

# Book Notes

## Broken Embouchures:

### **An Embouchure Handbook and Repair Guide**

By Lucinda-Lewis (Oscar's Press, 2002, 171 pages, \$39.95).

[Available from [www.embouchures.com](http://www.embouchures.com) or Lucinda Lewis, PO Box 20384, Greeley Square Stn, New York, NY 10001.]

*Broken Embouchures: An Embouchure Handbook and Repair Guide* is written by Lucinda Lewis, a professional French horn player and teacher. This book covers many aspects of embouchure mechanics and dysfunction and outlines potentially beneficial exercises for rehabilitating a brass player's injured embouchure. It is based on the author's personal playing experience and years of investigating embouchure failure in brass players. Despite the endorsement of several physicians, this book should not be considered "must" reading for every brass player; however, it offers potentially valuable insights to players who have dysfunction of a previously serviceable embouchure.

The book is written in a whimsical, colloquial jargon that is accessible to most English-language readers who lack medical expertise. The author acknowledges the lack of generally accepted terminology for various types of embouchure dysfunction and has coined several terms that aim to create a common vocabulary regarding problems brass players may encounter when their embouchure fails them (e.g., *embouchure malaise*, *muscle memory*, *mechanical ambiguity*). The text benefits from numerous quotations introduced to illustrate the author's point so that most experienced brass players would recognize quickly certain problems all have encountered at various times (e.g. puffy lips from too much strenuous playing when not in shape). The 20 chapters are devoted to discussions of specific topics, including embouchures in general, mouthpieces, mouthpiece repositioning, playing exercises to rehabilitate the injured embouchure, and personal testimonies. One section deals briefly with the surgical repair of a tear in the major lip muscle. Two chapters superficially cover other medical conditions that may affect the mouth and throat of wind musicians and numerous herbal remedies for common ailments. This material should raise the player's awareness of other problems that could affect the embouchure but is of questionable value and is potentially misleading. The author clearly indicates the need for appropriate medical advice when considering such matters and in the use of prescription drugs. Although it is a lengthy book to wade through for specific remedies, it may be well worthwhile for the player who cannot find answers or a means for reconstituting a failed embouchure.

The book's primary weakness is its anecdotal nature, relying primarily on the author's personal experience and testimonies of colleagues and students. For the medically sophisticated reader, there is a large amount of lay wisdom with a paucity of scientific data regarding the various issues discussed. Although the book is intended as documentary rather than prospective, hypothesis-driven research, no effort has been made to quantify the incidence of embouchure problems amongst various brass players, the potential benefits of the exercises proposed, or the efficacy of one approach over another. Given the acknowledged idiosyncratic and multivariate causes of embouchure dysfunction for brass players, the author's approach to rehabilitating the injured embouchure may not be uni-

versally successful. Of additional concern is the author's mention of the breathing methods of Caruso and Jacobs without reference to the more widely available techniques of the Alexander method, which have benefited many performers.

The previously mentioned weaknesses of the book do not limit its potential usefulness. They are the chief strength of this unique book, representing years of careful, detailed, painstaking assessment of acquired embouchure problems. The author makes several important points for the player who is setting out to correct an acquired embouchure problem. The advice that "whatever works for you is the *best* method" (p. 128) is important because the attempt to make the prescribed exercises a "one size fits all" remedy is destined to create more problems than it solves when applied by desperate players. The recommendation to be "kind and understanding with yourself" (p. 88) is invaluable advice for the performer who is seeking a quick fix to get back on top of his or her game. The author makes passing reference to a period of 6 months for rehabilitating a failed embouchure. This period is consistent with many other types of rehabilitation for musculoskeletal disorders and prematurely stressing damaged tissue is likely to lead only to further delays in recovery and additional injury.

For the ailing brass player, this book can provide a starting place for analyzing one's own embouchure idiosyncrasies and potentially unraveling the web of interrelated factors that may prevent recovery. It may serve as a reference for players, teachers, and physicians dealing with previously successful brass musicians with acquired embouchure problems. Although this book may not be the final word on embouchure dysfunction and rehabilitation, it provides a further tool for players who otherwise might have to abandon performing.

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### **Making Music Without Pain**

By Ans Samama-Polak (Assen, The Netherlands, Van Gorcum, 1998, 170 pages, 20 Euros, softcover).

In general, *Making Music Without Pain* provides useful information on proper posture and technique for the musician that includes a wide variety of instruments, such as string instruments, keyboard instruments, woodwinds, voice, brass instruments, percussion instruments, conducting, and plucked string instruments. The author's suggestions are detailed nicely and outlined with pictures along with a table of complaints and useful interventions at the end of the book. This book can be a useful tool for suggestions on improving posture and preventing possible problems with musculoskeletal pain.

The suggestions are probably more useful, however, for the amateur musician because most of these recommendations are basic principles that most professionals probably already know. The general breathing, warm-up, and cool-down exercises and principles are good, including the hand.

I would recommend caution for any musician who has ongoing undiagnosed pain to seek an arts medicine specialist's evaluation before starting the suggested exercises. This should be stated clearly in the beginning of the book. Also, some of the suggested exercises could be harmful in certain diagnoses, such as cervical degenerative joint disease, in which neck extension exercises, 2.3B, should be avoided. In Chapter 3, some of the back exercises can be difficult to do and cause more pain in patients with degenerative spine diseases, disk herniations, and spondylolisthesis (fig. 3.1, 3.2 C/D, 3.3 C, 3.4 E/G/H, 3.5-7, 3.12, and 3.23). The author tends to overemphasize the incorrect use of the monkey posture to find the correct posture. Excessive hyperlordosis or "swaying" of the lower back could strain

this area, causing more pain. I would recommend focusing on the correct neutral spine position instead.

Given the above information, I would recommend this book cautiously to the musician if some of these exercises were used initially without supervision. This book could be a useful tool for the musician with some modifications of the above-listed concerns or when used initially with supervision by an arts medicine specialist.

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