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## INTERSECTING HISTORY AND PEDAGOGY: USING THE NATURAL TRUMPET TO TEACH BEGINNING BRASS STUDENTS

BY BRUCE BRINEY AND KIRSTY MONTGOMERY

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# INTERSECTING HISTORY AND PEDAGOGY: USING THE NATURAL TRUMPET TO TEACH BEGINNING BRASS STUDENTS

BY BRUCE BRINEY AND KIRSTY MONTGOMERY

In June 2014, the *ITG Journal* published an informative article by Leigh Anne Hunsaker, “Baroque Trumpet Study in the United States: An Update.”<sup>1</sup> In it, Hunsaker offers facts about the rapid growth of Baroque trumpet programs in American universities and compares the current state of such programs to that of just ten years ago. There are now 24 US schools that offer graduate or certificate degrees in historical trumpet performance and several that offer Baroque trumpet for credit. An overview and synopsis of eight programs stands as the detailed portion of Hunsaker’s article.

As impressive as this burgeoning study is at the university level, a creative and diverse approach to teaching the natural trumpet to younger students also exists in Chicago in a program led by trumpeter and teacher Chris Hasselbring. As a faculty member at the Music Institute of Chicago (MIC), Hasselbring initially came to Chicago as a graduate trumpet performance major at Northwestern University, studying with the late Vincent Cichowicz. His undergraduate mentor at Rutgers University, William Fielder, was himself a prominent product of the Chicago brass tradition and encouraged Hasselbring to pursue additional studies in the Windy City.

After a year with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and orchestral engagements as principal trumpet in Bogota (1993), Shanghai (1996), and Singapore (1997), Hasselbring returned to Chicago and began to teach at the Music Institute of Chicago. He had long been interested in Baroque performance practice and, with the help of local Baroque trumpeter Bob Rieder, purchased an instrument by Francis Tomes of London. Hasselbring soon realized the pedagogical potential of using the natural trumpet as a teaching tool for students of the modern trumpet. Hasselbring said:

Learning the natural trumpet fascinated me, and I wanted my students to have the opportunity to play it; so I decided to incorporate it in my studio. I ran into some problems, though. The replica instrument was awkward to hold, especially for younger players; the mouthpiece is very different; and the distance of the bell from the player’s ear can be disorienting. I don’t think any of my students had a good experience with the modern replica. In fact, I don’t think my first experience was all that good either. With some experimentation, I discovered that I could remove the valve section from an old B-flat trumpet, keeping its leadpipe and bell section intact, and insert a vinyl tube in its place, making the overall length the same as a natural trumpet. My students had a very positive experience with that instrument right away.

The creation of this “hose horn,” for lack of a better term, filled the immediate need of producing an alternative that was inexpensive, easy to hold, and accessible (taking a modern mouthpiece) and that produced a surprisingly authentic sound

(see Figure 1). Hasselbring said, “I used to perform a blind comparison test with students and colleagues, and they often couldn’t tell the difference; the sound of the hose horn was full of overtones, just like the modern replica.”

Because Hasselbring’s students were so enthusiastic about playing the hose horn, he created instructions to help them build their own instruments. The flexible tubing could be wrapped in a variety of ways, and this soon led to the formation of natural trumpet ensembles—made up of middle school and high school players—and eventually to the use of the instrument in teaching the basics of brass playing to beginners. By the fall of 2007, Hasselbring and his brother Jack, a New Jersey-based music educator, had formulated what resembled an elementary band method (covering the reading and writing of modern musical notation and indications) and initiated



Figure 1. A Baroque trumpet (left) and one of Hasselbring’s “hose horns”



One of Hasselbring's students with his hose horn

programs funded by the Music Institute of Chicago and the Mount Olive Education Foundation in New Jersey. These programs were offered to underserved youth as band primer classes and have reached over 150 students to date. The advantages of using a natural trumpet for beginners in a group setting became apparent immediately. The length of the natural trumpet makes several lower- and middle-register partials accessible to the beginning-level student, and the absence of slide and valve mechanisms helps to focus the player's attention on the fundamentals of brass playing. In particular, students could hone into their sound production, articulation, and navigation of the harmonic series.

The natural limitations of the instrument help students to hear and reproduce pitches and intervals that are elementary for all brass instruments. Also, having all the students "on the same page" (in the same key, with the same instruments) at the beginning stages of development supports more in-depth work on such pedagogical issues as embouchure formation and breathing. Finally, the use of the natural trumpet offers exciting and limitless opportunities for teaching by ear. The model of teaching group classes has precedents in other successful methodologies. The Suzuki method, for example, immediately comes to mind as a comparable approach where learning by ear—and in a group setting—plays an integral role in the training.

Significantly, included in this original elementary band method is a short history of lip-blown instruments with color pictures and illustrations. Hasselbring found that students enjoyed discussing such ancient trumpets as the conch shell, the *shofar*, and the *didjeridoo* and that they loved hypothesizing about who first discovered how to make a trumpet sound. Over time, it became clear that discussing the history of lip-blown instruments could lead to important creative steps in the students' development. Hasselbring began to incorporate some of the historical uses of lip-blown instruments into his lesson plans, starting with teaching the Jewish *shofar* call, which, interestingly, encompasses the basic elements of brass technique.

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Another of Hasselbring's students, with a differently wrapped hose horn

This topic led to a crucial progression in Hasselbring's teaching method—the idea of using the history and development of lip-blown instruments in tandem with brass pedagogy. Hasselbring explains:

All instructors understand the difficulty of teaching younger students awareness of the quality of their

sound and its relative importance when playing with others—that is, *how* to make it sound good individually or in a group setting can be extremely difficult at beginning stages of development. In addition to *how*, five often-ignored questions—*who*, *what*, *why*, *where*, and *when*—hold the key

to a student's ability to be reflective and imaginative about the quality and meaning of the sounds he or she creates.

With this philosophy, Hasselbring put together a team that included history instructor Kirsty Montgomery, graphic artist Alyssa Parsons, and sound designer Curtis Hasselbring to begin work on a new curriculum based on a historical narrative.

The new method was dubbed *Brass for Beginners (BFB)*. To bring everything into focus, the authors created a character, the hypothetical first trumpeter from prehistory, who travels through time to demonstrate many different contexts in which lip-blown instruments have been used. Hasselbring commented:

We started the method in the Paleolithic period with hunter-gatherers who likely used natural materials

to make sounds. Scholars can only guess when humans first blew a trumpet, but we know that many natural trumpets such as horns and shells were used extensively during the Neolithic period. The first instrument our character, Ragnar, plays is a bison horn, which he uses for hunting to startle prey.

Hasselbring continued:

Ragnar continues his historical journey and appears alongside the priests playing a *shofar* at the Battle of Jericho. In fact, we see Ragnar all over the world. He plays an Egyptian *snb* [sheneb, or šnb], a Peruvian conch shell, a side-blown Irish bronze horn, and an Australian *didjeridoo*. He's in Greece, playing the *salpinx* at the trumpet Olympics, in ancient Rome, playing a *cornu* in battle with the Celts, and eventually in Leipzig, performing under the direction of J.S. Bach.

The curriculum's historical themes, concepts, and content overlay its iterative (incremental and repetitive) method to learning the fundamentals of brass playing. By illuminating the relevance and impact of the trumpet's sound throughout history, students move beyond the mechanics of sound production to think critically and creatively about the sounds they are making.

The history of the trumpet offers ample opportunities to bridge history and pedagogy. For instance, in order to perform the *shofar* call, students need to be able to play a long tone, move between two harmonic pitches, and articulate successive notes. It does not matter which notes students use, since all the partials in the lower and middle register sound good together on the natural trumpet. This allows students at the beginning stages of learning to play in their own comfortable range while developing basic techniques.

Another example is an activity modeled on the Ancient Greek trumpet Olympics, which facilitates student-centered learning. Students first decide on the competitive events to be held; past suggestions have included longest note, fastest articulation, best-played musical piece, and loudest or softest sound. They then sign up to compete in an event; they go into training (using their Olympic coach, the instructor); and they compete while other students serve as judges. The idea is not to foster a sense of competition, but, rather, to build awareness of the various techniques a brass player must learn, to highlight the advantages of regular practice, and to develop criteria for evaluating quality of performance. After one competition is complete and the winners are awarded olive wreaths, students go back to the coach for training and further work on improving their events.

It appears that the *Brass for Beginners* method is very timely. First, the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards released new National Core Music Standards in June 2014, which emphasize connecting music to varied contexts in order to deepen understanding.<sup>2</sup> The *BFB* program includes a curricu-



Young beginner students in the program

lum map that aligns with these standards; it also references the National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies.<sup>3</sup> The inclusion of these parallel standards provides a framework for educators not only to delineate required national standards for teaching, learning, and forming assessments in their lessons, but also to facilitate additional interdisciplinary learning opportunities. Second, there is a general trend in education towards an interdisciplinary approach. Studies by educational researchers including Jacobs (1989),<sup>4</sup> Klein (1996),<sup>5</sup> Newell (1998),<sup>6</sup> and Repko (2008)<sup>7</sup> argue that there are a number of distinct educational benefits of interdisciplinary learning. Specifically, Kite et al (1994)<sup>8</sup> and Asmus and Haack (1996)<sup>9</sup> emphasize the importance of integrating music with other disciplines such as the humanities and social sciences. Hasselbring believes that the addition of a historical narrative to his brass

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teaching methodology has not diminished the rigorous approach to learning the fundamentals of brass playing—quite the opposite, in fact. The added historical narrative has resulted in increased opportunities for building students’ creative capacity for sound production.

While Leigh Anne Hunsaker sees the growing trend in learning the natural trumpet in university education, Hasselbring envisions his method reaching a wide variety of students in multiple age groups, from youthful beginning brass players to amateur adult learners. Hasselbring starts beginners from ages five and up on natural trumpets in private lessons. In public school residencies, *Brass for Beginners* students start one year before the school’s instrumental program commences (typically in third or fourth grade). Typically, students play the natural trumpet for one year before moving on to a modern instrument.



Trumpet ensemble from the Music Institute of Chicago (MIC)

Hasselbring has used the approach of using the natural trumpet for beginners (and trumpeters at various stages of development) for over ten years with measurable success. Over seventy percent of his students who started on the natural trumpet are now entering middle and high school instrumental music programs playing trumpet, horn, and trombone—many as section leaders. Students who started private trumpet study with Hasselbring after completion of the *Brass for Beginners* residency program have returned to the natural trumpet to explore more advanced techniques. Other more advanced private students who have benefited from learning the natural trumpet and playing in natural trumpet ensembles have gone on to perform in leading roles at various post-secondary institutions. Ultimately, any particular student's playing ability is based on many factors, including musical talent and personal motivation, but there is compelling evidence to show that after a year of playing the natural trumpet, almost all beginning students have developed a solid technical and creative foundation for playing brass instruments. According to Hasselbring, *Brass for Beginners* students can pick up a B-flat trumpet and immediately produce a good sound, articulate clearly, and move from the lowest note to at least C in the staff; after learning the valve combinations, they are ready to play more complex music. For the more advanced trumpeters in Hasselbring's studio, the use of the natural trumpet has promoted greater pitch accuracy, embouchure development, and a more horizontal concept of sound production.

Beyond the classroom, participation in *Brass for Beginners* and in the MIC natural trumpet ensembles has provided unique opportunities for students to perform at many public events

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and festivals, including the Chicago Brass Festival, Make Music Chicago, Chicago Early Music Festival, Young Evanston Artists Festival, Music In Our Schools Month, and a variety of in-school events. Since starting an online blog in the fall of 2013 (<http://brassforbeginners.com>), Hasselbring has been approached by music educators from all over the world keen to utilize his curriculum. The first volume of the *Brass for Beginners* method (prehistory to classical antiquity) and low-cost natural trumpets were made available in the fall of 2014. With the growth of early music and natural trumpet programs across the country, many hope that this significant and timely interdisciplinary method will go on to inspire the next generation of brass educators and natural trumpet students alike. As far as we can tell, it looks like it has a bright future.

*About the authors:* **Bruce Briney** pursues a creative life that intersects the worlds of performing, teaching, and conducting. Briney received his musical education at the University of Illinois

and Northwestern University, where he earned Bachelor of Music, Master of Music, and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in trumpet performance. His primary trumpet teachers were David Hickman and Vincent Cichowicz, with additional studies with Arnold Jacobs, Ray Mase, Ray Sasaki, and Luther Didrickson. At Northwestern, his conducting teachers and mentors included John Paynter and Victor Yampolsky. Fall 2014 marks the start of his 22nd year of teaching trumpet at Western Illinois University and his eighth season as the music director of the Quincy (Illinois) Symphony. **Kirsty Montgomery** is a PhD candidate in history at the University

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of Chicago. Her research focuses on extra-parliamentary political economic discourse in Britain, 1800 – 1840. A native of Great Britain, Montgomery received the BA degree in History from Northwestern University in 2007 and MA degrees in Social Science and History from the University of Chicago in 2008 and 2010, respectively. Montgomery has taught history at Oakton Community College, Northwestern University, and the University of Chicago. As part of the history faculty at the Illinois Math and Science Academy, Montgomery currently teaches the courses “Ancient World Religions and Philosophy” and “The History of China and India.” Montgomery has presented at academic conferences worldwide and published several articles, most recently “T.E. Lawrence” in *Philosophers at War* (Praeger, 2013).

### Endnotes

- 1 Leigh Anne Hunsaker, “Baroque Trumpet Study in the United States: An Update.” *International Trumpet Guild Journal* 38, no. 4 (June 2014), 15 – 22.
- 2 The National Coalition for CORE ARTS STANDARDS released the new National Core Music Standards on June 4, 2014 (see <http://www.nafme.org/my-classroom/standards>).
- 3 Susan Adler et al., *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. National Council for the Social Studies: Bulletin 111 (Silver Spring: National Council for the Social Studies, 2013).
- 4 Heidi H. Jacobs, “The Growing Need for Interdisciplinary Curriculum Content,” in *Interdisciplinary Curriculum: Design and Implementation*, ed. H.H. Jacobs (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1989).
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- 6 William H. Newell, ed., *Interdisciplinary: Essays from the Literature* (New York: College Board, 1998).
- 7 Allen Repko, *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (Los Angeles and London: Sage Publications Inc., 2008).
- 8 Thomas S. Kite, Thomas Smucker, Stan Steiner, and Mina Bayne, “Using Program Music for Interdisciplinary Study,” *Music Educators Journal* 80, no. 5 (March 1994), 33 – 36 and 53.
- 9 Edward Asmus and Paul Haack, “Defining New Teaching Roles,” *Music Educators Journal* 83, no. 2 (September 1996), 27 – 32.

