

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Brass musicians, especially trumpet players, often underestimate the importance of applying correct basic techniques. There are a few personal reasons that motivated me to study the subject in more detail and, by publishing this work, share my experience and findings.

The first reason is an injury I incurred about twenty years ago. I developed this injury by depriving myself of sufficient rest. Because of a structural stress or physical strain, I gradually sought for strength in numerous sidetracks—pitfalls—causing me to increasingly deviate from basic techniques. Eventually, after taking a recovery period of about a year, I started playing trumpet again.

This, however, was a dramatic experience: I had lost many skills previously taken for granted, and saw no way to reaching my old form again. Finally, being desperate, I sought advice with an institute specialized in therapy for musicians facing problems with their posture and breathing. For the first time in my life I was *confronted* with the basic principles of a correct posture and abdominal breathing. These principles were never properly explained to me, neither during music school nor when studying at the music university.

Secondly, teaching music for many years, I have learned that merely explaining the basic techniques, limiting oneself to terms like *breath support*, *air*, *compact*, and *core*, definitely does not suffice. A **structural attention** for the basic techniques is requisite to ultimately develop these into natural reflexes.

Throughout the years I have found that playing the trumpet is a matter of priorities. I am convinced that the basic techniques are responsible for 80% of ones playing. The remaining 20% is driven by embouchure (10%), mouthpiece (5%), instruments (2.5%), and finally the study materials (2.5%). Often, however, the opposite is applied, paying most attention to embouchure, mouthpiece, and instrument. The basis is being—consciously or not—neglected; not infrequently because music teachers do not exactly know their workings and significance.

Finally, my motivation is driven by best practices I have found with singing and speech educators. Singing teachers often reserve the first half of a session for practicing breath support; it is a natural focus. The basic techniques for posture and breath support, but also for tonality and body, take up to 60–70% of teaching.

As soon as you realise that playing the trumpet actually gets easier by applying the right basic techniques, you are on the right track. The only purpose therefore should be: **make playing easier. Focus on the basic techniques instead of the embouchure. In chapter 1 I limit myself to the explanation and exercises without trumpet. In chapter 2 the trumpet is included in the exercises.**

**It is of great importance to maintain this order in exercising abdominal breathing.**

## Posture standing (without trumpet)

You can practice and control the right technique for trumpet either while standing up or sitting down. The best results, however, are achieved when practicing standing up: place your legs slightly apart, keep your back straight and your head up high. To relax your body completely, pull your shoulders up high and let them drop. Repeat this a few times and notice the relaxed sensation it generates.

By carefully leaning back, bringing your body weight on your heels, you obtain a *passive posture*: your body is not prepared for action. By leaning slightly forward, bringing your body weight towards the front of your feet, you obtain an *active posture*: your body is ready for action.



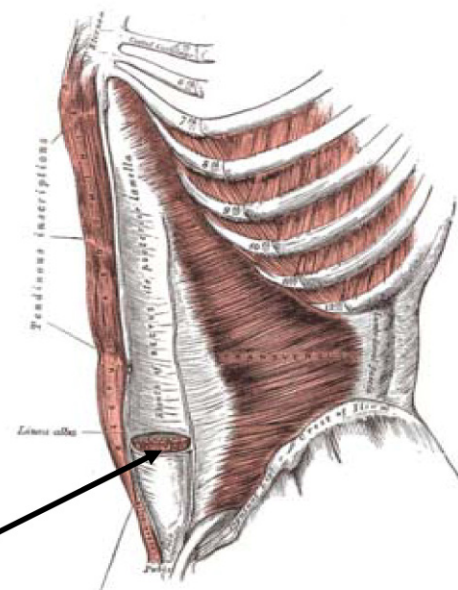
**Try moving your body weight back and forwards a few times, but don't exaggerate these movements. Try sensing the changes in tension in your lower body.**

By doing this exercise, you should feel a *horizontal* tension in your abdomen, between your belly button and your pubic bone, about where your belt is. It is an inward tension, as if your abdominal wall is being pulled inwards. (Using your abdominal muscles creates a *vertical* tension.) The horizontal tension is caused by the *pyramidalis* muscle, a triangular muscle in the centre of the abdomen; see example 1 and 2.



**A side effect of the active posture is that the tension in your body is directed towards your hips and below, leaving your upper body completely relaxed.**

Example 1



**Pyramidalis**

The pyramidalis is an abdominal muscle which—when active—makes the thoracic diaphragm flexible. When breathing in with the thoracic diaphragm flexible, the lungs expand downwards, expanding the abdomen. This is called *abdominal breathing*.

A passive posture will keep the thoracic diaphragm relatively stiff and unable to expand downwards. When breathing in with the thoracic diaphragm stiff, the lungs will expand upwards. This is called *chest breathing*.