

# A Brief Practical Guide for the Teachers of Beginning Horn Students

Clinician: Roxanne Haskill

## I. Preliminary Considerations

### A.) Required Physical Attributes:

1. The student should be of sufficient size and strength to properly and comfortably handle the instrument under all conditions. Discussion of which type (single F or Bb, or Full Double) of Horn to select will follow; however, it is critical that regardless of which instrument is selected, that the student is tall enough to sit properly in a chair and position the instrument in the proper manner to play correctly. The student should also possess sufficient strength in her/his arms to be able to hold the Horn free of the leg (on or off leg playing is covered in a separate clinic.) Generally, because of the design of the instrument, the majority of the weight of the instrument is borne by the left arm and shoulder.

2. The thickness of the lips should be considered. An individual with very thick lips may not be the best candidate for the Horn, since the mouthpiece is small, in comparison to some of the other brass instruments.

3. Good “ears.” When evaluating a student/person to determine whether or not they have the potential to become a good Horn player it is also very, very important to find out if the individual can hear and process pitches/notes well. A very important part of playing the Horn well is to be able to find the correct partial on the Horn. If a person/student cannot sing back a pitch or note either sung or played to them accurately, chances are they will find it very difficult and frustrating to play the Horn; not only well, but at all! **Very important-Test this ability along with testing to see if the person/student can create a good “buzz” on the mouthpiece.**

## II. Mouthpiece Selection

### A.) Physical Properties:

1. The wider the inside diameter of the rim, the easier the low notes are to play. The more narrow, the easier the high notes.

2. A wide rim allows for good endurance, but often a muddy sounding tone, and too little sensitivity. A narrow rim gives better accuracy, but less endurance.

3. A “soft” or well-rounded inner edge of the rim allows smooth slurs, but can make staccato attacks not clean. A sharp edge allows the slurs to “pop” and can make smooth slurs difficult.

4. A shallow cup produces a brighter, sometimes harsh tone, but allows higher notes to sound more easily. A deep cup will create a darker tone and “fatter” sounding low notes.

5. A pronounced “bowl” shape provides a Baritone like sound, and a straighter side produces less resonance but a more “Horn like” sound.

## **A Brief Practical Guide for the Teachers of Beginning Horn Students**

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### **II. Mouthpiece Selection (Continued)**

#### A.) Physical Properties

6. The mouthpiece bore should be straight for about and eighth to a quarter of an inch to allow more control and consistency of tone.

(Recommended mouthpieces: Farkas MC, Conn #2, Bach #7)

**Very Important! Once the proper mouthpiece is decided upon, stick with it!**

### **III. Instrument Selection**

#### A.) Single or Double Horn?

1. For a beginning student, a single Horn is strongly recommended. Why?

a.) Weight and Size: the Full Double Horn weighs approximately 8 lbs and sometimes has a slightly wider circumference of the body of the instrument. 8 lbs is a lot of weight for a young person to hold suspended away from the body—is resting the Horn on the leg an option? Preferably not. Why? Resting the Horn on the leg usually results in very poor alignment of the Horn in relationship to the mouth and the rest of the body. Most players who only play on the leg become dependent on the leg and are not able to play off leg or standing. This will pose a problem for players who want to become advanced or even intermediate performers on the Horn; it is still, pretty much world wide, not acceptable to play solos, whether alone or with piano or an ensemble, sitting. (More related to this issue will be covered in a separate clinic.) Another consideration is that a great deal of care was and is spent designing the bell of the Horn to allow the instrument to resonate properly.

B.) Single Horn, Which One? (Single Horns generally come in 2 varieties, F and Bb.)

1. The F Horn is the better of the two for young players because:

a.) The F Horn possesses the most characteristic tone.

b.) The instrument demands the formation and development of a proper embouchure.

c.) The F Horn, although slightly larger than the single Bb, is light enough to permit proper posture when playing (as opposed to the heavier, bulkier Full Double.)

**(Note: The single F Horn should not be chosen if the music will frequently require the player to play at or above e2 (top space treble clef.)**

## **A Brief Practical Guide for the Teachers of Beginning Horn Students**

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### B.) Single Horn, Which One? (Continued)

2. The single Bb Horn is sometimes used by professional Horn players because of its relative ease of use in the upper register, and its light weight.

a.) This instrument is frequently modified to include a valve for open F notes and a stopping valve, among other alterations. Smaller than normal bore sizes are also available to further improve high Horn playing.

### C.) The Full Double, also referred to as the Double Horn

#### 1. Both and F and Bb Horns combined together

a.) Most common is the F Horn as the “basic” Horn; that is to say that without engaging the thumb (also known as the trigger or fourth) valve the Horn is pitched in F, or sometimes will also be said to “stand in F.” If this is the case the thumb/trigger/fourth valve is depressed/engaged to play the Bb instrument. On most professional Horns this setup can easily be reversed.

b.) Best for fully developed students who are strong enough to support the instrument properly, have a well and properly formed embouchure, understand the differences of the F and Bb Horns, and have a need for the flexibility and increased range of this instrument.

c.) Advantages are: F Horn for its characteristic tone, “fatness” of sound, and accurate intonation and the Bb for ease of playing, accuracy in the high range and for its rapid response.

## **IV. Common Practices, Are These Good or Bad?**

### A.) The Trumpet/Cornet Conversion to Horn

#### 1. Pros:

a.) Starts the student reading music.  
b.) Starts the student on a brass instrument when she/he may be too small or stature to handle a Horn.

#### 2. Cons:

a.) The student becomes a very good Trumpet/Cornet player and has no interest in switching to Horn (!)

## A Brief Practical Guide for the Teachers of Beginning Horn Students

Clinician: Roxanne Haskill

### IV. Common Practices, Are These Good or Bad? (Continued)

#### A.) The Trumpet/Cornet Conversion to Horn

##### 2. Cons: (Cont.)

b.) The embouchures for the Trumpet/Cornet and the Horn are totally different\* and the convert cannot shift to the Horn embouchure.

1.) Tone on the Horn is too “bright”.

2.) Cannot develop range on Horn.

3.) Has significant accuracy problems (missing partials).

4.) Has tonguing technique problems.

c.) Usually is a poor Horn player and quits altogether.

(\* General differences: Horn: combination of a “smiling” and puckered” embouchure, Trumpet: a more “smiling” embouchure; Horn: 2/3rds upper lip, 1/3 lower, Trumpet: generally the opposite.)

#### B.) Horns Playing Mellophone in Marching/Pep Bands

##### 1. Pros:

a.) Increases the size and sound of the Marching/Pep Band.

b.) Allows Horn players to participate in these ensembles.

##### 2. Cons:

a.) Because the Mellophone uses a Trumpet style mouthpiece the player’s Horn embouchure begins to “mutate” to an embouchure more similar to the Trumpet, causing the problems listed in A.) 2. b. above to develop when switched back to Horn.

##### 3. What’s the Answer Then?

a.) It’s generally not acceptable in the US to play the Horn in Marching or Pep bands because the bell goes the opposite direction as compared to all of the other brass instruments. This creates balance and projection problems in performance.

b.) Put your Horn players on other instruments: percussion or perhaps flute (more about why the flute is a good choice for Horn players is covered next.) Maybe even in the Color Guard or in the role of a Drum Major/Ensemble Leader.

c.) **If they must play the Mellophone, mouthpiece selection is critical. Don’t use Trumpet mouthpieces; they are designed to work with Trumpets! Avoid using the mouthpiece that came with the Mellophone. Don’t use the Mello 6 mouthpieces. What to use? First choice: Larry Kerchner IYM Mellophone Mouthpiece ([www.iymcorp.com](http://www.iymcorp.com)), 2d choice Karl Hammond Marching Arts 5MP ([www.karlhammondsgdesign.com](http://www.karlhammondsgdesign.com).)**

## **A Brief Practical Guide for the Teachers of Beginning Horn Students**

Clinician: Roxanne Haskill

### **IV. Common Practices, Are These Good or Bad? (Continued)**

#### **C.) Starting Horn Players on Flute**

1. The embouchure required to play Flute and Horn are much more similar in shape and function than the Horn embouchure is to most other instruments.
  - a.) The corners of the mouth should be firm and anchored toward the eyeteeth, providing a half smile and half puckered embouchure.
  - b.) The chin should be flat and pulled downward.
  - c.) The air stream, which is critically adjusted by the Flute player to cause the air to move across and into the tone hole perfectly for whatever register the player is in, and for whatever tone and pitch the player is controlling, is a good skill for the Horn player to have (upstream and downstream concepts.)

(In contrast, remember what the Trumpet/Cornet embouchure is like: more of a “smiling” type of embouchure with the corners of the mouth pulled back and the lips fairly stretched and firm.)

2. Although the weight of the Flute is fairly well distributed to both arms, the supporting arm often feels like the left arm because of its closeness to the head and face, and the angle of the arm. This parallels the feeling of the left arm later, as the player is moved from Flute to Horn, because although the Horn player should strive to balance the weight of the instrument, the design of the Horn puts most of the support requirement on the left arm.

### **V. Stopped Horn Technique**

(Note: Playing Stopped Horn is not usually a skill expected of beginners, but teaching them about it early and having them try it if their hands are big enough and they have good control of the instrument and they have good basic technique, is one of the very best ways to ensure that the right hand is being used properly. )

#### **A.) Done CORRECTLY the instrument sounds a half step HIGHER!!!**

1. If the pitch is sounding a half step LOWER this is because the instrument is only being partially Stopped; the seal made with the heel of the hand is not sealed tightly enough, and/or not enough air is being used.

## **A Brief Practical Guide for the Teachers of Beginning Horn Students**

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### **V. Stopped Horn Technique (Continued)**

A.) Done CORRECTLY the instrument sounds a half step HIGHER!!!

2. When being Stopped correctly the Horn player must transpose DOWN a half step from what is written because the properly Stopped Horn is now sounding a half step higher. Correct Stopping is simply “closing the hinged gate” with the wrist. Young players and those with small hands may need to “jam” (I use this word very carefully!) the hand into the bell ensuring that they don’t stick the thumb into the middle of the fingers- -the proper pitch will sound, but it will probably be sharp- -compensate with the embouchure for short passages or the tuning slides for longer ones. For players who are small stature wise, a mute may be used, but do this only when necessary, as Muted and Stopped Horn are NOT the same technically, nor is the sound the same.

3. Play Stopped Horn **ONLY ON THE F HORN!!!** This is because the Stopped Bb Horn will rise (or sound) approximately three quarters of a tone higher, which is almost impossible to accurately compensate for. (Exception: Single Bb Horn with a Stop valve.)

### **VI. Concluding Comments:**

Not ALL converts from Trumpet/Cornet to Horn will have the difficulties described previously. Very careful selection of the player chosen to move to Horn from the Trumpet/Cornet, accompanied by **immediate instruction from a Horn player and teacher** who supports and understands this process is crucial. Most important is the close and consistent observation and support of the ensemble director(s) as the student makes this difficult change.

Always be very careful as to where the horns are placed within the ensemble. Because the Horn bell points backward avoid putting the Horns in front of percussion or in front of other brass instruments whose bells point directly forward. Also, ensure that the Horn players have sufficient space, especially to their right, so that the bell is not touching another player, or wall or some other object. Many Horn players’ mouths are injured when another player hits their bell. Not given enough space Horn players will resort to putting the Horn bell on their leg, usually not correctly, which often results in poor embouchure and right hand development.