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MARIACHI TO MAHLER: LEARNING TO PERFORM DIFFERENT STYLES

BY KYLE MILLSAP

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MARIACHI TO MAHLER: LEARNING TO PERFORM DIFFERENT STYLES

BY KYLE MILLSAP

The trumpet is an incredibly versatile instrument. From orchestras and bands to jazz, funk, and mariachi, trumpeters can be found blowing hot licks in a multitude of ensembles. In today's varied musical landscape, the need to play well in different styles is becoming increasingly important. Experience is the key factor to performing success in multiple genres, but how does one first become prepared to perform and gain the necessary experience? The following roadmap is a guide to learning how to play in a wide variety of styles on the trumpet.

Listen

Unequivocally, number one on the map is listening. No one can expect to play principal trumpet successfully in their youth symphony without first actively listening to what an orchestral trumpeter and section should sound like. Likewise, students inexperienced with jazz should seek out recordings by the great masters, such as Louis Armstrong, Stan Kenton, or Charlie Parker, to learn the vocabulary. Skill in one area of music may not directly translate to another, so it is important to devote time to all aspects.

Study and Practice

Number two on the map takes listening a step further. Turn up the stereo, put on recordings of Mahler 5 by the Chicago, New York, or St. Louis symphonies, and listen and "perform" with Mr. Herseth, Mr. Smith, and Ms. Slaughter. Listen to the Basie band to get a feel for time and emphasis, or Mariachi Vargas for style. Then, play along to put it into action. Perform what has been practiced for feedback and guidance from an experienced teacher. Study to master essential technical skills required of trumpeters. These skills include varying dynamics and articulations, transposing at sight, playing well in all registers, and making quick mental shifts between styles. Individual practice should include all of these elements each day.

Create Opportunities

It is almost always possible to put together a brass trio, brass quintet, or jazz combo. When solo and ensemble festival

comes around each year, assemble a group and compete in the contest. Other suggestions for performance opportunities include asking an ensemble director for permission to perform a piece before a concert, volunteering to perform in the orchestra for the spring musical, or inquiring about an opportunity to perform a feature with a large ensemble. Remember, initiative is usually rewarded. It might seem uncomfortable to step into new areas of performance, but these opportunities lead to greater ease and comfort in an audition and performance environment.

"A night in the theater orchestra for Jerry Springer: The Opera can lead to a call for a gospel and R&B gig, which could lead to breaking in with the local symphony."

The end goal for any musician is performance, so be ready to act when opportunities arise. Make daily practice a priority to ensure that you have the ability and confidence to say "yes" to a new performance opportunity. Each successful performance can have a ripple effect and lead to additional performance opportunities. A night in the theater orchestra for *Jerry Springer: The Opera* can lead to a call for a gospel and R&B gig, which could lead to breaking in with the local symphony (yes, this did happen!). Learning to be a high-level performer in all musical genres is the mark of a great musician.

There are times when it appears that specialization is valued above being the "Jack of all trades." Baseball bullpens are now designed to need four pitchers to get through a game. Businesses have become compartmentalized so that it takes talking to four people to find the one answer being sought. Certainly, musicians have areas at which they excel more than others, but this should not exclude cultivating skills in all areas of music. Great jazz lead players are still capable soloists, and some orchestral principal trumpeters are virtuosic chamber and/or jazz musicians. Celebrate the incredible versatility of our instrument, and seek to increase your command of its many possibilities.

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About the author: Kyle Millsap is assistant professor of trumpet and jazz at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. His students perform successfully in a variety of professional and university ensembles, including mariachi bands.

