

**How to Have a Fabulous Horn Section at All Levels**  
**Presented by Richard Lambrecht**  
**Professor of Horn**  
**University of Texas El Paso**  
**Thursday February 15, 2018**  
**4:00 PM to 5:00 PM**

**1. Embouchure Establishment & Mouthpiece Placement**

A few basic facts, if thoroughly understood by the student, can set him on the road toward the development of a good embouchure and the establishment of a sound foundation for horn playing.

First, the lips must be "even" or "parallel" and must vibrate "evenly." The lower lip must not slip behind the upper lip—this will cause a pinched sound and will seriously handicap the lower jaw forward slightly. The student can blow an air column and check it with his hand in front of the aperture to see if the air column moves straight out or down. If it moves in a downward direction it is a likely assumption that the lips are not even and that the lower lip will slip behind the upper one in the high register.

Next, the student should develop a free, unforced vibration of the lips. There must be a "controlled relaxation" in the corners of the lips, and the "buzz" must be free and not forced or squeezed. This can be practiced with a mouthpiece.

The student must understand that pitches can be controlled by the size of the aperture and that the lip muscles control this size, not by mouthpiece pressure. When the student can produce different pitches on the mouthpiece in a free, unforced manner he can also play those same tones on the horn with a relaxed, unforced tone.

Mouthpiece must cover the top of the upper lip and must never go below the lower lip. It is generally agreed that the mouthpiece should be placed 2/3 on the upper lip and 1/3 on the lower. The student should be careful, however, that the placement of the mouthpiece allows enough of the lower lip to be inside the cup. There must be enough lower lip for aperture control—too little will not allow the embouchure to function properly. Flat chin, firm cheeks and firm corners.

A relaxed embouchure is helpful in allowing the lip vibration to center and maximize. The bottom lip should feel "tucked in" against the bottom teeth while the top lip should be allowed to relax and vibrate freely. Some teachers have referred to this as the bottom lip being the "holder" and the top lip being the "vibrator." The corners of the lip should hold and not stretch out during breathing. The breathing system should be opening the embouchure vertically to take in air and not horizontally. This allows the embouchure to reset more easily and accurately to the setting for the next attack. If the lips are allowed to vibrate freely, even while playing loud, and the air is used to produce the power, the tone is much clearer, better supported, more accurate, better in tune with a clearer pitch "center," and more powerful overall.

## **2. Tone Production**

After the embouchure is established and is functioning properly, the student should strive to play through the embouchure, not with the embouchure. The breath does the work of producing the tone. If the embouchure is properly set it will not hinder the working of the breath. The embouchure must always maintain the "controlled relaxation," and the student must always use a minimum amount of lip tension. Since the tendency will always be toward the use of too much lip tension, the student should try to use only enough tension to maintain tone control. The tone must have a "core" or "center" and should never have a "fluffy," "dead" quality. If the tone has a solid, compact quality, it will "ring" and carry to the back of the concert hall, even at soft dynamic levels.

## **3. Holding Position of the Instrument and Left Hand Position**

Because of its unusual shape the horn is a very awkward instrument to hold. There are three things to keep in mind:

- (1) The position of the instrument must not upset the embouchure by changing the angle of the mouthpiece.
- (2) The bell must not be pointed in toward the body, thus deadening or muffling the sound.
- (3) The holding position must allow the left hand to remain relaxed so that the fingers can work properly.

### **Body Position Exercise**

1. Both legs in front of body
2. Lift horn and slide right leg to the side
3. Right leg at 45 degree angle
4. Bell should rest on the center of the leg and run parallel to the inseam of pants
5. Left leg directly in front and facing music stand
6. Left hand and lead pipe aligned with left knee
7. Left elbow dropped and relaxed
8. Shoulders level and back slightly arched
9. Lead pipe should be at 45 degree angle down from face

## **4. Left Hand Position**

Left fingers lay flat on the keys with left palm below the valves.

The fingers of the left hand should be gently curved so that they touch the valve levers in a "relaxed but firm" manner. The fingers should always maintain contact with the valve lever—they should never rise above the lever. The fingering should be part of the attack; the finger should not move before the attack. Concentrated practice on this point will result in a clean, precise technique.

## **5. Right Hand Position**

The right hand must be in a comfortable position, must cover the tone just enough to give the desired "sheen" to the tone, but must not distort or muffle the sound.

Here is an accepted procedure:

(1) Keep the fingers together and straight; let the thumb touch the first finger at about the second knuckle, or between the first and second knuckles. This will cause a slight cupping of the palm.

(2) Place the hand in the bell of the horn in a vertical position, with the back of the fingers against the side of the bell opposite the body.

(3) Do not cup the hand to the point where the sound will be muffled or distorted.

## **6. Range**

Year 1- low C to 3<sup>rd</sup> space C.

Year 2- low C to 4<sup>th</sup> space E.

Year 3- low C to high G.

High School- full range.

## **7. Tuning**

On a double horn, the first slide after the mouthpiece is the main or combination tuning slide. A separate F slide is the largest other main slide. Some double horns offer a separate Bb tuning slide: usually located on the front of the instrument.

Tune the open pitches first! On a double horn, begin with the Bb side of the instrument.

Using the main tuning slide or a combination of the main slide and the separate Bb tuning slide, tune 3<sup>rd</sup> space C first. Proceed chromatically down and tune each valve slide. Tune the open F horn using the separate F slide (in the back) to 3<sup>rd</sup> space c, then proceed to tune the F horn valve slides.

Please do not rely on 1<sup>st</sup> space F to tune the horn: it is a valved note and it is the sixth harmonic which is sharp.

## **8. Section Set Up**

Set up the 1<sup>st</sup> horn on the conductor's right so that the bell faces the section.

Place the chairs far enough apart that a chair will fit between them.

If there are more than 6 players in the section put them in two rows.

Double the lowest parts first.

## **9. Section Placement**

Place horn section in the back so that nothing is behind them.

If section is on stage right (conductors left) set the rows at a 45 degree angle so that the bells are facing a wall (shell) behind them. Do not face the bells toward the audience.

Richard Lambrecht

[rlambrecht@utep.edu](mailto:rlambrecht@utep.edu)

(915)433-6678