

Uncoiling the Mystery

Understanding and Teaching the French horn

Kansas Music Educators Association In-Service Workshop

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I. Is the horn really more difficult to play than other brass instruments?

- Partial are closer together (overtone series)
- They can't play in unison with the rest of the beginning band.

II. To start or not to start on horn

- Know your beginning horn player's desire, musical ability level and musical ear.
- Know your instrument inventory.

III. Switching to horn from another instrument

- "Well-taught", motivated brass players have no problem switching to horn.
- Flute players

IV. Playing position

- Straight torso, neck and head
- Use right leg and right foot to bring horn to the player.
- Rubber shelf paper makes a great "stabilizer".
- Centered embouchure

V. Right hand position

- Must not just hold the instrument!
- Cup right hand like drinking water from a stream or forming clay on a potter's wheel.
- Right hand goes into bell across from body-far enough in to shape sound but not so far as to muffle it.

VI. Instrument selection

- My recommendation for a beginning horn: Conn 6D with a Holton-Farkas MDC mouthpiece (double horn!)
- My recommendation for an intermediate horn: Holton-Farkas 179/180 with an MDC mouthpiece
- Conn 7BW mouthpiece? Holton-Farkas MC mouthpiece?
- The former "gold standard"-Conn 8D

VII. How to find those partials

- A combination of hearing and feeling the pitches
- Doing slurs and exercises around "home base" can form the foundation of a strategy to find all other pitches until confidence is gained. (See example #1)
- Scales (see example #2)

Kyle Hopkins is an Associate Professor of Music and Director of Bands at McPherson College. In his short time at McPherson College, the band program has experienced unprecedented growth and success, including being selected to perform at the 2018 Kansas Music Educators Association In-Service Workshop for the first time in the history of McPherson College. Kyle holds degrees from the University of Kansas, Washburn University and Kansas State University. Prior to returning to college to obtain his first music education degree, he worked for seven years as a Disability Examiner for the State of Kansas specializing in childhood disabilities. Before accepting his position at McPherson College, he was Director of Bands in the McPherson public schools for 12 years and before that he taught in Topeka and Shawnee Mission. Kyle has been a board member of the South Central Kansas Music Educators Association and has served as the district's Jazz Chair. He is the recipient of McPherson College's 2015 Non-Tenured Faculty Teaching Award. And in 2011, he was voted USD 418's "Teacher of the Year" by its faculty and staff.

In addition to being a sought-after clinician and adjudicator, Kyle has performed French horn with a wide range of groups such as Manheim Steamroller, Celtic Women, the Topeka Symphony, and the Kansas City Philharmonia. Currently he performs with the Wichita Symphony Orchestra and the Wichita Grand Opera as substitute horn, and regularly with the Salina Symphony Orchestra as principal horn. He has performed and/or conducted in 38 states as well as in Austria, the Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Poland and Switzerland. Kyle and his wife Christi, who also plays horn, have two sons; Isaac, who is a graduate student in trumpet performance at the University of Michigan; and Ben, a senior at McPherson High School who is an All-State and All-National tuba player.