

# T.A.M.E. Your Horn Section for a Better Sounding Band

by

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## **T.A.M.E.: Tone\*, Air\*, Musicianship, and Enthusiasm!**

### I. TONE

#### A. Embouchure

1. The horn embouchure is somewhat more relaxed and the oral cavity, by virtue of an open lower jaw, is more open than the trumpet embouchure. The lip aperture is larger than many younger players use without encouragement.
2. Similar to the other brass instruments, though, the center of the lips, and especially the upper lip, must be free to vibrate.
3. The lower lip may be firm, even in the low register.
4. Embouchure formation may be considered a two step process.
  - a. Set the corners of the embouchure.
  - b. While maintaining the "set" of the corners, focus toward the aperture. This step relaxes the center of the upper lip. Note also that the upper lip relaxes more than the lower lip.
5. Avoid excess mouthpiece pressure.
6. Be flexible. This is especially true when descending after having played in the upper register. Relax the embouchure. (See accompanying Warm-Up Exercise.)
7. Keep chin flat when ascending, just as in clarinet playing.
8. Play in the low register, at least down to the written c on the bass clef staff.
  - a. Although most wind band music does not exploit this range, all other horn literature does, inc. orchestra music, solos, ensemble music, and so forth.
  - b. "Opening up" the low register aids the middle and upper registers as well (see item II.C.4. below.)

#### B. Mouthpieces

1. Problems with "stock" mouthpieces
  - a. Many of the mouthpieces that normally are shipped with horns are too small to allow adequate airflow or to promote stable response.
  - b. In addition, many have a rim that is too wide to allow quick, smooth slurs over large intervals as required in horn playing.
2. Recommended mouthpieces
  - a. Holton Farkas MDC (medium deep cup)
  - b. Holton Farkas DC (deep cup)
  - c. Notes
    - 1) These actually are middle of the line mouthpieces in that the Holton Farkas lineup includes the SC (shallow cup,) MC (medium cup,) MDC, DC, VDC (very deep cup,) and XDC (extra deep cup.)
    - 2) They are relatively inexpensive (approx.\$30.00,) widely available, and have good (medium narrow) rims.
  - d. Many other excellent mouthpieces from Conn, King, Schilke, Yamaha, Giardinelli, and others.

#### C. Position of bell on leg/off leg

1. Sit with right leg off the right side of the chair.
2. Edge of bell nearly parallel to right leg just inside femur
  - a. Do not let body block sound.
  - b. Do not let an adjacent player's body block the sound (see item D3.)

**\*(These concepts are inextricably linked.)**

3. Alternatively, a person of sufficient physical stature may choose to hold the horn with the bell off the leg.
    - a. Facilitates breathing
    - b. Easier to see music, conductor, other musicians
    - c. Makes it much easier to stand for solos or when convenient
- C. Right hand position
1. Hand on side of bell away from body; **HAND MUST BE IN BELL!**
  2. Fingers closed inc. **thumb closed against fingers**
    - a. Closed thumb keeps heel of hand open
    - b. Facilitates stopped horn playing
  3. Generally the last knuckles are showing (depending on hand size.)
- D. Positioning and spacing in concert band seating
1. Try to position horns near the center of the row in which they sit.
  2. At least try not to have horns at the end of the row with bells facing front, i.e., to conductor's left.
  3. Leave enough seating space.
    - a. Players need room for sound to escape.
    - b. Need room to empty *condensation*
    - c. Some symphony hornists' contracts specify at least three linear feet of space each or else they don't play.
- E. Fingering of a double horn: when to use the F horn, when to use the B-flat horn
1. Use F horn for g1 descending to F< (written pitches,) although B= horn is optional for the range f descending to c.
  2. Use B= horn for F descending to C, i.e., below the B= horn fundamental.
  3. Use B= horn for g<1 and above.
  4. Common sense rules apply to above; exceptions may be made to facilitate fingering of technically difficult passages, for example, but sound quality generally predominates! (See Farkas, *The Art of French Horn Playing*, p. 16, Yancich, *A Practical Guide to French Horn Playing*, p.4, etc.)
- F. Tuning the double horn: which notes to use, what slides to pull (see illustration.)
1. Tune open notes on the B= horn, e.g., c2, f2 (written,) pulling main slide.
    - a. The main slide can be found by following the tube from the mouthpipe.
    - b. On horns w/ a separate B= tuning slide, e.g. some Holton, some Yamaha, this amount can be divided between the main slide and the B= slide.
  2. Compare the c2 of the B= horn and the F horn, pulling the F slide to match.
    - a. Many horns have two slides that will control the f side of the horn, e.g., Conn 6D and 8D, some Holton, some Yamaha.
    - b. One of these slides is provided to facilitate removal of condensation and generally should be left pushed in. If pulled, many cases will tend to push in this slide.
  3. Tune individual notes using 1st valve, 2nd valve, 2-3 combination on each side of the horn.
  4. Certain notes on the horn tend to be sharp and must simply be played down to pitch. These include a1, c2, d2, d, c< (see harmonic series.)

5. Certain notes tend to be flat and must be played up to pitch. These include e1, e=1, d1 (see harmonic series.)

## II. AIR

- A. Teach your players to relax and **BLOW!**
  1. Play for them a motion picture soundtrack, e.g., Star Wars, Robin Hood, Dances with Wolves, Independence Day, Sleepers, Titanic, etc., or play a Mahler symphony (also a good recruiting tool.)
  2. Encourage your players to emulate that sound.
  3. Play in the low register, *f* and *ff*!
- B. Go through the Horn Warm-Up Exercise with your students to explain its purpose and ensure that it is played properly.
- C. Assuming the correct fingerings are used, and if the mind's ear hears the proper pitch, 99.44% of the time missed notes are the result of a problem with air.
  1. In the middle register and especially in the upper register, the **air speed** must increase. (Think not of blowing air into the horn, but visualize it travelling through the horn and speeding out of the bell!)
  2. Tongue vigorously to release enough air to start each tone cleanly, and use a small contact patch between the tongue and teeth. Say "tah," not "thah." Hornists often refer to this concept as "pinging" the notes.
  3. Air speed in the upper register is wholly a separate idea from dynamics. Although the quantity of air is less for a softer dynamic, air speed must remain the same - fast!
  4. The lower jaw must be open, (the front teeth must be sufficiently parted,) for the air to be able to emerge. This is true in all registers. In the lower register, the jaw may open so wide that the lower teeth no longer are behind the portion of the lower lip upon which the mouthpiece rests. This is permissible in that the embouchure in this register is puckered to the point that the lower teeth are not functioning as part of the embouchure (see French Horn Test Subjects 1 and 2.)
  5. In the lower register, as the lower jaw opens, it may be pushed slightly forward as well.
  6. In the lower register, hornists must play with a sufficient **quantity of air** to produce the sound.
  7. Emphasis must be placed on the importance of developing the lower register by the instructor.

## III. Musicianship

### A. Ear training

1. It is of vital importance for students to hear pitches in order to play them.
2. Although they may not like to, insist that hornists sing troublesome pitches.
3. Do not allow hornists to "test notes" before playing them. They very rarely can do so when they perform.
4. Use the accuracy drill in Philip Farkas' *The Art of French Horn Playing*, p.69.
  - a. Farkas suggests that for every note missed, insist on three correct repetitions before continuing.
  - b. In light of the above, perhaps a student may play only two or three lines each day, especially during the beginning stage.

- c. Be sure the student removes the mouthpiece from the embouchure between each two notes.
- d. Though the drill is designed not to constitute a singable melody, eventually it does become familiar. To avoid this, be creative in how it is performed.
  - 1) Play the first measure of each line.
  - 2) Play lines from right to left.
  - 3) Play from the end to the beginning.

## B. Dynamics

- 1. Many young brass players attempt to play too softly.
  - a. Review what we have discussed thus far: a mouthpiece that is large enough and with a throat that will allow air to be moved through the horn, relaxing the center of the upper lip and parting the front teeth to open the aperture to allow air to be moved, and so forth.
  - b. Balance within an ensemble should not be created by teaching the brass players not to blow. Instead, teach the woodwinds to produce a larger body of sound!
  - c. The piano dynamic must not be as soft as we can play.
- 2. Relatively few exploit the upper dynamic range of the horn.
  - a. Can your horn players make the sound “ring,” can they play with a bit of an “edge” when the music demands it?
  - b. Ask students for one week simply to practice everything loudly.
  - c. Ask students absolutely to blast. Only through producing a truly loud, obnoxious, ugly sound will they know the upper limit to which they can go, stopping just short of such a sound.

## C. Technique

- 1. Eyes must move ahead to know what is coming next. If the fingers catch up to the eyes, missed notes will result.
- 2. Sight reading needs to be a regular and frequent occurrence. Play duets with students (on any instrument.) Your playing, in a friendly manner, insists that students maintain tempo, do not stop, and so on. It also reinforces many other concepts including dynamics, style, articulation, and so on.

## D. Stopping the horn: how it works, which side of the horn, fingerings, hand position

- 1. How it works is disputed: does it raise the pitch by  $\frac{1}{2}$  step or lower the pitch to within a  $\frac{1}{2}$  step of the next lower partial?
- 2. In any event, stopped horn **must** be played on the F side of the horn unless the horn is equipped with a stopping valve
- 3. Pitches **must** be played  $\frac{1}{2}$  step lower than normal
- 4. The hand **must** be spread vigorously against the sides of the bell
- 5. The *seal* is the crucial factor and will NOT be achieved simply by shoving the hand in the bell as far as it will go.
- 6. The fleshy heel of the hand helps to make the seal.
- 7. The middle joint of the fingers is slightly fleshy and seals against the bell throat.
- 8. The thumb must remain outside the bell throat to help make a good seal.
- 9. If the resulting sound does not possess the proper “buzz,” continue to work to produce a good seal.

10. If the pitch is sharp, the hand is too far into the bell. Withdraw the right hand a bit and spread it more vigorously.
11. Once the proper position has been achieved, then simply open the hand. The resulting hand position should be the correct right hand position for the “open” horn.

#### E. Lip trills

1. Whole step valve trills simply are not satisfactory on horn due to our position in the harmonic series.
2. Development of lip trills also facilitates flexibility, endurance, and other positive aspects of horn playing
3. It is a “badge of honor” among horn players.
4. A number of sources exist to aid with fingerings and development exercises.
  - a. Farkas: *The Art of French Horn Playing*
  - b. Brophy: *Technical Studies for Solving Special Problems on the Horn*
  - c. Tuckwell: *Playing the Horn*
5. In general, above c2 use the standard fingering of the B= horn for the lower note; for c2 and below use the F horn.

#### IV. Enthusiasm!

- A. As teachers, we need to promote the horn, horn playing, and horn players.
  1. Single out the horn section for praise, even if you have to look for a reason.
    - a. Something as simple as the ascending concert B= major scale in Carmen Dragon’s arrangement of *America, the Beautiful*, can hold great beauty.
    - b. The first horn part in Lucien Cailliet’s transcription of Wagner’s *Elsa’s Procession to the Cathedral* at rehearsal number 8 is gorgeous.
  2. Such action undoubtedly is all the more essential with the increased prominence in our programs of marching band and jazz ensembles.
- B. Feature the horn section if at all possible.
  1. Several concert band arrangements exist for horns with band.
    - a. *Caught By the Horns*, Burton Hardin
    - b. *Hornscope*, David Bennett
    - c. *French Horn Frappe*, David Bennett
    - d. *The Four Hornsmen*, David Bennett
  2. A substantial number of selections are available for solo horn and band.
    - a. *Adagio and Allegro*, Don Haddad
    - b. *Allegro, Concerto no. 3*, Mozart/Bardeen
    - c. *Romanza, Concerto no. 3*, Mozart/Bardeen
    - d. *Concerto no. 2*, Mozart/Sansone
    - e. *Concert Rondo*, Mozart/Andy Clark
    - f. *Rhapsody for Horn, Winds, and Percussion*, Jan Van der Roost
    - g. *Concerto for Horn*, Ralph Hermann
  3. Selections for band abound that make great use of the horn section
    - a. *Four Scottish Dances*, Malcolm Arnold
    - b. *American Overture for Band*, Joseph Wilcox Jenkins
    - c. *Eternal Father*, Claude T. Smith
    - d. *The Klaxon*, Henry Fillmore
- C. Choose your horn players

1. Select from among the best students; don't just hope they will appear.
    - a. Find the youngsters who are good singers.
    - b. Select intelligent students.
    - c. Find out who plays piano.
  2. Please don't just attempt to convert your weakest trumpet players.
  3. Recruit; talk to the students, tell them they have been selected to have the opportunity to play the horn, a very special instrument.
  4. Mom and Dad may easily be convinced if your school district provides an instrument.
- D. Maintain the horns. No one wants to play an instrument that has been "through the war." Have dents removed, loose braces soldered, and lacquer touched up.