

Fish Face

When I let my chops fall apart the quickest thing to bring it back is really just mostly playing technical exercises; not leaving myself much room for improvisation. Improvisation is always, you know, something that's happening in my head anyway. I feel like my concept; my musical concept, my voice, is always developing. Whether I'm using the trumpet as a tool for that development or not.

So anyway, when I do get the horn back in my face, the most important thing is to re-establish the fine nuances; the fine details of my muscle memory, of the coordination, of exactly how I do business; exactly what shape my lips need to be for every note; exactly what shape my tongue needs to have for every note.

And so I just — getting back into the shed for me is very much about playing simple, rudimental exercises. And one thing that I like to do a lot is [sounds] — you can do this with me now, this is our first chance for something interactive. So maybe stick your finger (or something) in your mouth, and flex your lips forward; *flex* them forward as far as you can so they're as thick and three-dimensional... just really flexing away from your teeth. Maybe blow a kiss, and flex that; [sounds] and then open up that diameter, so [sounds].

So this is a serious isometric exercise and really, you should probably be tired in ten seconds, fifteen seconds you should feel some serious burn. So, the exercise is: Blow the kiss, hold it, flex it, [sounds] and that action is just great for growing your muscles *in the way* that I feel is the most helpful: growing them thick, and far away from your teeth.

Get ready to push that mouthpiece away from your teeth and make it so that the passageway that the air is traveling through, that is your aperture, is a more three-dimensional — is a longer tunnel of vibrating flesh. When you get tired, the chops just give up, especially underneath the rim of the mouthpiece.

So really flexing forward and really putting that muscle memory into your face without the trumpet, so that when you get the horn on your face, it's not just connecting, just pushing the mouthpiece right up against your teeth, and knowing where the horn belongs because of the action — the interface between the mouthpiece and your teeth. That's very unfair to your lips to do such a thing. But I feel the way I interface with the horn is by observing how far away from my teeth I'm pushing the mouthpiece.

And so 'fish face' [sounds] is the action of building those muscles' ability to flex forward, which is huge, and it's what you need in order to counteract any inward pressure. So if you flex your biceps, or whatever, or use the "octave key" when you're playing (*neither of which I recommend, by the way!*) at least, *at least*, if you are still doing that; if you're meeting it with more outward pressure than inward pressure, then it's still a net positive. If you play with completely jiggly arms, that would be even better. And you're pushing the mouthpiece away from your face, that's even healthier.

But 'fish face' is a great way to pull your shit together and to come back from a long time off.