

Arban's "Complete Method" might be the most common method book used by brass players from all over the world. Nearly every player I know has encountered this book at some point in their musical development.

Today, it seems, most players seem to either swear BY or swear OFF using it.

Arban's, is a classic book of exercises which covers a fairly wide and complete range of topics. The author does not present a particular formula or even a philosophy for any kind of specific musical growth. He presents us with merely ONE suggestion for how to develop certain brass-playing skills in a sequential way. Some people may think, "If I just figure out everything in Arban's, I'll be set". If it were ONLY that easy! Remember, many outstanding players have never cracked open the Arban's book. Many others work out of it regularly.

I have heard many great player/teachers suggest working out the types of patterns and exercises in Arban's by ear. This is a good idea, but there is also something to be gained by SEEING the music in print too. Some player/students may work better SEEING what a given task is right in front of them. Also, this book does a good job at introducing a player [regardless of ability] to the idea of taking ONE musical idea [scale patterns, arpeggio patterns, intervals] through many/all keys AND vice versa: practicing several musical ideas all in ONE key. Both are critical skills for achieving mastery of one's instrument.

Is it better to read these exercises or make them up by ear?

Why not do BOTH!!??

For trombone and euphonium players, I feel that the recently published Alessi/Bowman edition of Arban's is well worth the money. The comments between the sections alone are worth the \$50 US [even if you already have the older version]. This is considerably less than the price of one lesson with either of these two legends!! Also the new edition contains duets, arias and other exercises not available in the previous two volumes for trombone. The spiral binding sits better on a music stand and most of the typos from earlier editions have been corrected.

The following outline consists of several of the topics I like to address on a regular basis as part of my daily low brass playing routine. What I actually play might be drawn from a variety of books, lesson notes, improvised

exercises and music I might be preparing for upcoming performances. Arban's is near the top of the list for this type of material I use to address one of the bold printed topics below. ¹

After warming up, and depending on how much time I have that day, I will focus on any one of the following topics for 5, 10, or maybe 20 minutes, then move on to something else, rest a little, then maybe come back to the first thing again, etc.

Within each topic below, there are other variables...Articulation, dynamics, range, transposition/clef, tempo. There are many other topics [breathing, improvisational ideas, range expansion, extended techniques, etc] but these are just the topics I use Arban's for the most... the page numbers refer to the Randall/Mantia version, the Alessi/Bowman edition [A/B] page numbers are in parentheses.

1. Mouthpiece/Buzzing....

p. 19 [A/B p. 15] #9 [on mouthpiece]

2. Sound...

p. 108 [A/B p. 119] #44-47 [ala Bordogni. More of this stuff in the Alessi/Bowman version--great for sight-singing/playing and buzzing too]

3. Slower Slurs and Intervals...

p 45 [A/B p44] #3-11, p 47 [A/B p.47] #16 and 17,
p 135 [A/B p.147] #8-12

4. Slow Articulated Playing...

p 45 [A/B p.43] #1 and 2,
p 93 [A/B p.101] #1. 1/8 note=60 or slower.

5. Faster Slurs/Trills...

p 48 [A/B p.48] [#18-26]

6. Faster Articulated Playing...the subject I draw out of Arban's most...

¹ In practice, I usually like to do a basic "warm up routine" which allows me to briefly address many of the topics listed. For this, I use portions of the warm up and daily routines by Alessi, Stamp, Main, Remington, Sachs, Neumeister, Ellefson, Baker, Marsteller and my own material, some of it improvised. I begin with simple breathing exercises [for a great survey of the way to incorporate breath work into your daily routine, see Pilafian/Sheridan's "Breathing Gym" DVD]. This portion of the routine also serves as a little inventory check. What needs work today? How can I make my music more relaxed, more efficient and more clear?

p. 53 [A/B p.54] #31-60,
p. 93 [A/B p. 101] #1-23
p 110 [A/B p.121] #48-54, no grace notes,
p. 136 [A/B p. 148] #13-47, triplets and 1/16's.

7.Slow Scales...

p 63-90 [A/B p. 64-86], try starting with one or two keys/day every week for a few months...1/8 note=50!!

8.Faster Scales...

p 24 [A/B p.22] #28-45,
p 28 [A/B p. 27] #47-50, "Major Scales"
p. 63 [A/B p. 65] 1-16 are different patterns in Bb, the remaining keys have 6 patterns each...I like to take one key through all 6 of these patterns in a practice session then I'll make up or derive my own patterns in that key. Unfortunately, Arban only goes through the flat keys...you should do the sharp keys too!!
p.80-90 [p. 88-99] #1-30,"Chromatic Scales". I might read one exercise then do it again by ear starting on a different note.

9.Faster/Wider Intervals

p. 126-127 [A/B p.139-140] ...My personal favorite! A good timbre/consistency exercise [courtesy of Roy Main!!]:, play p 127 [A/B p.140], top to bottom [no repeats if you like], "mf", with a good solid tenuto attack, then shift over to p 128 [A/B p. 139] and read it from the bottom up. Rest for a couple seconds every couple of lines. As you play this every day for a couple weeks, you will eventually get through the whole thing without needing to rest as much. Work this up from about quarter=72 if you are an intermediate player, and work it up day by day, week by week, month by month to 160 or more. Strive for an even resonant sound at all times through all registers.

10. Multiple Tongue...

p. 162 [A/B p. 175] #1-14 are triple tongued triplet patterns on a single note. Don't rush your way through these. Play them very SLOWLY [quarter=60-72 at first]. You can experiment with articulating TTK, TKT, TTT, TTK, KKK [again, thanks, Roy Main!!]. Get the T's and K's to be equally clear. They can then become interchangeable. On p 167 [A/B 179]#16-46, you start triple tongue across one, then two intervals, the next step in the process. p. 175 [A/B p. 187]#47-76 is the application of triple tongue on scales and intervals. You can go back to the Fast Articulation exercises for more triple tongue practice too. The Double Tongue section then moves through the process a little quicker [maybe Arban figured that if you made it

this far with triple tonguing, you should pick up double tonguing pretty quickly]. In this section, there are some nice mixed articulation [double tongue/slurred] exercises to expand your fast articulation repertoire. Again, crispness, clarity, great time and great sound should be a higher priority than speed.

11. Rhythmic Accuracy/Style...

p 30 [A/B p. 29] #1-18."Syncopation" section. Strive for clear consistent time on these. Check yourself against a metronome occasionally. Slide and tongue work together!

p 35 [A/B p. 35]#19-37...this is in my "top ten" of single tongue exercises!! Start very slowly. Each exercise focuses on a different rhythmic "groove". Make them lock in time-wise. Then, when you encounter these rhythms in other music, you will have already done the hard work here. Time permitting, I will often do 3-4 of these a day, striving for clear and precise rhythm. I will play them again at a faster tempi. Single tongue speed and sense of time are closely related. Strive first for efficiency, good time and clarity. Eventually, you will be able to perform them faster with less effort.

12. Arpeggios...

p 60 [A/B p. 62]#68 and 69, major chords, taken through various inversions. On #69, all the keys right there in front of you!! No excuses!! p 151 [A/B p. 160] major: #'s 48, 50 and 52, minor: #'s 49 and 51, dominant 7th: #53 and diminished 7th: #55. Again, all keys are right there! Get to work, even if you start REALLY slow!! I like to do 3-4 keys at a practice session. Let's them soak in! Strive to be comfortable doing these all by ear. Close your eyes and BLOW!

This leaves the famous "Characteristic Studies" and the "Airs and Variations". As you work on the more tedious work above, jump into these technically challenging pieces. Working steadily, in a pretty short period of time, there should be some pieces in there for you to tackle. Each "Characteristic Study" emphasizes certain musical challenges...one might be mostly chromatic, another might challenge your multiple tonguing, another tests your arpeggios, etc. If so, you can go back to main volume to work out the loose ends you find in your playing.

You may also try isolating certain phrases in the Characteristic Studies and the Airs/Variations [transpose them!!] to add to any of the categories above.

Be imaginative and creative ESPECIALLY when you work on "exercises". Focussing on fundamentals does not have to lead to mechanical playing. Let

the tools you use become transparent and instinctual. That way, your attention ultimately leads back to making beautiful music.

Good luck!!