

A Take on "The Breathing Gym"

by Andrew Hitz (Boston Brass)

Wherever we go, I am always asked about my breathing. Many people want to know how I am able to breathe as frequently as I do without getting dizzy, especially on the jazz portion of the program. There is a very simple answer to that question: I practice breathing every single day. Even though you are practicing your breathing any time you are playing a wind instrument, I am referring to practicing breathing...away from the horn.

When a baseball team practices, they do not simply split the team in half and play a game. A baseball team isolates all of the different aspects of the sport: pitching, defense, hitting, and base running. The manager would then break each of these major categories into many much smaller ones to isolate and improve. Once the skills are worked on and progress, the team comes together and plays a game.

In music, you are your own manager! Any time that you are practicing your instrument you should isolate many different aspects of music to improve just as a manager would. And probably the most important aspect of playing a wind instrument is breathing. For many years, I would piece together many different breathing exercises from various masterclasses I had attended from Sam Pilafian, Rex Martin, David Fedderely, and Arnold Jacobs, to name a few. There was never one ultimate source for breathing exercises that you could easily point out to a student. Finally, there is a book and DVD/VHS that tells you everything that you would ever want to know about exercises to improve your breathing. **Sam Pilafian** and **Patrick Sheridan**, two of the greatest tuba players in the world, have written a book entitled "The Breathing Gym" which is available at www.breathinggym.com, or by calling (800)332-2637. I thought that I would share an exercise with you from the book to give you an example.

This exercise is called the "Power Bow and Arrow" and is located on page 22:

Exercise - Breathe in to your fullest capacity in 1 count (stretching) and breathe out in one motion to completely empty (compression). The imaginary guideline is "shooting a bow and arrow." Both the stretch and the compression should be smooth and deliberate. Extend your "bow arm"

forward when you "shoot" the arrow, and keep pushing it forward as you squeeze out the air (all the way to a hiss).

As with this exercise, there are pictures throughout the book to show you how to properly perform the exercises. The book also explains the purpose of each exercise (what exact aspect of breathing you are working on) and gives you hints for success. My favorite part of the book is the chart in back. If you are having trouble with something air related in a passage, you can look up that problem and see what exercises you can use to fix it. The DVD or VHS is also a perfect accompaniment to the book. All of the exercises come to life as Sam and Patrick enlist the help of a few Arizona State students who demonstrate all of the stretches and breathing exercises and keep it fun.

Here is the note from Sam and Patrick on their website:

Your students will stretch, breathe, move, and make noise along with Pat and Sam on the video/DVD. These fun exercises help them to:

Increase airflow and stamina.

Improve tone and breathe control.

Reduce body tension.

Raise energy level and focus.

Using The Breathing Gym in your rehearsal is easy!

Just include a few breathing exercises in the warm-up, or do an exercise or two between pieces for a change of pace and a chance to refocus.

Beginning musicians can perform the basic exercises, and even professional musicians are challenged when the exercises are extended to the most difficult levels.

I would highly encourage all of you to check this book out. It is a wonderfully organized resource for all of your breathing needs. Happy practicing and see you on the road!

If you want more info on Andrew Hitz and the rest of the Boston Brass musicians, visit their **website** at (www.bostonbrass.com).