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**Beginner Horn Show and Tell**

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**HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

# Beginner Horn Show and Tell

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## **INTRODUCTION**

There are many schools of thought on teaching beginning horn. Today, you will get an opportunity to witness two different approaches and see what practices you can apply to your own classroom teaching.

## **PICKING SUCCESSFUL HORN STUDENTS**

### Interviewing

Choosing appropriate students for any instrument can play a critical role in the success of the student and the band program. Recruiting for horn should begin prior to the beginning band instrument selection meeting.

There should be an open line of communication between the middle school and elementary music teachers so that you can get information on grades, work ethic and classroom behavior. The director can look for further traits during individual testing:

- Willingness to try new things and figure them out.
- Personal confidence
- Understanding mistakes will happen and they help us grow!
- Pitch recognition

### Physical Characteristics

A student's physical characteristics play a vital role in their future success

as horn players. The following items are concrete things that you can look for:

1. **Lips:** Top lip should be medium to thin and naturally cover the teeth. Stay away from students that have a major tear drop as this could hinder air flow. The bottom lip should not protrude past the top lip. Instead, a straight line should be formed where the two meet.
2. **Lower Jaw:** Should not protrude forward. Mouthpiece angle should be slightly downward so students that have a natural overbite have an easier time with mouthpiece placement and horn angle.
3. **Chin:** Should be able to model a flat chin with little explanation.

It is important that you are careful with the students you are placing on horn. Most students will be able to produce a relaxed sound in the middle register no matter what physical characteristics are present. It is your job to select students that will also be successful at the high school level. Many problems caused by physical characteristics do not present themselves until a student is required to play more advanced music. Make sure you are setting them up for future success by helping them choose the right instrument from the very beginning.

## **HORN SUPPLIES & MAINTENANCE**

Mouthpiece – Holton MC and the Schilke model 29.

Plastic Locker Mirror – monitor embouchure and mouthpiece placement

Music Stand – vital for correct posture during home practice

Korg Metronome/Tuner and Pick-up Microphone – essential for encouraging correct practice techniques at home

Miscellaneous Items - Synthetic valve Oil, Thick oil (3-in-1 Household Oil), Slide Grease, Mouthpiece Brush, and Flexible Vinyl-Coated Cleaning Brush

Horns that are not functioning properly will hinder student success. It is important that instrument maintenance is taught prior to allowing students to take home this expensive equipment. The following items should be

addressed:

1. The expectation of where the instrument (still in case) will be placed next to their chair.
2. How to gently open the case and take the instrument out.
3. How to properly carry the horn while walking so that it is safe.
4. How to clean and lubricate the instrument. It is important that you give your students a hard copy handout to put in their binder, email the handout home to parents so they can help their child, and allow the students to record you explaining how to do it.

Horn maintenance needs to be checked regularly to make sure that it is being done properly. A good time frame is once a month. To pass the inspection, the horn should have been cleaned, greased, oiled and snaked with the student's name visible on the case. The small amount of instructional time that you lose completing these checks will save you LOTS of money and headaches down the line. Remember, instruments that are not well maintained cannot be played in tune.

## **CLASSROOM SETUP**

When determining the physical setup of the classroom, you need to keep in mind that the room you use needs to have enough space for you to be able to easily walk behind each student. This will allow you to check for proper right hand placement in the bell throughout the year. Chair spacing should be significant enough that students have the option to place their horns safely on the ground when they are not in use. This will also allow each student enough room that posture and horn position will never be compromised due to lack of personal space. Try to position the chairs in an arc or at least have chairs positioned in windows so that you can always monitor embouchure and horn position.

\*If at all possible, schedule beginning horns in their own class period. If they must be combined with another instrument, another brass instrument (ideally trumpet) is best. Trumpet is preferable because their embouchures

are similar, as are their beginning ranges. When trumpets and horns are playing identical pitches (i.e. everyone plays their own G), a P4 will sound, which is an easy interval to hear and adjust to. In this instance, place the trumpet students in front of the horn students so the horn players do not get confused with the trumpet pitch, allowing greater flexibility to walk behind the horn students and ensure that they are on the correct pitch. If all students are playing in unison (i.e. everyone plays a Concert F – horn on C, trumpet on G), trumpet students may be seated behind the horns, encouraging horn students to match the trumpet pitch.

\*Neither one of us teach horns with another instrument. This information was taken from a TBA horn clinic several years ago from successful teachers that have experienced this challenge.

-From HORNific to HORNtastic – How to Start Your Beginner French Horns presented by Cathy Humphrey, Susan Scott, Jennifer Wren (2016)

## **BAND POSTURE**

Proper band posture can and should be taught from the first day you see your students. The importance of posture is emphasized early on but it is important that you monitor your students' posture daily. Every time a student "performs," whether it be counting, breathing, or reciting their musical alphabet, you can check for excellent posture.

### Steps to Proper Posture

1. Feet should be flat on the floor and positioned so that a student could stand up easily from a seated position.

2. Backs should be straight and bottoms should be at the front of the chair. Remind students to relax their shoulders. They should have a natural slope downwards.

3. Head should float naturally above the shoulders.

## **BREATHING**

Once a student is sitting with proper posture, breathing can be addressed. The best way to describe breathing is the ability to move air in and out

efficiently. When working with beginners you always want to keep it simple. Class demonstrations and follow the leader tend to be the best techniques. Be on the lookout for the following things:

1. Breathing should be in through the mouth and not the nose
2. Inhale using an “OH” syllable; this keeps the teeth open and tongue out of the way
3. Stomach expands first (Santa Claus tummy) and then the chest
4. Natural shoulder rise with no tension
5. Pendulum air (in and out) that is not interrupted. Do not allow students to hold in air!
6. Tension created by taking in too much air
7. Squeezing abdominal muscles in order to use old air; this causes throat closure

### Breathing Exercises

- In for 4 , out for 4; Select a target in the room and always blow the same volume of air.
- Ripping exercise; Place fingers vertically in front of your mouth. Breathe in with energy trying to create the “ripping” sound. This exercise requires that you are using an “OH” syllable while breathing.
- Personal Paper; Hold a single sheet of paper against the wall with using breath control.

For a complete understanding of proper breathing for wind players, read **Arnold Jacobs: The Legacy of a Master** Edited and Collected by M. Dee Stewart

### **EMBOUCHURE**

Embouchure is the term for how a musician’s mouth looks while playing. It is important that each student has a mirror handy to check for correct embouchure formation. Do not worry about getting too detailed when you explain embouchure formation to students. The best thing to do is to show

your students your “natural” or “resting” face and then have them mimic it in the mirror. Next, demonstrate a “proper” embouchure and ask them to copy it. Phillip Farkas describes the ideal lip formation as a “puckered smile.” A great way to get a proper embouchure formation is to gently blow air through the lips from a natural face. Look for the following items:

- Firm corners that are not tight - think about saying a “poo” lightly
- Corners will look the same as they were in “natural face”. They should not be pushed forward or pulled back into a smile.
- Lips should be soft
- Oval shaped aperture
- Teeth pinkie width apart
- Tongue should be out of the way - if you hear a hissing sound, the tongue is too high
- Flat chin

## **MOUTHPIECE PLACEMENT & FIRST SOUNDS**

Once the class can demonstrate proper posture, breathing, and embouchure formation, it is time to move on to making the first sounds on the mouthpiece. It is important to take your time with properly placing the mouthpiece on each individual students face. Set it several times with each kid while they are looking in the mirror so that they understand what proper placement looks and feels like.

Introduce “Echo Playing” (I play - you play). While demonstrating good posture, set a metronome, breathe in tempo, and blow out through your embouchure for four beats. 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 the air. Do this as a class several times then begin alternating: first you, then the class.