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### Tips for Optimal Breathing

In order to breathe fully one must relax. I find exercising to be an indispensable aid in both relaxing and “keeping my air moving.” For those who don’t regularly exercise, I would like to suggest speaking with your physician about beginning a walking regimen; you would be surprised at the difference it makes. I occasionally walk up Queen Anne Hill between Ballet performances; it really helps.

Stretching is another important tool we can use to relax and, consequently, breathe properly. As Sam Pilafian says, “Tension kills sound.” Muscles need to be stretched to both lengthen them and to increase the amount of blood flowing through them. The more you are in the same sort of a position (e.g. sitting with a tuba in your lap or sitting behind a computer) the more important this becomes. There are many useful stretches. When stretching remember to breath fully and to “listen to your body.” Do not over stretch; let your body warm-up and relax in to a position.

I believe that it is important to work on breathing away from one’s instrument. Practicing relaxed breathing (“friction-free” or quiet inhalations with a smooth flow on the exhalations) really helps when we go to play our instruments. For many people, thinking “oh” really helps get an optimal inhalation. As the late great Arnold Jacobs said, “Suck from the lips.”

There are numerous breathing aids and tools available to wind players and singers. One of my personal favorites is the “Breathing Gym” DVD available at PatrickSheridan.com. Practicing breathing exercises, like those on the Breathing Gym, can make an enormous difference in how well you breathe.

When you finally go to play your instrument I have a few suggestions:

- 1) If at all possible (not tubists etc.), stand while you warm up. Standing or not, ensure that you are “standing/sitting tall” and bringing the instrument to your mouth, not your mouth to the instrument (don’t slouch).
- 2) Start with one full breath and one full long tone. Before you do this, visualize your ideal sound in your mind. I often like to start an octave above the fundamental (for many of you a “concert low Bb”). Ask yourself: Was my inhalation quiet? Did I smoothly change from inhalation to exhalation? Did I make the sound I hear in my mind?
- 3) Take practice breaks to stretch and keep your air moving. If you’re practicing numerous hours, get some exercise in between sessions. If you’re performing and/or practicing a lot, you have to consciously work to avoid repetitive stress and the accompanying tension.

I hope you find this helpful. I will post this handout and any forthcoming additions to it on my webpage: <http://www.ryanschultzmusic.com/html/education.html> .