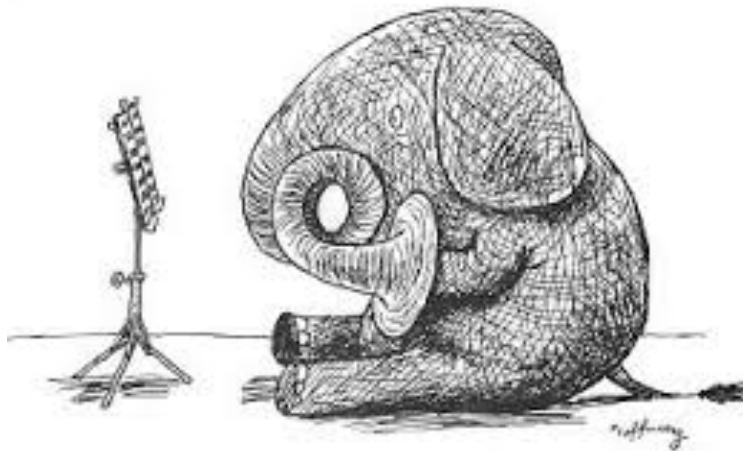


Harnessing the Power of Pitch to Improve Your Horn Section

Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic 2015



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Identifying the Root of Accuracy Problems

- ❖ Harmonic Series
 - The harmonic series itself hinders accuracy.
 - The horn frequently lays in an area of the harmonic series where harmonics are very close together – more so than other brass instruments.
 - This harmonic closeness requires absolute precision in articulating each note, but also a preconception of which pitch is to be played.
 - The characteristic “fracked” note is information that the student is either not aiming at the correct partial or is not articulating with precision.

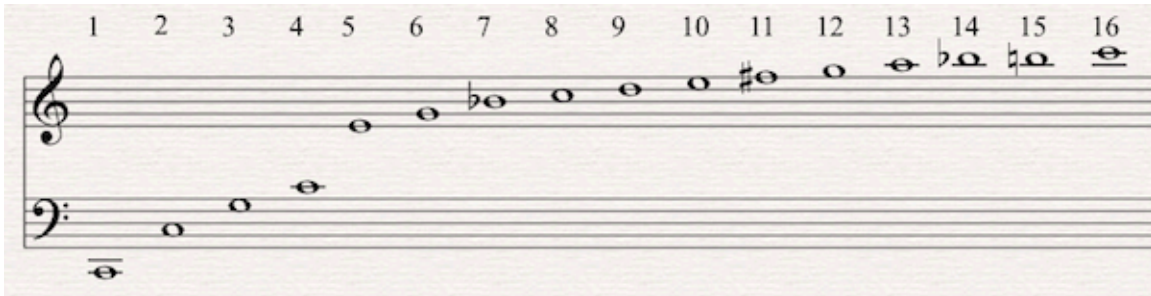
- ❖ Natural Horn and the Challenge of Fingerings
 - Harmonic fingerings are not only a challenge for young players, but also a source of great confusion: Why can horn players play so many notes on the same fingering?
 - The valve system is a way to connect a set of natural horn crooks. Each fingering gives the student access to the entire harmonic series in the key of that fundamental, not just one pitch.

- ❖ The Untrained Ear and Self-Confidence
 - If you can’t hear it, you can’t play it.
 - Most pitch issues related to intonation and accuracy are a result of the hornist not hearing the pitch before they play it.
 - Students frequently experience a sensation similar to “shooting in the dark.”
 - Frequent accuracy problems, especially exposed parts, can cause self-consciousness in students, especially if their director draws negative attention to this problem. Try to always empathetic and careful to correct in a positive, helpful manner.

- ❖ General Distraction
 - It is good to keep in mind that young horn players juggle many issues related to the instrument all at once. A young music student with a limited background will likely be distracted from the task of playing correct pitches by reading sheet music, remembering fingerings, and deciphering rhythms.

Offering Pedagogical Solutions for the Problem of Accuracy

- ❖ Finding an Auditory Anchor
 - Harmonics 4, 5, and 6 outline a major triad. Utilize this recognizable sound as a way to encourage relative pitch.



- Routinely encourage students to relate pitches to the major triad. This will create a kind of home base for sight-reading and sight singing.
 - The major triad can also be very helpful for teaching other intervals.
- ❖ Hearing the Pitch Before You Play
 - Encourage students to pay attention to the differing levels of resistance that can be felt in each note. This recognition will them to develop their “taste” for each note.
 - Developing muscle memory for each pitch is the end-goal.
 - ❖ Resist Note Testing
 - Many students will develop a habit of audibly testing notes before a musical entrance.
 - This acts as a security blanket, giving the student a false sense of security and delaying their reliance on muscle memory. It should be discouraged as soon as it begins happening.
 - Learning to trust the internal ear will be more difficult at first, but more beneficial for the students development in the long run.
 - ❖ Relate Notes to One Another
 - Train students to look at music in a way that encourages pitch memory.
 - We need students to make visual connections on the page, transferring those to their inner ear and then to the horn. This process is by far the most efficient way of working on accuracy.
 - Use solfege or a numbering system when singing instead of *Da*. This places notes in a spatial relationship to one another. We know that when singing *Do* and *Mi*, we must leave a space for *Re*.

Singing and the Horn Player

- ❖ Why Sing
 - If you can sing it, you can play it!
 - Horn tone color and intonation start with singing.
 - Articulation can also be practiced through singing.

- Encourage open syllables, such as “Toh” or “Oh” while you sing with your students. This is an extremely important element of quality tone production.
 - Sing with a vowel sound that encourages resonance – Any vowel sound that encourages the back of the tongue to stay low and the soft palette to raise up.
 - Singing helps to create stronger musicians at the most basic level.
 - Singing is one more way for your students to connect to the music they are learning.
 - Singing will help students detect the musical line and musical elements of the piece more quickly.
 - Teach students to sing early and often. Make singing an expectation from the very first rehearsal.
- ❖ Synthesizing the Voice and the Horn
- Without the obstacle of the instrument, young players will often sing more naturally than they can play.
 - The routine of singing and playing only works if the student learns to listen to their singing voice and apply what they learn to the horn.
 - Emphasize the ideas of shape, line, style and phrase direction.
- ❖ Singing as a Memory Tool for Pitch
- Establish a simple and direct process for learning. Pitch and singing should be major components of this routine.
 - When you practice something in multiple ways such as singing a phrase, buzzing a phrase and playing a phrase, you approach it and experience it from many different angles, thereby creating a deeper and more lasting connection to it.
 - Routines are a significant pathway to musical connections.
 - Singing strengthens interval memory, which in turn aids sight-reading.
- ❖ Auditory Security
- The work that you do as an educator to form routines and habits of singing and reflective playing helps your students form solid connections to their music. These connections can be relied on heavily when the student is performing in a stressful situation.
 - These connections can provide a focal point when the student starts to deal with performance anxiety.
- ❖ Incorporating These Ideas Into Your Band or Orchestra Program in a Practical Way
- I am advocating a way of training horn players to utilize the powerful tool of pitch from a very young age. I believe that the director’s role in this process is to plant seeds and encourage simple routines that can help to inform a student when they begin working with a private lesson instructor.
 - I advocate using the group rehearsal time for its unique learning opportunities.

