

The Importance of Playing Duets

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Students should be encouraged to play duets with each other. Benefits include better ensemble (attacks & releases), improvement in intonation, better sight reading, higher awareness of blend/balance, and more quality time (hopefully) on their instrument. Playing duets should also be FUN!

Important Aspects to Consider:

- **Ensemble Skills**

Attacks and Releases. Practice starting each entrance together. Be aware of cut-offs and make the releases together. Move from note to note together! After a breath, practice coming in at the exact same time.

- **Intonation**

Learn to hear octaves, unisons and then 3rds, 4ths, and 5ths perfectly in tune. Using a tuner will obviously be a valuable resource but we must learn to hear intervals without one. Be aware of certain notes that are out-of-tune on the instrument and learn to play them in tune. Musicians constantly adjust pitch in an ensemble situation and playing duets provides a microcosm of what it takes to play in larger groups.

- **Blend and Balance**

One part shouldn't stick out from the other—either in volume or tone quality. Learn to balance and blend the two tones together.

- **Sight-Reading**

The ability to quickly grasp notes, rhythms, dynamics, and other markings is crucial. Playing unfamiliar duets is a good way to encounter these. We all first learned to read easy books at home and/or school then progressed to more complex material. The same principle works for reading music—the more music we read, the better and faster we become at it. We'll recognize rhythms better and start to hear different styles as well. As we get better at this we notice more and more things automatically in the music and avoid many of the common mistakes lesser

experienced musicians make. Think of sight-reading as an investment in your musical development! And don't forget . . . always keep the key signature in mind.

• **Teamwork**

This is a skill that will prove valuable throughout our lifetime. Learning to give and take toward the common goal is the basis for teamwork. Working well with others is an important component of playing duets, and in turn, making our ensembles better, not to mention more enjoyable.

• **Resources**

Brass players have the duets located in the back of the *Arban Conservatory Method*; these range from easy to medium difficulty and include many different styles, keys, rhythms, and articulations.

The *Rubank Series* of selected duets are very good and available for many different combinations of instruments.

Amsden's Celebrated Practice Duets begins at a very easy level and progressively gets more difficult in the rhythms, keys, and articulations. Many brass players have spent hours in this book.

Saint-Jacome's Grand Method has highly engaging duets. They are longer, written in many contrasting sections, and provide an advanced opportunity to practice duet playing.

Miniature Classics for Two Trumpets; More Miniature Classics for Two Trumpets. Works by the Masters such as J.S. Bach, Handel, and Purcell are arranged for young players and are good resources to cover quality music arranged at an easy level.

There are good duets for clarinetists in the *Klose Method*. These duets are similar to those in the trumpeters' *Saint-Jacome's Grand Method* in that they are more advanced and written in contrasting sections.

A good on-line resource is *virtualsheetmusic.com*. This requires a \$37.75 annual fee but will allow unlimited downloading; renewal is \$25.99. There are 3,500 single items and 750 collections of a variety of styles of music for all instruments in this resource. This source includes solos (accompaniment included), duets, and ensembles.

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