

TROMBONE WARM UPS IN THE REAL WORLD

By Barry Mosley / jazz valve trombonist

Introduction

We all hear the stories of some players and teachers who say you need to do long warm up routines before any performance or practice. That would be great, but it is NOT a real life situation for me and I believe for most trombone players. After playing in Los Angeles jazz clubs and doing society events for many years with my trio or quartet, I have learned that usually I have very little or no free time before playing to warm up as there is always a lot going on.

I know all brass players have this same issue. You show up to a concert and last minute issues arise. Perhaps you are running late, stuck in traffic, or there is no great place to warm up at all. This is real life, situations are rarely as perfect as we would like them to be.

For me its a common problem. As a band leader there are always last minute details with the club, stage and PA set up, musicians loading in that need help, parking issues, and many more details to deal with. All really normal stuff to be expected. Also many restaurant jazz clubs do not have a back room for musicians to warm up in, so I have been kicked out of many kitchens. Yet I must do some type of warm up to play my first notes well. So what do working trombone players do ?

This writing is about that. I share my stories and things I have learned from others about REAL WORLD quick warm ups and playing.

It is important to do some kind of warm up. The muscles in our embouchure and body produce all the sound, so they must be

respected and treated properly. Like an olympic athlete that warms up before a race or sporting event, we are the same. We must warm up however we decide to do it, AND warm down after a performance to keep the muscles in proper condition. If you abuse these muscles, you will increase the odds of playing badly and also you can really damage your chops. If we start off badly, it is difficult to recover.

There are many professional players that have different ways to warm up. You may already have a method you like that works for you.

So I will never say in this writing that you MUST warm up in an exact certain way.

I can only talk about certain ideas in different real situations that seem to work for various players or myself. You can decide if something is useful to you. However the thing I have always noticed is that the goal of the warm up is always the same.

- 1) It is to gently get the muscles in performance mode. To not shock them or damage them.
- 2) To get the mind as well as the body in a proper state in order to perform at a peak level.
- 3) To create a comfortable playing volume level from the start of a performance so your embouchure is protected.

I have been fortunate in Los Angeles to perform with and get to know some of the worlds best brass players, and I will share some of the warm up methods I have learned and observed from them. I will also share my personal experience from many years of professional performance as a jazz valve trombonist. I hope this read helps you to perform more successfully and comfortably.

FIRST THOUGHT, UNDERSTANDING THE BODY FLUX

The great brass teacher Carmine Caruso states that the body is always in a state of FLUX, every day we can feel different in our body and therefore our chops (embouchure). We all experience this, some days playing is easier than others. Chops can be stiff, sore, chapped, or they can feel great on the first note. The KEY thing to remember is that some kind of warm up needs to be done even on a good chop day, it is still helpful. Some warm up routine, though it can vary a bit, is important for constancy. The more constancy we have, the less FLUX we will have in our playing sensation, resulting in better constant performances.

The goal is to be comfortable and only be thinking about the music.

WHY VARIOUS PLAYERS HAVE DIFFERENT WARM UPS

Why is there not just ONE way to warm up ? The thing that I have realized is that no player plays exactly like another. Musicians being creative people have created many warm up ideas that are used. I do believe that you must do something gentle for the way that you play. For most people that is staying out of the extreme range of the instrument on the first few notes.

You also should find a workable quick warm up for when time is limited and rushed that works for YOU. I will cover some methods that I have experienced myself and observed in other professional players over many years.

DETERMINING THE TYPE OF WARM UP NEEDED FOR THE PLAYING SITUATION.

Some players have a strict warm up routine that they never vary from. I and others sometimes warm up differently depending on the type of playing situation we will be in. The variation for me depends on how I feel physically that day and how much time I have.

If in the first notes of a show you have high notes, you had better warm up carefully as possible. If you are playing lead trombone in an orchestra, you need to be ready for anything on the first downbeat. Not warming up could be disastrous and damage your chops for the rest of the gig, and then it is a downhill slide, usually using too much mouthpiece pressure and no fun.

CAN YOU WARM UP ON THE GIG ?

Sometimes you can do this. I use a warm up trick on jazz gigs with my trio when I can call the tunes. I often simply call an easy first tune and avoid playing higher notes in the first jazz improvisations. This can be a part of my warm up concept so I do not need much pre show warm up in a real time crunch situation. After a couple easy tunes my chops are ready to push the more extended range.

So often the playing situation will determine your warm up options. The question is, can you select the range of the first notes you need to play or not ? You need to know.

HOW MUCH WARM UP TIME DO YOU REALLY NEED ?

This is a great question. It will vary on many levels. I think the answer involves many other questions. Usually though you want to be able to do it as quickly as possible, however the time needed can vary depending on the situation.

HOW DO YOUR CHOPS AND BODY FEEL TODAY ?

On a day your chops feel sluggish and stiff, you will need more warm up time than normal to get your lips free to vibrate. The catch is that usually you need to play some tones to see how your chops are feeling. I can usually tell in advance, but I do “ play test “ and see. If your body is tired, lack of sleep etc...you will need to eat well and stay hydrated. You also need to get your energy up, coffee anyone ?

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PLAY ?

The great tuba player and teacher ARNALD JACOBS commented that he played and practiced so much, that he needed very little warm up time if at all. He was sort of always ready to play and rarely ever needed to warm up very much. However, that is rare and for most of us that will not work. Sometimes you can over play and the next day the chops are stiff or sore, so too much playing can be bad as well.

WHAT TIME IS THE PERFORMANCE ?

Our bodies feel different at different times of the day. Most jazz musicians are much more ready to play at night than early morning. Studio players have more early morning sessions. Not easy.

WHAT MUSIC ARE YOU PLAYING ?

If you're playing high notes right in the start, you better be well warmed up. Lower tones to start can actually be a part of your warm up. If you're on a steady gig and you know all the music you will be playing in advance, you will know how much warm up time you need.

HOW TO BE WARMED UP AS YOU ARRIVE TO THE GIG , MOUTHPIECE BUZZING and the BUZZARD TOOL

In Los Angeles many years ago I played a weekly Thursday night jazz show with one of the world's most respected trumpet players, TONY TERRAN . Tony was a studio and jazz legend in Los Angeles, he was a top call studio player with a reputation for booking several studio sessions in one day, showing up just in time to play, and always sounding great on the first note. He was always ready to play, and I learned how he always did this by giving him a car ride.

Being a friend and also a neighbour, I would drive Tony to the jazz club that we were playing at. It took us about ten to fifteen minutes of driving time, depending on city stop lights. The whole time in the car Tony would BUZZ his mouthpiece. Long tones, scales, tunes, BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ. He buzzed at different volumes, pitch ranges and intervals. He really did a musical work out with his mouthpiece buzz. When the show started he sounded great on his first note without ever warming up a single note on the trumpet itself. He was ready to play anything from the first note. That is how he was ALWAYS WARMED UP AS HE ARRIVED TO THE GIG OR STUDIO DATE. It was an eye opener for me and I copied his concept. Thank you Tony Terran for a lesson from a master while driving my car.

The very cool BUZZARD tool from Warburton Music.

So I learned a great lesson from Tony, buzzing can warm you up just fine. The added plus for me is that my old friend and amazing craftsman TERRY WARBURTON makes a tool called the BUZZARD. It is scientifically made so that it gives you the same resistance as your horn when you put your mouthpiece into it. I keep it in my pocket

and it is not expensive to purchase (note I do not get a spiff for suggesting it) and it is a great buzzing tool.

Check out the BUZZARD on the Warburton Music website at www.warburton_usa.com



THUMB BALANCE BUZZING I LEARNED FROM TROMBONIST SLYDE HYDE TO REDUCE MOUTHPIECE PRESSURE DURING BUZZING WARM UPS.

A great friend and mentor to me was and will always be the amazing trombonist SLYDE HYDE in Los Angeles. He was a first call studio player and jazz player on trombone, bass trombone, baritone horn, valve trombone and tuba, he did it all. He took on very few students and I was lucky to be one. He was an amazing musician and human being, very much loved and missed by all.

Slyde would start our warm ups with mouthpiece buzzing but with a unique way of doing it. We would BALANCE the mouthpiece with our

thumb while buzzing. Letting the mouthpiece rest only on the thumb keeps the MOUTHPIECE PRESSURE OFF. You can not push or the mouthpiece will fall off your thumb. You can do this with the BUZZARD as well. Playing with the least amount of mouthpiece pressure is very important and you should think of this when you are warming up.



The buzzing concept works great for a busy night as you can buzz while driving to a gig, walking from the parking lot to the venue and

buzz in any spare moment you have just before playing your horn. It does not disturb anyone and really gets you ready to play quickly.

BASIC FIRST NOTES

EASY FIRST NOTES TO START WARM UP

(PART ONE) SLOWLY AND SOFTLY

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on a five-line staff. The title is 'BASIC FIRST NOTES' and the subtitle is 'EASY FIRST NOTES TO START WARM UP'. The first section is labeled '(PART ONE) SLOWLY AND SOFTLY' and consists of seven staves of music. Each staff contains four measures of music. The notes are half notes, and the first measure of each staff begins with a fermata. The notes are: Staff 1: C4, D4, E4, F4; Staff 2: C4, B3, A3, G3; Staff 3: C4, D4, E4, F4; Staff 4: C4, B3, A3, G3; Staff 5: C4, D4, E4, F4; Staff 6: C4, D4, E4, F4; Staff 7: C4, B3, A3, G3. The second section is labeled '(PART 2)' and consists of three staves of music. Each staff contains four measures of music. The notes are: Staff 8: C4, B3, A3, G3; Staff 9: C4, B3, A3, G3; Staff 10: C4, B3, A3, G3. The notation is written in black ink on a white background.

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The above is how I like to start a warm up when practicing or if I do have some time before a gig. If I do NOT have time to do at least this before a gig, I do the mouthpiece buzzing for sure. No Exceptions.

It is easy and seems to work for me. Someone told me this is similar to a REMMINGTON warm up, though I do not know as it's just something I started doing on my own that works for me. It only takes about two minutes and it's easy on the chops.

I gradually start extending my range and then I start playing a few jazz licks to get my ideas going. but only after I do this first. I also avoid playing loudly at first and focus on my air balance.

THE “ WHISPER “ WARM UP FOR STIFF CHOPS

Stiff chops do not want to vibrate, we all know the feeling on occasion. This soft WHISPER warm up is good for stiff chops especially. You can start with very very soft buzzing, then apply that to your horn warm up. I find this really extremely soft playing helpful.

I will play my normal warm up as shown above, except do it extremely softly, just a whisper. Perhaps a couple low pedal B flats, then some other notes just a bit higher but not much. I may only have two minutes to do this, but it really helps to gently get stiff chops vibrating.

Often in a club there is a lot of chatter and noise so this soft warm up does not stand out to disturb anyone. I find a corner or some place where I'm not in front of the customers directly. I have walked out to parking lots, back of the room, hallways, kitchens, wherever I can find. We must always be respectful of the audience and venue.

If you're playing in a concert hall, usually you will have a set up room back stage. Or you may be able to do this on stage when setting up.

THE HOT SHOWER TIP FOR STIFF CHOPS

One of the greatest trombonist ANDY MARTIN was on a YouTube video with my great trombonist friend PAUL NOWELL talking about warm ups when your chops are stiff. Andy has been a legendary studio and jazz artist in Los Angeles for many years, he is an amazing trombonist.

He said when his chops feel stiff he would get under the hot shower and let the warm water run on his chops to get the blood flow going and relax the muscles. This is great advice from a very busy working trombonist.

FRANK ROSOLINO, AN UNUSUAL WARM UP CONCEPT.

I listened to a rare recording of the great FRANK ROSOLINO doing a clinic. He talked about and demonstrated his warm up. He warmed up fairly quickly by playing some mid range jazz licks and also hitting a few quick pedal tones as well. Gradually he would increase the speed and range of the jazz licks.

Frank was not playing long tones like most of us do. When the jazz licks sounded clean he felt he was warmed up enough for a show. He said the quick few pedal tones really helped to get the chops working. Most players do not do this as a warm up, but again as I said earlier, each player is different. Try it and see if it works for you. It worked for Frank that's for sure.

Also the great lead trumpeter SNOOKY YOUNG used low tones for a quick warm up. Players reported he would get out his horn, sit in the section and play some very soft low trumpet F sharps in long tones. Then he would play a high loud lead part on the first tune perfectly, a very very quick warm up that worked for him.

USING A MUTE FOR WARMING UP

I have known some players that use a practice mute or harmon mute to warm up when they can not warm up at normal volumes. Some players do this as their normal warm up even if they do not need to play softly. Often road big band players would do this in a hotel room before a show as they could not play at full volume in a hotel without complaints. It was their best option.

This can be a good warm up if you develop it, however for me I do not normally do this for very long. The reason is the air flow is so different when I pull the mute out, it throws my air off balance. It could be a learned skill, I am not sure. However as I said earlier, different players have different methods, so try this if you like and see how it goes for you. Some players use this method very successfully.

A SAD BUT TRUE STORY OF CHOP DAMAGE FROM NOT WARMING UP PROPERLY BEFORE A GIG.

I am not trying to scare you, however this story is one of the many reasons why we do warm ups. Many years ago I was playing at a jazz session in Portland, Or and a very fine trombone player was performing with us from out of town. We started chatting and he told me that he was lucky to be playing again. The story he told me would

be that about three years ago he was late for a big band gig, and had no warm up at all. No buzzing, nothing. Sadly the first chart called by the band leader had a high trombone part that he had to play. While playing it he felt a sudden tear of a muscle in his chops and had to stop playing. He did serious damage to his chops.

He was two years rebuilding his embouchure to be able to perform again. He said he now NEVER plays without a warm up. So be aware this can happen and always warm up with something. If someone tells you that a warm up is not important, remember this story.

BILL WATROUS, WARM UP STYLE AND AIR BALANCE

Air balance is very important. I was fortunate to study also from the great trombonist BILL WATROUS and get to know him well over many years. He was a great human being and of course an amazing trombonist. He had incredible CONTROL of the trombone at all times.

Bill Watrous was really focused on not overblowing the horn. He started his daily warm up with soft slurs, however his first notes were higher than most people would do, usually starting on the F above the staff. He had just set that note as his normal range to start the day, and it worked for him. He gradually extended the slurs to the extreme ranges. When the slurs were smooth and easy, he was ready to play. He also would jog to exercise and keep his health in good shape.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTROLLING YOUR PLAYING ENVIRONMENT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

Proper preparation for your playing environment is to me almost as important as warming up. Bill Watrous always took control of the PA

sound and mic set up and as much as possible to protect his chops at all times. He knew that being in a comfortable playing situation was very important. If you can not hear yourself, your chops do not know what to do and you can over play, resulting in quick chop fatigue and loss of air balance.

A BILL WATROUS STORY ON AIR BALANCE

I was hanging out with Bill and listening to him at a jazz club in Los Angeles. He always used a mic and PA even in small clubs as the chatter of people and such is often loud. During a tune the PA system went down and his mic went totally off. After trying in frustration to get the sound guy to fix it, he gave up and decided to keep playing. I thought wow, WHAT IS HE GOING TO DO TO COMPENSATE FOR NO AMPLIFICATION ???.

The answer was NOTHING...he did not start playing louder than his normal sound. He did not overblow his chops to compete with the room noise. He was softer having no PA, but those of us who were listening could still hear his beautiful tone. He knew from experience that lips and chops can not compete with loud stage or room noise, and you can not play well when overblowing. The mic was later fixed on the next set. He maintained his embouchure and control at all times.

So the way he warmed up was how he played throughout the show. Control your AIR BALANCE from the start. It can save you. As once told to me " PLAY THE HORN, NOT THE ROOM "

Room acoustics and stage sound volumes always vary, your horn and chops should not vary. So start off softly on warm ups and stay in control of your chops and tone at all times.

Bill would use the term “ Play by FEEL “ as the sound around you can change, so remember how your chops feel when your air is balanced.

“ FLAPPING THE CHOPS “

A thing the great trumpeter and brass teacher BOBBY SHEW talks about is FLAPPING or FLUTTERING the chops. You just relax and flutter the chops without the mouthpiece, kind of like a horse....Bobby uses this to get blood flow in the lips and rejuvenate tired or stiff chops. He teaches this to his students as well. It can be applied to warm ups as well, and you can do it at any time even when counting rest measures on the band stand. Give it a try.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WARMING DOWN.

Lastly, after you play a show or do a practice session, a warm down is extremely healthy for your embouchure as well. You see professional athletes warm down all the time. In some situations in the REAL world of music performance, you can not always do this without disturbing an audience, but you usually can find a way most of the time. At least you can buzz your mouthpiece while driving home.

I will find a corner spot in a jazz club or a back room to do some soft long tones just before I put my horn away. I basically do the same tones I use in warm up and I really do not need a lot of time. I just play a few easy notes. This relaxes my chops and resets my EAR as well. I call this the daily PLAYING CURVE

WARM UP ——— PLAY ——— WARM DOWN.

I want to start my playing day with the same easy notes I ended on the day before, and the same pitches to my ear. It is just another way to keep constancy in your chops and keep the muscles healthy.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Thank you for reading this, and I hope that this writing has some information that may help you in performance preparation in the REAL WORLD of trombone playing.

As said earlier, each of us have a different way of playing. We also play in different settings and circumstances and play different types of music, so take from this writing anything that may work for YOU.

Remember it is always about MAKING GREAT MUSIC !

Keep Swinging,
Barry Mosley / Jazz Valve Trombonist / Music Educator.

For artist resume, teaching availability and contact information
Visit. WWW.BARRYMOSLEY.COM



