

Introduction

I first heard of Carmine Caruso from my oboe colleagues in New York City. They spoke of how his method was making significant improvements in their playing. But it wasn't until after I had moved to California, yet was still spending the summers in New York in order to perform with the Goldman Band, that I looked up Mr. Caruso and began taking lessons from him.

I was unaware of his background, and, in fact, never asked him about it. I relied totally on the recommendations of my friends. Through them I learned that he played all the wind and brass instruments. It wasn't until years later that I learned that his primary instrument was trumpet. In a way, my ignorance was a plus. It allowed me to simply accept his lessons without question. Perhaps if I had known his first instrument was a brass, I would have doubted his method. Fortunately, I accepted his lessons in full faith.

After the first summer of lessons, I returned to my regular position of principal bassoon with the Sacramento Symphony. Almost immediately my colleagues remarked on how much I had improved during the summer, and I could only surmise that it was a result of Mr. Caruso's method.

I continued my lessons by phone from California during the next months, and I returned to New York the next summer to resume weekly lessons in person. During that year, I noticed that my control had improved significantly, and my reeds had changed. I became aware that I was also much less dependent on my reed in order to perform well.

I continued my studies by phone during the symphony season and in person during the summers until the Goldman Band fell into financial difficulties and had to reduce its season drastically. This made it unaffordable for me to return to New York in the summers, and thus my lessons came to an end.

I covered all of the material in this book during the course of my study with Mr. Caruso. I now practice the first four exercises and the second schedule on a daily basis in order to maintain my embouchure.

I hope all who pursue this method will enjoy the same results and benefits I have received.

Performing the Exercises

Maximum benefit will only be gained if the exercises are performed in the following manner:

- 1) Each exercise is to be performed without removing your lips from the reed for the duration of the exercise. Begin each exercise with whatever embouchure and positioning that is customary for you. Don't give positioning extra thought - simply play as is normal for you. During rests or breaks, you inhale through your nose or through the sides of your mouth, keeping your lips in the same place on the reed. You should relax your muscles during rests to allow blood back in to the lips, but keep your lips on the same spot on the reed. If you forget and remove your lips, you need to start the exercise over again.
- 2) Each exercise is to be performed at quarter-note m.m.= 60, or one beat per second. However, a metronome is not to be used. You must tap your foot per each beat instead. I generally look at a clock's second hand for at least four beats before beginning each exercise, but after that rely on my "inner clock." I also alternate feet per beat. However, you can simply "tap your toes" inside your shoe, or tap your heel - whatever seems good to you, but tapping is an essential part of the method.
- 3) These exercises are not for intonation. Do not use a tuner while performing this method. There are many long-tone exercises where a tuner is a very good idea, but this method is not about that. So do not pay overmuch attention to intonation. I generally advise my students to play the exercises with a very relaxed embouchure, favoring playing flat rather than at pitch.
- 4) Do not vibrate, i.e., perform the exercises without vibrato. Straight tone only.

5) The exercises are grouped into “weeks.” Each “week” is a period of 7 to 10 days, assuming you are doing the exercises daily. If you feel that you have reasonably mastered that week’s exercises in 7 days, go on to the next week. If after 10 days, you don’t feel that you have mastered that week’s exercise, go on to the next week anyway. (You’re thinking too much. Just do the method.) If you miss a day or more, play only the first four exercises on the first day you return to practicing before resuming where you left off.

6) The first four exercises take about 10 minutes. By the time you get to week 7, the exercises will take about 25 minutes. After that, the exercises will progressively take more time as they are varied and added, and as your embouchure becomes stronger and more able.

The Six-Note Exercise

The first attack of each group of three notes is with a breath (B) attack. Subsequent notes in each group are tongued (T). The notes should be sustained as much as possible with the tongue only interrupting the air stream to start the next note. The air should be maintained at a fairly strong dynamic level, but a consistent air stream is more important than the volume of air. During the one measure rests, relax the muscles, still keeping the lips on the same spot on the reed, and exhale any stale air through the nose (or corners of the mouth) for the first two beats, and inhale for the next two beats.

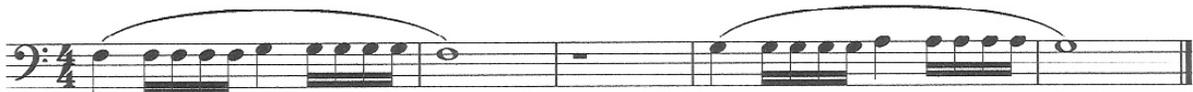
N. B. Breathing in this manner is to be done for all subsequent exercises with a measure rest.

Don’t forget to tap.

Intervals

Unlike the Six-Note Exercise, there are no breath attacks. But as in the Six-Note Exercise, relaxing the muscles but keeping the lips on the reed while exhaling and inhaling during rests is the same.

In the second week, one needs to mentally sub-divide the second and fourth beats of the first bar and similar bars into sixteenth notes. Think the following rhythm as you play:



(The theory is that one has a slightly different embouchure for each note. By thinking of this rhythm as one plays the exercise, one will not adjust the embouchure for the next note until after the last sixteenth note, thus minimizing the time it takes to make the change, and perhaps minimizing the embouchure change as well.)

In the course of performing any study with intervals, attempt to continue the exercise through the highest note you can play before quitting due to lip exhaustion. If a note does not speak, and your embouchure is not exhausted, continue to blow (do not use the tongue) and try to get the note out, but still keep time. Eventually, you will be able to produce the entire range of the bassoon and perhaps continue the exercises past high E!

And don’t forget to tap.

Descending Chromatic Exercise

Again, begin each measure with the tongue. Since there are no rests in which to breathe, one “drops” the dot on any dotted-half note when a breath is needed in order to inhale. In other words, instead of playing a dotted-half note, play only a half note followed by a quarter rest, and inhale during the rest. The rhythm is not to be interrupted by the breath, and one must continue to tap during breaths. You can breath every measure if you need to. I generally perform this exercise in the following manner. A quarter rest indicates where I breathe.



Again, inhale through the nose or corners of the mouth, but don't move your lips from their current position on the reed, although you should relax the muscles for the duration of the rest.

Don't forget to keep tapping.

Expanding Chromatic Intervals

No logical place to breathe is indicated and that is because you can breathe whenever you need to and take as long as time to breathe as you need. However, you must maintain the rhythm by continuing to tap. Resume the exercise where you left off and on a beat. Again inhale through the nose or corners of the mouth, but don't move your lips from their current position on the reed, although you should relax the muscles for the duration of the rest.

In the course of performing this and the subsequent Expanding Chromatic Interval studies, be sure to continue the exercise even when a note does not speak. If a note does not speak, continue to blow (do not use the tongue to start the note) and try to get the note out, but go on to the next note when it is time. Do not interrupt the beat. With daily and rote practice, you will eventually be able to connect any note to the starting note through the entire range of the bassoon.

I recommend that you don't use the whisper key lock.

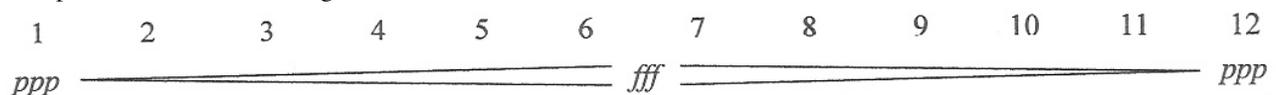
And don't forget to tap.

Soft-Loud-Soft (SLS) and Loud-Soft-Loud (LSL) Exercises

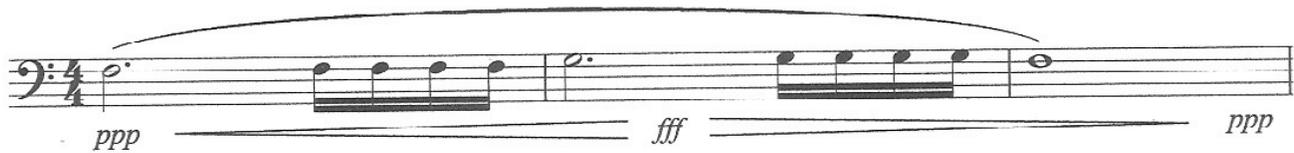
These exercises are at the heart of Mr. Caruso's method, and the preceding exercises are in many ways preparing you to execute these exercises.

Although the dynamic is indicated as *ppp*, begin each SLS exercise as softly as you can with the tongue. If the note does not respond, continue to count and keep blowing until the note speaks as you proceed with the exercise. Increase the volume gradually and smoothly. The dynamic indicated in the middle of the exercise is *fff*, but you are actually to overblow at this point. Overblow to the point where the sound loses focus. (The goal is to increase your dynamic range. The theory is that you will learn, over time, to control the overblown volume, thus blowing harder and harder in order to continue overblow as your ability to control louder dynamics improves.) Diminuendo gradually until you can play as softly as you can, trying not to let the note stop. Learn to extend the diminuendo all the way to the end of the final note of the exercise, right up to the barline.

You must try to make the crescendo and diminuendo as smooth and as even as possible. The following diagram may help. The numbers indicating the beats over three bars.



As in intervals, subdivide the last beat of each note, as below.



LSL exercises are done in a similar manner. Begin each exercise by overblowing and accenting with the tongue. Gradually diminuendo to your softest dynamic without losing the note, and then increase your volume until you end by briefly overblowing. Subdivide the last beat of each note as in SLS.

Breathing Summary

Breathing is as in Intervals above for all exercises that have a measure rest between phrases. All exercises that have no rests, i.e., Expanding Chromatic Intervals, Developed Scales, Developed Intervals, etc., breathing is as specified under Expanding Chromatic Intervals.

The most common error is to remove the lips from the reed when one breathes. If you do this, you have nullified the effect of the exercise and therefore must do that exercise over.

The Theory of the Caruso Method

Although Carmine Caruso described the exercises to me as “Embouchure Calisthenics,” they are really breathing exercises. The goal is to eliminate, as much as is possible, reliance on embouchure and lip placement to control the bassoon. Through daily and rote practice of these exercises, the body will train itself to be as efficient as possible. Over a period of days, weeks, months, and even years, the body learns to balance air and embouchure with the result that the air does most of the work of playing the bassoon. The embouchure is then free for color changes and musical expression instead of just getting the note out. Similarly, one becomes less reliant on having the “perfect” reed, since the body becomes trained to blow through any resistance, or lack thereof, that is presented by the reed.

Mr. Caruso emphasized the tapping of the foot. One must incorporate an internal rhythm as part of the breathing process. Also, involving the whole body in the playing of an instrument is very important, and tapping one’s foot helps to insure that.

All you need to do is to play the exercises as described, and don’t think too much about it. The body will become stronger and more relaxed because that is what happens when we tax our muscles. By simply performing the exercises regularly, the body will adjust to meet the demands you are placing on it. The process does not require extra thought. “Just do it” as one famous slogan says.

Conclusion

At a recent, and very taxing, chamber music concert, a colleague approached me to say I had the “most perfect embouchure.” Now, I know from my many past teachers that my embouchure is far from perfect, and I suppose my surprise showed. She then added, “Your embouchure never moves no matter what you are playing or what range you are playing in.” I immediately thought to myself, “Thank you Mr. Caruso!” I hope you will have similar results from studying this method for bassoon.

David Granger