

Stretching, Breathing, Buzzing

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Disclaimer: The material listed below is gleaned from numerous sources. I do not claim rights on any of the material, but rather assembled the material in a sequence suited to preparing the body for the rigors of brass playing.

WARNINGS: All persons using the following exercises should take into considerations any personal physical limitations before attempting. The author takes no responsibility for injury as a result of these exercises. BREATHING IS ESSENTIAL! Persons should continue a normal pattern of breathing during all exercises unless otherwise directed. DO NOT HOLD YOUR BREATH WHILE PERFORMING STRETCHS! It is possible to cause harm to yourself by holding your breath while stretching.

Stretching

Neck Rolls – Allow your head to lean forward until your chin is touching your chest. Slowly rotate your head around to the left until you are slightly behind your shoulder, allowing the muscles of the right side of the neck to stretch and loosen. Reverse the rotation back to the right to the same distance slightly past the right shoulder. Repeat this motion 4 repetitions, ending with the chin back against the chest. Slowly bring the head back up into position, allowing the weight of the head to rest balanced upon the spinal column.

Shoulder Shrugs – Shrug the shoulders up alongside the head, then slowly rotate the arms forward, down, and back up and around, still hanging limp below the shoulder joint. Repeat this motion for 4 repetitions, then reverse direction for 4 repetitions. Upon completion, shake out shoulders to relieve any residual tension.

Shoulder Stretches – Reach forward with hands and fingers outstretched as if reaching for an object just beyond your grasp. Hold the arms in this position, feeling the extension of the muscles of the shoulders and back. After approximately 15 seconds slowly rotate the arms forward and up to reach toward the ceiling, then down and out to the sides, slightly reaching behind your body to stretch the shoulders and chest. Repeat this twice, and then shake out the arms to relieve any residual tension.

Back Stretches – Place feet slightly greater than shoulder width apart to provide a stable base. Slowly lean forward as if moving to touch your toes. Allow your back to stretch and relax, slowly reaching further down, and between the legs if you are able to readily touch the floor. **DO NOT BOUNCE!** Allow your body to hang from the waist up. Hold this position as relaxed as possible for approximately 10-15 seconds. Then begin to roll back upright, allowing the individual vertebrae to come into alignment one on top of the other. Weight should settle evenly on top of the hips, with the head finally rolling up into place much the same as in Neck Rolls. Once fully upright the entire weight of the upper body should be aligned atop the hips.

Side Abdominal Stretches – Place feet slightly greater than shoulder width apart to provide a stable base. Reach over your head and touch your left shoulder with your right hand. Take your right elbow into your left hand and slowly begin to “pull” to the left, extending and stretching the right side of your abdomen. Continue with a slow, even motion to the maximum extension **WITHOUT** pain. **DO NOT OVEREXTEND OR BOUNCE!** Hold this position for 10-15 seconds while allowing the muscles to relax and extend. Then slowly return to upright. Reverse hands and “pull” to the right. Repeat this 4 times, shaking out the shoulders and arms between each repetition.

Around the World/Abdominal Stretches (Matrix Move) - Place feet slightly greater than shoulder width apart to provide a stable base. Slowly lean forward as if moving to touch your toes. Allow your back to stretch and relax, slowly reaching further down, and between the legs if you are able to readily touch the floor. **DO NOT BOUNCE!** Allow your body to hang from the waist up. While allowing your upper body to hang from the waist up, slowly rotate the upper body to the right in a complete circle. Upon reaching the center again reverse direction. Repeat this 4 times. Upon reaching center the final time allow your body to again hang from the waist up. Then begin to roll back upright, allowing the individual vertebrae to come into alignment one on top of the other as detailed in Back Stretches.

Breathing

Natural Inflation – Place finger vertically across mouth and inhale, listening for dark whooshing sound. Do not focus on any aspect of breathing except the whoosh. Allow your body to inflate naturally.

Paced Breathing – Set your metronome to 80. Breath in for 4 counts and out for 4 counts. Do not hold the breath between the inhale and the exhale. Repeat for four repetitions. Then breath in for 3 counts and out for 4 counts. Again repeat for four repetitions. Next inhale for 2 counts and exhale for 4 counts. Repeat for four repetitions. Inhale 1 count, exhale 4 counts. Repeat for four repetitions. Inhale the second half of beat four, exhale 3 and 1/2 counts. Repeat for four repetitions. Stay as relaxed as possible at all times.

Measured Breaths – Using your arm as a gauge, inhale 1/3 of your capacity, briefly hold the air in (open throat), then release the air. Repeat. Inhale 1/3, pause, inhale 1/3 (total of 2/3), briefly hold, then release 1/3, pause, release remaining. Repeat. Inhale 1/3, pause, inhale 1/3, pause, inhale final 1/3, hold air briefly, then release 1/3, pause, release 1/3, pause, release remaining 1/3. Repeat. Mix around combinations, inhaling 1/3, 1/3, then out 1/3, then in 1/3, in 1/3, out 2/3, out 1/3, etc.. Repeat.

Holding Without Valsalva Manuever - Set your metronome to 80. Place feet slightly greater than shoulder width apart to provide a stable base. MAKE SURE TO HAVE A CHAIR BEHIND YOU! IF YOU GET DIZZY STOP AND SIT DOWN. Inhale while raising arms for 4 counts, hold air in (throat and mouth open, holding air with chest aloft and diaphragm down, should feel like holding a yawn) and arms up for 4 counts, exhale and drop arms for 4 counts, stay open and empty for 4 counts. Repeat 4 times. Inhale while raising arms for 6 counts, hold air in (throat and mouth open) and arms up for 6 counts, exhale and drop arms for 6 counts, stay open and empty for 4 counts. ALWAYS STAY EMPTY FOR ONLY 4 COUNTS! Repeat 4 times. Increase number of counts to 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, etc. as you are able.

