraught with problems and misinterpretations, than trying to get there via the spoken or (worse) written word. Simply: imitate.
- A typical anecdote: You entered the lesson feeling lousy – nothing was working.. Chops feel awful, range sucks, you suck, not happy! You emerged after an hour of serious work, and your chops feel great, YOU feel great, your friends ask, "how did your lesson go?"

- You are all smiles and enthusiastically answer, "it went GREAT!" OK cool! What did he tell you? You puzzle over that for a moment, and your answer is, "nothing!"
- This is a scenario we all experienced time and again. The power of imitation, and save the dialogue to sharing a funny story or whatever, but not talk about "how to play the trumpet."
- This approach tended to take care of the breath too – other than Mr. Adam often reminding us, "take a big breath!"

# What about the 1%?

- As said, that 1% could literally be anything, but I think we'd all agree that trumpet players, especially frustrated trumpet players (!) tend to obsess on "feel" and especially how the embouchure feels.
- Is my embouchure OK?
- I felt great yesterday, but not today.
- Why do I run out of gas playing my solo...maybe I better save my chops.



- Mr. Adam taught us that awareness of the embouchure has no place in trumpet playing. Read that again, yes, he meant it.
- "The only awareness you should have is of the music, you're not aware of me, or the trumpet in your hand, only the music."
- The principle here is, the breath is constantly trained, so it is now intuitive. **The mind's focus on the result is so intense that there is room for no other thought.** This mentality tells the body what to do. All the "1%" elements are now taken care of and are now meaningless.

# OK, so what is meant by "kinesthetic response?"

- Essentially, the notion of kinesthetic response is that physical or motor actions are the result of a thought. They are triggered by a thought. Whatever is in our mind tells the body what to do. Therefore,
- We recognize that we can learn to control our thoughts, but we can never control our motor activity beyond at best, one thing at a time, if even that.
- On the other hand, the greater the clarity of thought we have, the more detailed is the information our mind needs to tell the body what to do, so...

- Through disciplined practice, we learn to direct our thinking to the "result" and let the causes take care of themselves (which is a FAR more musical place to be than worrying about my corners!)
- I would argue that if there is a "William Adam 101" this is it.
- When Adolph Herseth famously was asked, "before you play Pictures, what are you thinking about?" And he answered, "I'm thinking about how it goes!" Exactly.

# A note about Embouchure

- "The embouchure forms as a RESULT of the act of blowing."
- "A great embouchure allows you to do whatever you want to do on the trumpet for a sufficient time."
- "The area under the mouthpiece ALWAYS stays soft."
- The strength of a good embouchure is not in the lips, it is in the buccinators (which engage as a product of the act of blowing as stated).
- All you need to know about embouchure is to get a great tone and keep that freely delivered, energized breath going.

# How the sound controls the embouchure

- Only in the presence of "the" sound is the embouchure justified, or correct, for YOU.
- It does not matter what it looks like.
- You cannot form a proper embouchure absent of a great sound.
- If you can keep that ideal sound dead even and consistent throughout the registers, "chop problems" tend to disappear. (If you think you have chop problems, you can bet they are preceded by losing your sound...).

# What's up with this "routine" I've heard about?

- In order to create an orderly and effective practice regimen, Mr. Adam devised a series of exercises that became known as "the routine" at Indiana University. This was entirely nothing special, but was comprised of very commonly used exercises from Clarke and Schlossberg. There is no voodoo to it, or no "golden key" as Mr. Adam said.
- The "routine" evolved and changed over the years. I'm happy to delve into that if anyone is curious.
- It is absolutely vital to note also that while most of us did a lot in common, we all were given exercises intended just for us, or instructions specific to us as individuals, to help with whatever our issues were.

# Potential problems with the routine

- You must play these very generic exercises with the concept of sound we are describing.
- You must play these exercises with freely delivered, energized breath.
- You must pace yourself.
- If it becomes stale due to the repetitiveness of it, either keep it mentally fresh or don't do it.
- Play everything as if it is music, not a calisthenic.

# Important Tenets to Apply to "the Routine"

- Which of course leads me to say, apply to everything we play.
- The routine is a training ground to establish my global skillset.
- **Follow-through** is an absolutely vital Adam trademark. But it is hard to describe. Great opera singers sing with follow-through. A great golf swing has follow-through. Great trumpet playing has a horizontal, linear connection from every sound to the next sound, or even to the silence, that must be absolutely unbroken. Lesser players break their follow-through. This does not falter or fluctuate one iota regardless of interval, register, of dB level.



- It is not possible to consciously engage a physical action in exactly the right way, exactly the right amount of effort, such that good results will be achieved.

# It is a wind instrument!

- If you do not thoroughly understand the concept of the air column within the trumpet and the standing wave, look it up. This information is vital. You do not NEED to know this, but if you think the lips cause the sound, you need to do your homework.
- We must be in phase with the instrument. Anything else is a battle you will lose, 100% of the time. The trumpet does not care - as Mr. Adam said, it's about \$5 worth of tubing.
- "God breathed the breath of life into man and you must breathe the breath of life into that trumpet!"

- The breath:
  - "Get ready to jump." We must be in a state of elevated energy, "relaxed, but not 'relaxed blah'."
  - The center of our energy is our Ki. This concept is preferred instead of MusEd notions of "support," which too often result in over-athleticizing the breath and subsequent tightness which in fact defeats the freedom in the breath.
  - The breath is imagined to enter the body low in the torso, and fills upward from there, all the way to our collar bones. The shoulders are not lifted per se but will rise a little bit as the chest expands.

- "The breath must never be propelled from the sternum area." Rather, a sense of motivating the breath is from the Ki, or center, which is below the navel and slightly in toward the spine.

# Finally

- "Keep your mind in the sound."

# Questions