

## **MIRROR, MIRROR, ON THE WALL, WHO HAS THE MOST PERFECT EMBOUCHURE OF ALL?**

Ever notice how trumpet players are always looking in the mirror when they practice? I have no idea what they are looking for, and I suspect they don't either. The problem with practicing in front of a mirror is that if you play something particularly well, and at the same time notice some little movement of the muscles, you may think that is what caused you to play as you did. From then on you will try to duplicate this movement.

Any movement of the muscles of the face does not cause you to play good or bad. This is only *sympathetic muscular motion*. (When one muscle moves, the surrounding muscles "give" a little: You can't play rigid.) It's what happens on the inside that counts, and any visible corresponding movement is no cause for concern or celebration.

Yet there is much discussion about how the face muscles should look. Whole books have been written on the perfect embouchure. Some say to draw the corners of your mouth down, some say up, and others say to keep the lips in a straight line. But right now I want you to think of any four great trumpet players, all of whom play equally well. Do they all look the same when they play? No!

## **NO TWO PLAYERS WILL LOOK EXACTLY ALIKE WHEN THEY PLAY, JUST AS NO TWO PLAYERS WILL LOOK EXACTLY ALIKE WHEN THEY DON'T PLAY.**

So you can either forget about how you look when you play, or I can put you in touch with one "authority" who will analyze your embouchure over the phone. How ridiculous! To show you how close to tragedy I once came, years ago I had a teacher who suggested that I have surgery to correct my overbite. I did the obvious thing. I got a different teacher.

## **THE JAW WILL MOVE AS YOU PLAY.**

Your jaw is built on a hinge. It is meant to move. When the tongue moves, the jaw moves with it. As the tongue lowers into the "AW" position, the jaw drops. As the tongue rises into the "EEE" position, the jaw rises with it. Never would the tongue and jaw move in

opposite directions. If they did, you would have a collision inside your mouth. So do not try to hold the jaw rigid when you play, but let it move freely with the tongue.

### **IS IT OKAY TO PUFF OUT YOUR CHEEKS?**

If you play as well as Dizzy Gillespie, puff all you want. But the whole point is to get the wind to hit the lips at such a speed that it will cause them to vibrate at 1,906.61 times per second in order to produce a double high C. It is of utmost importance, then, that there be no weakness in the passageway or the wind will slow down. Have you ever seen an inner tube with a bulge in it? There is a weak spot in the rubber, which causes less pressure per square inch, because there are more inches to fill.

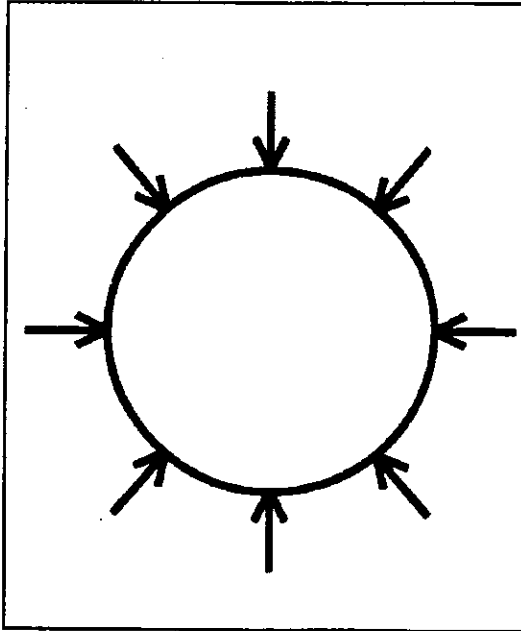
### **IF YOU PUFF YOUR CHEEKS WHEN YOU PLAY, YOU WILL LESSEN YOUR CHANCES OF PLAYING A DOUBLE HIGH C BECAUSE:**

1. You have created a larger area to fill with wind.
2. You must generate more air pressure to get the same amount of wind velocity.
3. Since the lips are being pulled *away* from mouthpiece by the air pressure inside your cheeks (when they should contract *toward* the mouthpiece as you ascend), your lips will tire faster because there is less “cushion” between your mouthpiece and your teeth.

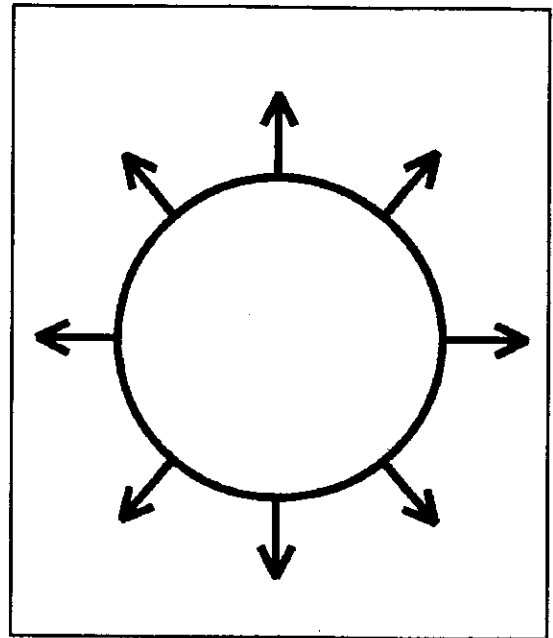
You see, what we must do is keep the wind “condensed.” Puffed cheeks make this pretty hard to do.

### **EMBOUCHURE CONTRACTION: THE THIRD INGREDIENT TO PLAYING DOUBLE HIGH C.**

The function of the muscles of the face surrounding the lips is to hold the lips in place so they will vibrate. When these muscles tire, endurance is gone and air sometimes leaks out the sides. These embouchure muscles contract toward the mouthpiece as you ascend, and relax as you descend. You must keep the lips moist to allow for this movement.



**MUSCLES CONTRACT AS  
YOU ASCEND.**



**MUSCLES RELAX AS  
YOU DESCEND.**

**JUST AS THERE IS A DIFFERENT LEVEL OF THE TONGUE FOR EVERY NOTE ON THE HORN, THERE IS ALSO A DIFFERENT AMOUNT OF EMBOUCHURE CONTRACTION FOR EVERY NOTE ON THE HORN.**

To prove this, turn to the *Hummel Concerto for Trumpet* (in B flat), movement 1, measures 138-139, and play the G, which slurs down to a low C sharp. Notice that when the tongue lowers and the jaw drops, the muscles around the lips relax. The opposite occurs when slurring up.

No one could figure out in advance of each note how much contraction is necessary, so do not try to *make it happen*; rather, just *let it happen*. If you try to make it happen, you will probably pinch the lips together and shut off the vibration. By “Embouchure Contraction” we do not mean a pinched lip at all!