Beginning Horn

CLINICIAN:
David Brandon

Texas Bandmasters Association
2014 Convention/Clinic

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HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

BEGINNING HORN

David Brandon

Duncanville ISD

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION CONVENTION

Monday, July 28th, 2014

5:15 p.m. – 6:15 p.m.

CC Room 213

BEGINNING HORN

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RECRUITING

When introducing the instruments to the incoming class of potential band students, emphasize the importance of high grades in all their current classes and let them know that they must be at least be an A/B student to play one of the school-owned instruments. This attracts the "right" type of kid to these very important instruments and prevents most eligibility problems over the next seven years.

INSTRUMENT INTERVIEW

The ideal beginner hornist should be outgoing, self confident and not afraid to make mistakes. They should also be able to recognize differences in pitches and be able to match pitch with their voice. You can get a good feel for a student's personality and pitch ability by how they respond when singing back pitches you either sing yourself, play on the piano or on the horn. Ask them to identify the higher or lower note of two pitches you either sing or play starting with wide intervals and progressing to half-steps.

Look for the following physical things while giving potential players a quick lesson on embouchure and mouthpiece vibrations:

1. **Top Lip:** Medium to thin, should cover the top teeth, no pronounced "cupid's bow when forming the embouchure so a straight line is formed by the top and bottom lips (like flute)
2. **Bottom Lip:** Not overly full
3. **Jaw:** Does not protrude forward. The natural angle of the mouthpiece should be slightly downward.
4. **Chin:** Student can flatten with minimal instruction

If the student can obtain a fairly relaxed sound on the mouthpiece while demonstrating the correct physical characteristics then they have a good chance of being successful playing horn**.**

BE CAREFUL IN THIS SELECTION PROCESS!!!! Some student's will be able to produce a relaxed middle register sound no matter what physical characteristics they have and may actually do very well at the beginner and/or intermediate level. Keep in mind that you are also selecting future high school players, too! Problems caused by physical characteristics not particularly suited to horn may not reveal themselves until the student has to perform high school level music (including college graduate level all state etudes). Set them up for future success by selecting the right instrument now!

CLASS STRUCTURE

If at all possible teach the horns separate from other instruments. If this is not possible combine them with trumpets. If your beginner text does not have a special horn book then have them use trumpet books with a horn fingering chart stapled in. It really isn't that difficult to get your horns used to playing in fourths with other instruments.

Teach on a "need to know" basis and try to talk in terms of desired results rather than lengthy procedures or explanations. Demonstrate first and then have them try it. If some students need more explanation then either provide it yourself or ask the class guided questions resulting in another explanation of the technique.

Set the classroom up so there is plenty of room front to back and side to side to walk between students. You will need to be able to see your students from all angles. (I prefer an arc and teach from a rolling chair that does not have arms. This allows me to be on their level and to quickly move from student to student.)

POSTURE AND BREATHING

Teach basic playing posture and breathing first and review at the beginning of every class until both become second nature.

Basic posture is very simple yet vital to proper breathing and playing position. The student should sit so that their back does not touch the chair, spine straight, shoulders relaxed and head erect. With their feet on the floor they should be able to easily stand up without any extra effort. (sit as you stand)

Proper breathing is simply the ability to move lots of air in and out of the body as efficiently as possible. Demonstrate to the class then have them copy. Look for the following things:

- Breathing through the mouth not the nose—it's a bigger orifice
- Stomach area expands first then the chest—like filling up a glass with water
- Shoulders may rise slightly but not abnormally
  Air should move in and out—NO HOLDING IN AIR!!!!! Think of a swing
- Silent air in and out—extra noise means something is getting in the way of the air stream
- Tension cause by taking in too much air
- Squeezing abdominal muscles while exhaling and closing off the throat

Breathing Exercises (keep it simple!)

- In ____; Out ____ (always moving the same volume of air each time and blow to a target in the room)
- Blow up balloons in one breath
- Blow against a single sheet of paper held about 6 inches from your nose
- Hold a single sheet of paper against the wall with only your breath

Read ***Arnold Jacobs: The Legacy of a Master*** Edited and Collected by M. Dee Stewart

EMBOUCHURE

It's very important for each student to have a mirror handy so they can see when they are forming their embouchure correctly. Again, don't give detailed information unless it's necessary. Show the students your "natural face" and ask them to do the same while looking in the mirror. Then show them your embouchure and ask them to copy it. Most students will come very close to what you want and need only minor corrections. Then have them take a breath and blow air through their embouchure. Look for the following things:

- Corners stay in the same place as "natural face"—no pulling back our pushing forward
- Corners firm, but not tight, against the canine teeth—tell students having problems to think about spitting something off the tip of their tongue or pronounce a sophisticated "m" or "poo" sound
- Equal amounts of red showing from top and bottom lips on the sides—this varies due to different lip formations
- An oval aperture
- Teeth apart—width of their pinky
- Tongue out of the way of the air— "wispy" sounds or hiss means tongue is too high

If you have taught pulse, foot tap with a metronome and basic theory at the point you can introduce "Echo Playing" (I play - you play). While demonstrating good posture and toe tap to a metronome, breathe in tempo and blow out through your embouchure for four foot taps, stopping on the 5th tap. Draw a whole rest and a whole note on the board and explain that you just played a whole rest and a whole note on air. Do this as a class several times then begin alternating: First you, then the class. (You will need to decide on what counts they breathe in.)

MOUTHPIECE PLACEMENT AND FIRST SOUNDS

When most of the class can demonstrate proper posture, breathing and embouchure formation (and any music reading skills taught up to this point) move on to making sounds on the mouthpieces. Work with one student at a time to make sure the mouthpiece is placed properly and the student learns the correct "feel" from the beginning.

If you are able, demonstrate different sounds (both good and bad) on the mouthpiece alone and ask the class to describe what they hear. Guide them to your vocabulary of descriptors of sound so they will be able to accurately describe and eventually identify causes and solutions for tonal problems.

Begin with the student who was the most actively involved with the above:

1. Sit with good posture
2. Lick lips so they are very moist
3. Blow air through embouchure
4. You place the mouthpiece on the embouchure—THEY CHANGE NOTHING and no matter what comes out (if anything) they must keep air moving
    - Determine where the natural aperture forms when they blow air through the embouchure (usually, but not always, horizontally centered)
    - Place the bottom of mouthpiece on the edge of the bottom lip, centered on their natural aperture (if bottom lip is full you may need to place the mouthpiece in the red of the lip)
    - Swing the mouthpiece upward to the top lip making sure the outside rim of the top lip is inside the mouthpiece
    - ***The line formed where the top and bottom lips touch should be just below center of the mouthpiece. (the traditional placement is 2/3's upper, 1/3 lower)***
    - ***MAKE SURE THE MOUTHPIECE ANGLE IS SLIGHTLY DOWNWARD SO THAT IT IS NOT PRESSING INTO THE TOP LIP!!!!***

Almost all students will have run out of breath so this is the time to teach them to breathe through the corners of their mouth. Make sure the embouchure reforms correctly after breathing and that they don't hold air inside their body. If they do, start the procedure all over again.

Possible Outcomes:

- No Buzz—this is ok—if air speed is slow have them blow faster, if lips are too far apart bring them slightly more together, if lips are too hard tell them to soften
- Tight and Pinched Buzz—start all over and ask them to soften lips and try to just blow air through the mouthpiece
- Tubby "wet" Sounding Buzz—think more pronounced "poo"—keep the inside flesh touching the teeth and gums
- Relaxed Buzz—great—have them do it again several times and hold it as long as possible

When the student achieves a relaxed buzz, have them hold the mouthpiece with the right hand index finger and thumb at the end of the shank and have them repeat the process themselves several times.

As you work with each student, ask the other students guided questions or their opinions about what they hear. The student with the best answers gets to be the next to try the mouthpiece vibration. This will encourage active participation from all students.

Once everyone can produce a relaxed sound individually while holding their own mouthpiece, repeat the procedure as a class several times. Add the metronome and play alternating whole rests and notes as a class then as "Echo Playing" with either you (if you can make a good sound) or individual students as the leader.

HOLDING THE HORN

The most crucial element affected by how the horn is held is the angle of the leadpipe and mouthpiece to the embouchure. The angle must be slightly downward so that excess pressure is not placed on the top lip. The bell should be angled away from the body.

Most professional players play with the bell off the leg. This allows them to sit or stand with the same posture and hand position in the bell without changing anything. The weight of the instrument is balanced between the right and left hands.

If you prefer your students to play with the bell on the leg make sure the angles are correct. Adjust where the bell is placed on the thigh, move the right foot in or out/left or right, twist the lower body or turn the head until proper playing angles are achieved. You will need to monitor and adjust their instrument to body angle as their bodies grow over the next few years.

LEFT HAND: Keep fingers curved and on the ends of the valve keys. Many students move the tips of the fingers too far down the keys creating sloppy technique later on.

RIGHT HAND: Have students reach their right hand out like they are going to shake hands. Bring the thumb alongside the index finger—hand will naturally cup slightly. Keeping the wrist straight place each students' hand in the bell so the line formed by the thumb and index finger is at the 12:00 position. The rest of the fingers must be against the side of the bell farthest from the body. Adjust how far the hand goes in the bell based on the student's hand size and tone produced. **Check right hand position several times every day!** (This is why there should be plenty of room between chairs. You must monitor and insist on correct hand position!)

Practice bringing the instrument from "at rest" position to "playing" position several times. ("At Rest" is instrument upright in the lap with both hands on the instrument.)

STARTING THE FULL INSTRUMENT

As soon as students can demonstrate a steady, relaxed sound on the mouthpiece and proper playing position, they are ready to start making sounds on the full instrument.

As before, begin with a student who has been the most actively involved. Ask them to demonstrate proper posture, movement from "at rest" to "playing" position, a relaxed breath and then a long sustained sound using the same air as they used on all previous exercises. The pitch is not important as long as it is a relaxed sound.

Draw the possible "open" notes on a staff and identify the pitch they played. Have the same student repeat the procedure and ask the class questions: "Was that note higher, lower or the same as the previous note? What pitch do you think they played? Did they take a deep breath before they played?" This promotes ear training and awareness. Pick the student with the best answers to be the next one to play on the full instrument and continue until everyone has produced a relaxed sound on the full instrument.

"Echo play" with individuals and the full class using the same procedures that have already been established in earlier lessons. (Pitch does not really matter)

Challenge them to play the next note up or down on the open horn and guide them through what does and does not change. Aperture is smaller for higher notes, larger for lower notes.

Play "Call The Pitch": Like calling the shot in pool, students must "call the pitch" they are going to play then attempt to play it. If they get it right then they get to call another one. If they miss, the next student in line that can name the pitch played gets to go next.

Soon, the students will be able to play the same pitch as a class (first line E, middle C or second line G are all reasonable) and you can begin adding the notes in-between by using the valves.

STARTING THE FULL INSTRUMENT--cont.

"Echo play" notes and rests either written on the board, in the beginner book or your own worksheet. It is important for them to see what they play.

(If you cannot play the horn with a characteristic sound you can use a tone generator such as the "Tonal Energy" application or harmony director connected to a small speaker.)

SIRENS OR "ROLLER COASTERS"

Introduce sirens (or "roller coasters) after they have played a few notes successfully on the full instrument.

Demonstrate for the class on air first then have them copy while watching themselves in a mirror. (Doing this "on air" through the embouchure will help prevent pressing lips together, bunching chin and pulling corners back.)

Start with the "kiddy coasters" on the mouthpiece, beginning on a comfortable note and moving down and up slightly. Gradually, over the course of the year build up to the "Texas Giant" or "Titan" levels.

The goal is to move from low to high smoothly without any major changes in the embouchure or tone. Look for the following things and address as needed:

- Head and face stay still—no bobbing up and down or raising/lowering eyebrows!
- Bottom Lip—should not disappear under the top lip when going higher or pooch out when going lower
- Sound pinches when going up—caused by pressing the center of the lips together or over tightening—make the aperture rounder, keep center of lips soft, practice "on air" then repeat with mouthpiece.
- Chin bunches when going up—watch themselves in a mirror, practice "on air"

TONGUING

When students can consistently play the first two or three notes they are ready to begin tonguing. Have the students first blow air through the embouchure. Emphasize the continuous forward motion of the air stream. Demonstrate tonguing four quarter notes on air using a "too" or "doo" syllable then have the students echo back. Check each student individually and look for the following things:

- Do they keep the air moving? Some students will try coughing the notes with the throat or huff spurts of air—go back to blowing air on whole notes.
- Does the jaw stay motionless?
- Is there extra motion below the chin? If so they are moving too much tongue—only the tip moves up and down—the back of the tongue stays inactive.
- Do you hear "wispy" sounds? If so their tongue is too high in the mouth or the teeth are too close together. Shape the tongue like a spoon or remind them to keep the "oo" syllable when tonguing.
- Do you hear a "thud" at the end of each note? Either the tongue is moving too slowly, they are stopping the air with the tongue or they are tonguing between the teeth.

Next, move to the mouthpiece then the full horn while watching and listening to each student. Try to hear each student individually every day for the next few weeks. Bad habits can quickly develop and are very hard to correct later on.

THE NEXT STEPS

When the students can produce steady sounds from middle C up to G, tongue properly and have successfully performed the first few real tunes in the beginner book they are ready to start scales and lip slurs.

SCALES

Introduce the chromatic scale within the range they can play. Add notes lower and higher when they can play them successfully on mouthpiece “roller coasters”. When an octave is achieved, introduce the first major scale—usually concert C or Bb—and continue adding as their range develops.

LIP SLURS

Simple lip slurs are very important at the beginning level. Look and listen for the same things on lip slurs as on “roller coasters”. Start off with two note slurs from C to E; B to D#; etc. Continue adding more notes of the harmonic series as their range increases on the chromatic scale. It’s a good idea for the lip slur range to lag slightly behind the chromatic scale range so that students are secure on the higher notes before they have to slur up to them.

OTHER THOUGHTS

THE INSTRUMENT

Repair all reachable dents as quickly as possible. Students will tend to take better care of a "nicer" looking instrument than one with many dents. Hold them accountable for all damage they cause to the instrument.

When assigning instruments make sure the student’s left hand can easily reach the thumb valve key or hook and the pinky hook. If the span is too far or too close adjust the thumb valve key or have a repairman move the pinky hook to match the student’s grip. Also check the height of the valve keys and adjust as needed.

Teach a specific routine for opening the case, taking the instrument out and carrying it from place to place. Always open the case while it is lying flat with the bottom side down—NOT UPRIGHTAND NOT UPSIDE DOWN! With the right hand grasp the valve slide cluster and guide the horn out of the case with the left hand on the bell. Swing the bell upward so it ends up over the right shoulder next to the head and the body of the instrument is held securely against the stomach and chest. This frees the left hand to close the case, carry music or grab a stand while keeping the horn protected in a busy band hall.

NEVER EVER USE THE CASE AS A CHAIR! Severe damage can occur to both the case and the horn!

THE MOUTHPIECE

The Holton Farkas MC mouthpiece has a "middle of the road” cup and rim that is suitable for most levels of playing. Consult a private teacher or professional for other alternatives.

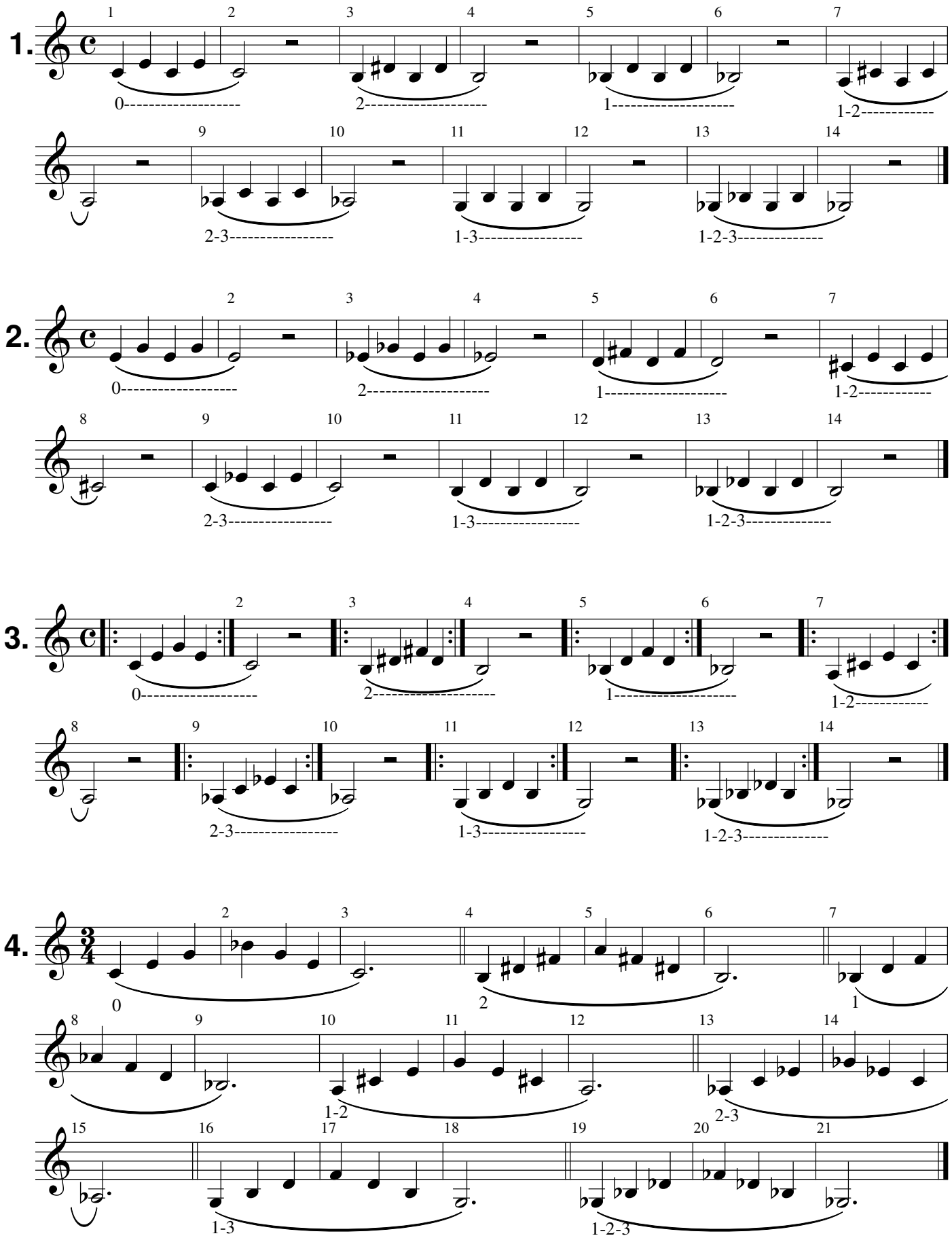
BRACES

Braces are a fact of life. Some students have little or no problems with them while others are temporarily destroyed by them. The main problems seem to be pain caused by the mouthpiece resting on top of a brace and/or the lips getting “caught” on the braces preventing them from changing shape from note to note. Without even realizing they are doing it students tend to gradually move the mouthpiece to a more comfortable setting—**usually too low**. **Make them aware of this and keep an eye on their mouthpiece placement so this doesn’t happen.**

PRIVATE LESSONS

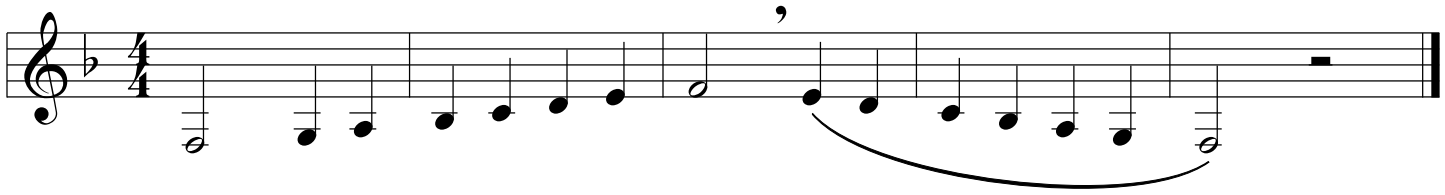
The best thing your students can do to improve (besides practicing) is to take lessons from a qualified private instructor. Since most school districts provide the instrument almost free of charge it only makes sense to encourage parents to use money saved by not having to rent or buy an instrument on private lessons.

HORN LIP SLURS

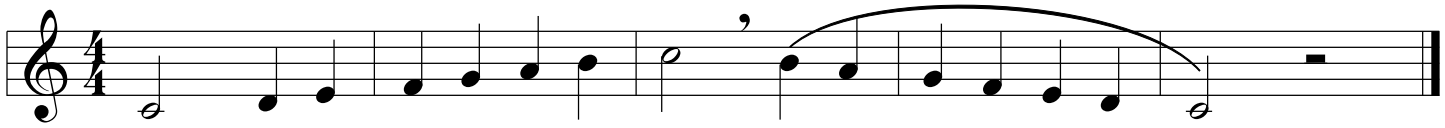


HORN ONE OCTAVE MAJOR SCALES

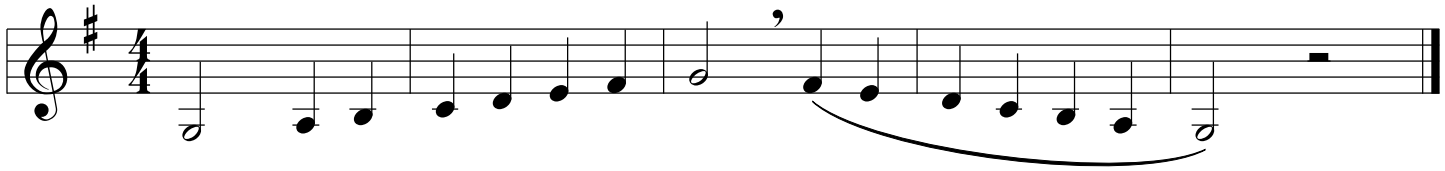
CONCERT Bb--YOUR F



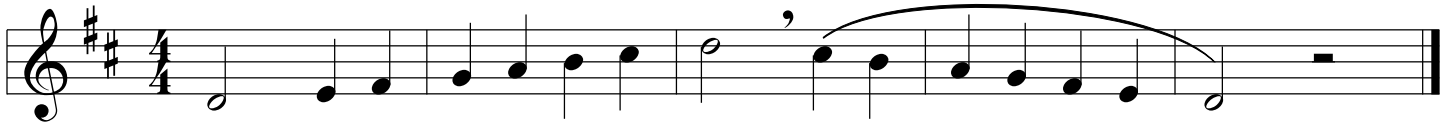
CONCERT F--YOUR C



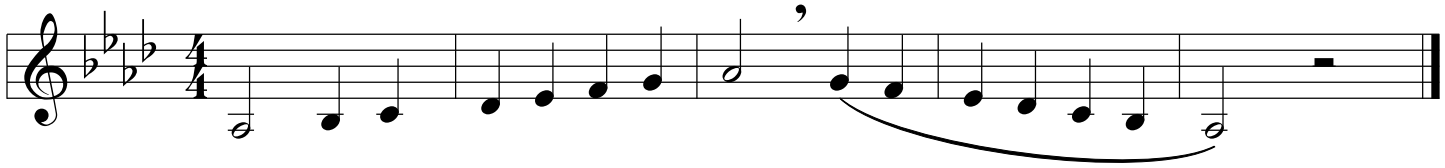
CONCERT C--YOUR G



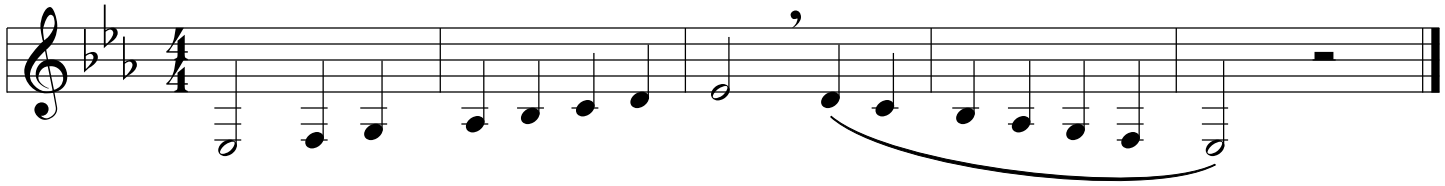
CONCERT G--YOUR D



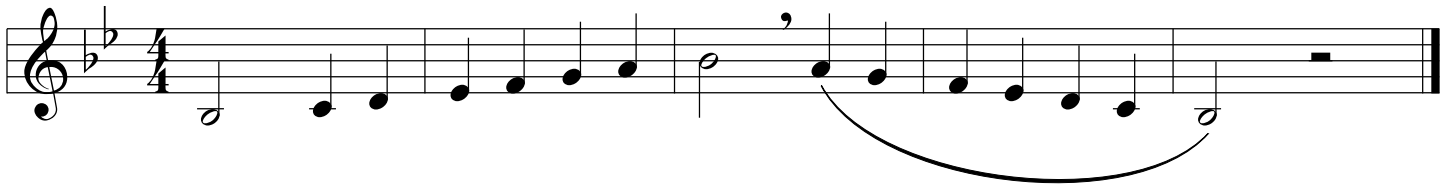
CONCERT Db--YOUR Ab



CONCERT Ab--YOUR Eb



CONCERT Eb--YOUR Bb



HORN CHROMATIC SCALE

CHROMATIC SCALE--a scale in 1/2 steps

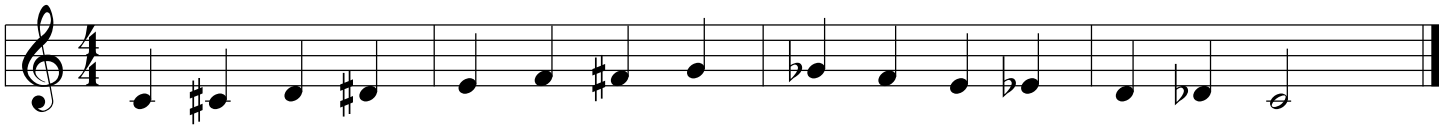
1/2 STEP--the smallest interval in music

(sharp)--takes a note up 1/2 step--use #'s when going up the scale

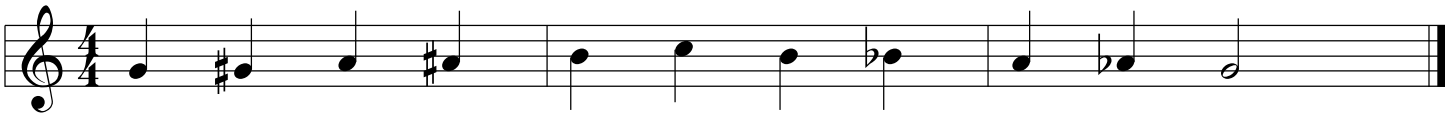
♭(flat)--takes a note down 1/2 step--use ♭'s when going down the scale

ENHARMONIC--a single note with two names

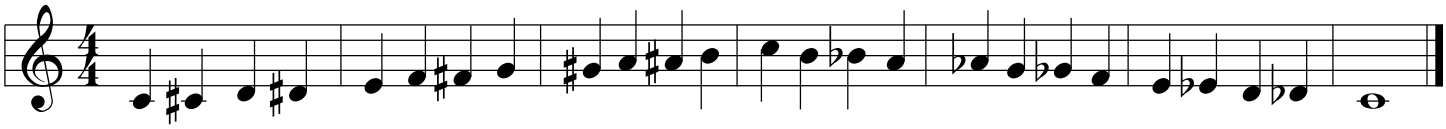
CONCERT F TO C (YOUR C TO G)



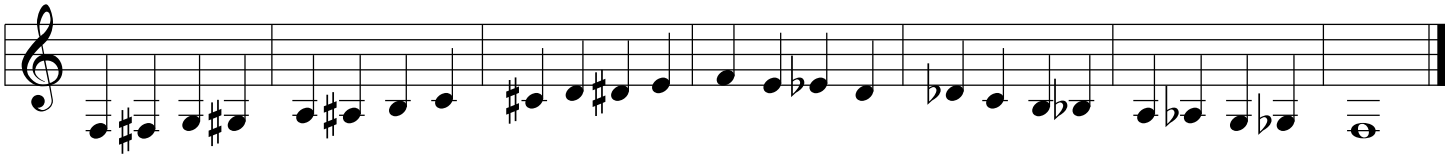
CONCERT C TO F (YOUR G TO C)



ONE OCTAVE CONCERT F CHROMATIC SCALE (YOUR C)



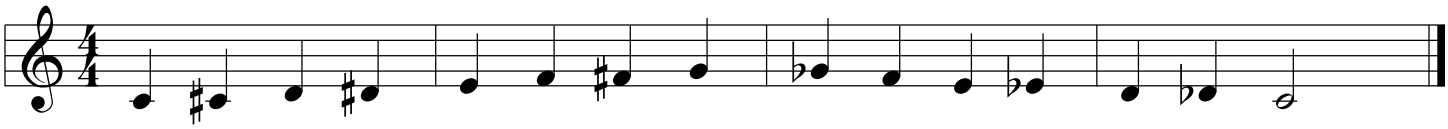
ONE OCTAVE CONCERT Bb CHROMATIC SCALE (YOUR F)



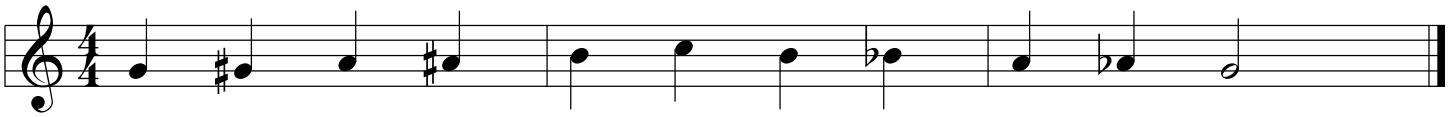
HORN CHROMATIC SCALE

CHROMATIC SCALE--a scale in 1/2 steps
1/2 STEP--the smallest interval in music
 # (sharp)--takes a note up 1/2 step--use #'s when going up the scale
♭ (flat)--takes a note down 1/2 step--use ♭'s when going down the scale
ENHARMONIC--a single note with two names

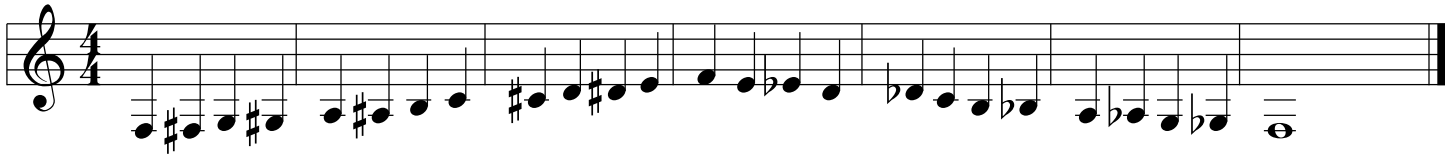
CONCERT F TO C (YOUR C TO G)



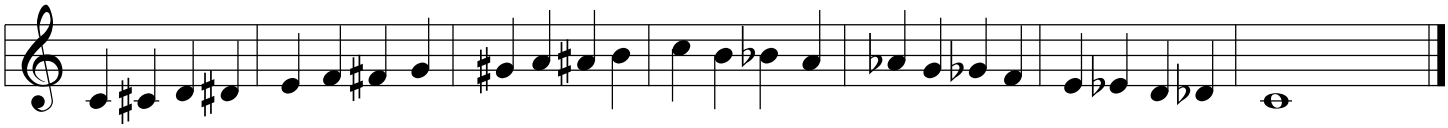
CONCERT C TO F (YOUR G TO C)



ONE OCTAVE CONCERT Bb CHROMATIC SCALE (YOUR F)



ONE OCTAVE CONCERT F CHROMATIC SCALE (YOUR C)



CONCERT Bb TO F (YOUR F TO C)