

Early lesson material

One thing I am sure we all find in our teaching is that whatever tutor or method book we use, there is never enough material for the early stages. I feel fairly confident that that statement is the last thing which will be agreed upon in this section, as there are so many tutor books in this competitive market. My personal choice is for Team Brass (which can be useful in a mixed instrumental group situation) supplemented by the Abracadabra book and Brass Roots. This is, in turn supplemented by my own material, both individual and group, which one soon builds up over a period of teaching. Whatever you use don't stick to it religiously, be flexible and adaptable to your student's needs, introducing whatever material is suitable to their development. At a fairly early stage for trumpet players or tenor horn players you can introduce John Miller's "Simple Studies for Beginner Brass". I have found this excellent for introducing new concepts of rhythm, time signatures, dynamics etc. in an enjoyable way. A comparable book for trombone is Derek Bourgeois' excellent "Splinters of Bone". "Winners Galore" from Brasswind is a very enjoyable compendium of well known tunes which all youngsters enjoy, and is available in treble and bass clef versions.

The Lesson

In these times of financial stringency in music and the fact of playing for instrumental music lessons in schools, the days of the group are upon us. Having come from a very traditional 1960's Royal College of Music background, I have to say that I was initially very sceptical when this was introduced into Berkshire in the late 1980's. However thanks to some inspired in-service training by the then Principal of the Berkshire Young Musicians Trust, Richard Hickman, I have been completely won over to this sort of lesson. True it does require a little more in the way of preparation and forethought, but the many benefits outweigh this.

At the first lesson, the pupils will be dying to get their hands on their shiny new toy, (in practice most of them will have had it out at home and Mum, Dad and the next door neighbour have probably all had a go on it), so you may find that the trumpet valves need replacing in the right order to make it work. It is essential to have a fairly large working environment, especially if you have a group of budding trombone players, as children need instruction in how to safely extract the instrument from the case and how to assemble it properly. I always try to structure my lesson to start with a warm-up, so get the group buzzing together, firstly with lips alone and then on their mouthpieces. Buzzing without the mouthpiece can be very helpful if you have a student who puffs out their cheeks when playing, as it shows them how to buzz properly without the resistance of the mouthpiece. Mouthpiece position is fairly crucial, with it being placed centrally on the lips with approximately one third on the top lip, two thirds on the lower for trombone and trumpet players. Buzzing with the mouthpiece alone also gets the pupil aware of this position. Try it first on a fixed pitch sound and then getting them to experiment with changing pitch by changing the tension of their lips and blowing a little harder. I like to introduce the concept of the diaphragm quite early on and this is a fairly easy way to do it without the worry of the instrument at first. Perhaps for the next lesson they could buzz a favourite tune on the mouthpiece. Imitation and rhythmic awareness are important elements in learning an instrument, and buzzing simple rhythms for the group to imitate and then getting individuals to make up their own rhythms for the group are fun ways to start a lesson.

Having carefully demonstrated to the group how to assemble, if necessary, their instrument I would stress the importance of not letting brothers or sisters touch them and also not taking all the valves out of the trumpet at same time. Some of the cheaper makes don't have the number stamped on them and it can sometimes take up a whole lesson of experimenting to find the

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by Peter White

right order. It is very important I think, to tell pupils, especially young ones, to take great care with valve oil and always to wash their hands after using it. For trumpet players the left hand takes the weight of the instrument. Adjust the third

slide finger ring, if this is possible (the third or wedding ring finger should go into it), until it is just touching the middle finger. The thumb should go round the first valve or into the first finger ring, (this may be difficult for younger children with smaller hands), not vertically up the valve. Encourage the student to take the weight of the instrument with this hand alone to feel the balance. For the right hand position, I ask the pupil to imagine they are holding a ball with their fingers spread out. Keep the fingers bent but the thumb straight. This should then transfer fairly straightforwardly to the instrument, with the thumb going under the mouthpipe with the tip against the first valve, the little finger in the ring and the three middle fingers touching the valves with the tips of the fingers. Try not to let them have the right thumb sticking up between the mouthpipe and bell section alongside the first valve as this can cause problems later on with fast valve action. Having a correct hand position like this should obviate any later problems with poor valve action caused by straight fingers. This sounds long-winded, but it has probably taken longer to read than to do and the later benefits are very real. (The Flute, see Page 29)

● It has been brought to my notice by Normans, who are the sole UK distributors of the Blessing range, that the B128 Trombone is even better value than I implied in the previous article. It is in fact only £275 including VAT, as are the Scholastic range of trumpets and cornets, making them truly excellent value for money.

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