

Lead Trumpet Style; How to Play Stylistically Accurate in a Big Band

Presented at the 47th International Trumpet Guild Conference on June 1st, 2023

By: Dr. Donny Albrecht D.M.A.

47th INTERNATIONAL
Trumpet Guild CONFERENCE



MINNEAPOLIS, MN | MAY 30-JUNE 3, 2023

Scan the QR code below for more materials and resources:



Stay tuned for a forthcoming book: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO LEAD TRUMPET
STYLE.

A step-by-step process to playing stylistically accurately as a lead trumpet player.

Guide on Developing Lead Trumpet Style

The lead trumpet's role is to be the leader of the band and to create a rhythmic and stylistic connection with the drummer. The lead trumpet's ability to lock in with the rhythm section is of utmost importance because the rest of the horn section will look to the lead trumpet to set the stylistic standard. It falls on the lead trumpet player's shoulders to interpret a chart correctly and consistently so that a band can follow its lead. The following guide aims to provide a study framework for a lead trumpet player interested in playing big band music with stylistic accuracy. The eleven stylistic elements that any lead player must account for are in order of importance: time, tone color, phrasing, articulations, dynamics, vibrato, shakes, glissandos, falls, bends, and scoops.

The process is as follows:

1. Select a recording or lead trumpet player that you would like to study. Listen to said recording until you can sing the part perfectly, with octave adjustments if needed.
2. If possible, obtain a printed copy of the lead trumpet part of said recording. If a chart is unavailable, transcribe the part with the highest accuracy possible.
3. Observe how the lead trumpet player places the musical figures within the musical time. Note the locations where they push or pull the time and how it relates to the rhythm section and the rest of the band. I use the following exercise to help me develop my time feel: I use a metronome and practice Exercise 1, listed below, in all keys and tonalities with the metronome clicking on varying beats. I also use a metronome app called Tempo for iOS that turns the metronome off and then on again in random succession. Maintaining consistent time is essential in the role of the lead trumpet, and I aim to maintain that consistency no matter where I place the melodic line within the beat. This helps bandmates to be able to follow your leadership, as stated before.

Musical Exercise 1: Keyed Time Drill

(♩ = 60 - 120)



Continue in all keys

4. Observe how their tone sounds: is it laser-like? Is it broad and warm? Is it raspy or played with a growl? Make a note of this on the part. If it is raspy, identify if a growl is being applied by either flutter tongue or growling in the throat while playing. I work on my tonal color by playing familiar melodies in all keys. It is essential to emulate our favorite-sounding trumpet players in what they play and how they play it. Observe the points where they break or extend the phrase and note this within the part. Pay special attention to how they phrase, including rests and breaks in the melodic line. I work on my phrasing by practicing long melodies and playing them in all keys and styles. Phrasing gets overlooked because it is synonymous with all forms of music. However, know that it is what separates professionals apart from others. I can continually refine my approach to phrasing through singing and listening to others.
5. Observe all articulations; this is a time-consuming process but an essential one. Listen to how and when they articulate. Take note of any articulations that are emphasized or different from others. There generally are four different articulation markings within a chart but many shades within these markings. The first is (-); this dash above the note means legato, and a longer note is usually a "doo" like articulation. The second is (>). This accent is traditionally played with a "ta" like articulation. The third is the marcato or "housetop" accent (^), which is played with a "dot" like articulation. Lastly is the staccato articulation (.), usually played with a "dit" like articulation. These articulations have many shades and are one of the most personal trademarks a lead player uses and is determined by the era. Older charts from the swing era will tend to have shorter articulations, whereas articulations in later periods will be longer. I use the following

Exercise 2 and Exercise 3 in all keys and tonalities to work on my articulations. I vary my articulations to include all the mentioned articulations. I also practice these exercises straight and swing. With Exercise 3, I will also change the rhythm to work on my specific needs. Be creative in your practice and compose the exercises that target your weaknesses.

Musical Exercise 2: Articulation Range Study

(♩ = 60 - 120)

Continue in all keys

Musical Exercise 3: Syncopated 5ths through the horn

(♩ = 60 - 120)

Continue in all keys

6. Observe the use of vibrato and focus on the speed, width, and where it occurs. Fast and frequently used vibrato is a trait of the swing era. It is usually done with hand vibrato, which is quicker and more intense. More rapid vibrato is generally used on extended notes in the 1950s – 60s styles. The note is established in the said eras of music, and then the vibrato is added, take note of this nuance. In more modern pieces, vibrato is slower, wider, and frequently not there. When there is no vibrato, take note of the harmonic chord structure around the lead player; if it is a cluster voicing, take note of that and avoid using vibrato at that point in the chart. I work on vibrato by playing the same melodies or tunes and making them sound from different eras. For example, I

would play the melody to Stardust and make it sound like it was from the 1920s or '30s with fast narrow vibrato and then play it again and stylize it like it was from the 21st century.

7. Observe the use of dynamics and focus on how the dynamics are shaded with the phrasing. Take note of any overdramatized dynamics and listen to how the lead trumpet dynamics are locked in with the comping of the rhythm section. I work on my dynamics when playing melodies in all keys and styles.
8. Observe all shakes and pay attention to speed, width, and occurrence. In general, shakes in older styles, like vibrato, the notes are established, then a fast narrow shake is applied. Notice how the shake informs the time being played. In more modern era charts, note the shake's width and speed and how it changes as the shake goes on. The way that I work on my shakes is with the following Exercise 4. I do these shakes, both narrow in width and wide in width. I transpose these into all keys and tonalities throughout the horn range.

Musical Exercise 4: Shakes Narrow and Wide

(♩ = 60 - 200)

Continue in all keys

9. Observe any falls or glissandos, their duration, and their velocity. These may be added beyond the notated part and come in various shading. Take note if a $\frac{1}{2}$ valve sound is present. I add falls and the other effects to melodies that I practice in all keys to become comfortable with their usage musically. I also use Exercise 5, listed below, to help me discover the range needed to execute the physicality of the glissando effect. I do this exercise 3 times for each set of glissandos at three dynamic levels. I play this exercise C through G above, D through A above, and continue this pattern as high as possible.

Musical Exercise 5: Glissandos

3 Times

P - MF - F

3

P - MF - F

5

P - MF - F

Ect.

10. Observe any bends/scoops that are applied and take note of the intended overall effect. Note if the pitch is being established and bent or if the note is bent into the center of the pitch. Notice when a valve is being used to achieve this effect or being executed with the embouchure. I add bends and other effects to melodies that I practice in all keys to become comfortable with their usage.
11. The last step is to play and sing with the record matching these nuances. Being able to reproduce these nuances without reference to the recording is the actual test. Repeat this process with as many charts as possible. After studying multiple lead players, you will develop your stylistic approach rooted in this music's history, making your stylistic interpretations accessible to the informed listener.