

# Sing it! How to improve away from our instruments. By Carlos Jimenez Fernandez

Surprising as it may seem, practicing our skills at our instruments is only part of what is necessary to become a great musician. In this article, I will focus on one of the ways in which you as a brass player can become a better musician without a horn in your hands: singing.

The idea of singing for brass players can seem daunting at first. After all, we mainly train to make beautiful sounds with our instruments, not with our voice. But, honestly, all you need to do is practice, just like everything else. The more good practice you do, the better you will become at it.

If you don't feel comfortable singing or don't have much experience, please ask a vocalist friend or vocal coach to teach you some of the basics. Singing can be very beneficial to your musicianship, but you can hurt yourself if you don't do it the right way. That said, where to start? It will depend on your ability. The most basic exercise is to see if you can replicate a pitch from your instrument, or from a piano, with your voice. Once you are confident, move on to intervals, scales, arpeggios. And eventually you will be able to tackle full phrases of the music that you are practicing. Just as an example, think of the Rochut etudes: they are transcriptions from vocalises, singing etudes for vocalists to develop their phrasing. So it makes a lot of sense to not only play those, but sing them as well! And because when we sing we don't have to think about valves, or positions, or partials, we can focus on how we want to phrase the music, how to give each note a place in the structure of the whole piece. It's essentially like a scientific approach: you are dissecting, pulling apart the different layers of the technique that come with

playing our instruments and just focusing on phrasing and breathing. You can try different phrasing models, emphasizing different notes each time, similarly to how you would practice a speech if you don't want to sound monotonous. This is a great way to develop your personal musicianship, by trying, changing, and adjusting different approaches.

I have described how singing will help your intonation practice by way of internalizing intervals and pitch relations. This is already a very important development. And the good news is that it is not the only one. Personally, when I think about singing as part of my practice, it is a beautiful reminder that, as Arnold Jacobs said, "music comes first, last, and always". Singing gives us a roadmap to expressiveness. All the technical elements (scales, arpeggios, articulation practice, legato, dynamics, etc.) then come into play and help us get to that goal.