

## On Purchasing a Trumpet

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### **Should your beginning student rent or buy an instrument?**

There are three levels of trumpet: student, intermediate, and professional. Rental trumpets nearly always fall within the student category.

A beginner should almost always rent an instrument, unless the student has a family member or friend who already owns a quality trumpet and who is willing to let the student borrow it. The information in this packet will help you evaluate whether your student's trumpet is of sufficient quality.

### **When will a beginner outgrow a rental trumpet?**

Any student who practices consistently is likely to outgrow a student-level horn within the first three years, particularly if he or she is also taking private lessons. Some families choose to make this purchase sooner rather than later to avoid prolonging monthly payments on a rental instrument, and some music stores allow them to build equity towards this purchase during the rental process.

Your student needs to upgrade if...

- S/he is learning to hit notes above the staff and is currently using an instrument without an extendable first valve slide.

OR

- S/he uses vibrato as a consistent part of the sound.

These two factors indicate that the student's progress is sufficient enough that a higher-quality instrument will make a noticeable difference to the student.

### **What quality instrument should parents buy first?**

When a family decides to buy an instrument rather than renting, there are three options:

- 1) Buy a professional horn right away, thus eliminating the need for future purchases.
- 2) Buy a student-level horn at first, then upgrade straight to a pro-line horn in another year or two if the student demonstrates continued commitment.

- 3) Buy an intermediate-level horn and forego any future purchases (or make the student pay for a professional trumpet if s/he wants one).

It is not a good idea for a family to buy an intermediate trumpet with the intent to upgrade later to a professional trumpet. The prices between a new intermediate trumpet and a used professional-quality instrument are too similar to make this option financially practical. Families considering a purchase should be encouraged to choose one of the alternatives listed above.

### **What do professional trumpets contribute that others do not?**

Professional-quality trumpets allow the player to fine-tune the sound quality and intonation. They also feel less “stuffy” and respond more readily to adjustments made by the player. Any truly dedicated student will need to own a professional-quality trumpet eventually, in order to keep pace with his or her peers. This is particularly true for those wishing to pursue music in college.

It is important to remember many professional-quality instruments are available secondhand.

### **What makes a good trumpet?**

The most important features of any trumpet are its sound, intonation, and ease of handling. In particular...

- The open overtone series should correspond to its usual tendencies (or be more in tune than normal), and the octave Cs should be especially well aligned with one another.
- Notes that need to be “lipped” (for instance, fourth-line D and high G) should be close enough to pitch that they are easy to move into place.
- There should be no “surprises” in the instrument’s intonation (for instance, notes that should be in tune should not be unusually sharp or flat; the instrument should not have notes that sound extremely dull or bright as compared to the rest of its timbre; etc.).
- The extreme registers should feel free-blowing and not stuffy or pinched.
- The instrument should play well at all dynamics and should project without excessive effort.

Whenever possible, all of these factors should be tested by a qualified professional trumpet player, preferably the student’s private instructor, prior to purchase.

## **Mechanical Considerations**

Not everyone has access to a professional trumpet player to test a prospective instrument, but the manufacturing quality is often observable by a non-trumpet player. If your primary instrument is not trumpet but you need to advise a family, you should ask the following questions:

- Does the instrument have both a first and third valve ring or trigger to make tuning adjustments? Can the student move the third slide in and out with a minimal amount of hassle?
- Do the valves move smoothly? (If oiling doesn't fix this problem, don't buy the horn!)
- Do the slides close all the way? When you remove the slides, is it easy to replace them on the instrument?
- Is there a stopper of some sort to prevent the third valve slide from falling out?
- Does the instrument come with a mouthpiece? Is the mouthpiece of an appropriate size, or do you already own one that your student will play? Remember that a cornet mouthpiece will not fit on a trumpet, and vice versa.

## **Additional considerations for used or rental instruments:**

- Carefully examine the area around the valves. Are there dents in the valve casings? Is the soldering secure?
- Remove and examine the valves themselves. Are they clean, or do they have stains? (Stains on the valves are not always a reason to forego an instrument, but sometimes they will require more regular oiling.)
- Remove the tuning slide and look down the lead pipe. Is it clean, or have mineral deposits accumulated and created lumps? Check the outside of the lead pipe carefully for any trace of red rot, which can accumulate on an instrument that has not been properly cleaned. (Red rot will appear as a series of rust-colored flecks on the metal.)
- Do the water keys work? (Check round water keys in particular.)
- Are there dents in places that might affect the playability of the instrument? (The lead pipe is of greater concern than the bell.)

- Is there a great deal of rust or mineral buildup on any of the slides? If your student purchases the instrument, someone may need to scrub them gently with steel wool to restore them to optimum working condition.

If your prospective trumpet passes all or most of these tests, you are probably in good shape.

### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

The trumpet your student should own is whatever trumpet s/he will practice. If the student loves the trumpet, make every effort to encourage or facilitate the purchase, since a practicing student on a student-level horn will always sound better than someone who owns a professional-quality trumpet that lives mostly in its case.