

BAY CHAMBER CONCERTS
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BAY CHAMBER CONCERTS PRESENTS: EPIC BRASS
October 27, 2006, Strand Theatre, Rockland, Maine

Provided by Epic Brass. For more information, visit their website www.epicbrass.com

The modern brass quintet consists of two trumpet players, one French horn player, one trombone player, and one tuba player. Although the instruments are sometimes substituted for variety (e.g. bass trombone for tuba, euphonium for trombone, and flugelhorn for trumpet) the basic configuration remains the same.

The modern brass quintet has only existed since the late 1940's, as a result, there are a limited number of compositions written for this combination of instruments. The Epic Brass has continued to add variety to the literature by transcribing music from the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras as well as arranging popular songs, jazz, blues, swing, and show tunes.

The earliest trumpets were used in the courts of kings and queens during the Renaissance. During this period, the trumpeters who were known as clarinos, had an extremely difficult job because they had to rely solely upon their lips to produce different notes. Through experimenting with the slides, finger holes, and extensions of tubing, the trumpeters finally found an acceptable solution: the keyed bugle. The modern trumpet, however, was not designed until 1830 for use in Prussian cavalry bands.

The French horn is a descendant of the hunting horn. The early hornists could produce many different pitches by using their hand to open and close the bell. Although valves were added in 1815, modern hornists continue to use their hands as a mute and to hold the instrument. The trombone differs from the other brass instruments in that it has no valves. Different pitches are produced by changing the length of the instrument using a device known as the slide. For this reason, the instrument was referred to during the Renaissance as the sackbut, meaning pushpull. This, in fact, is exactly what a trombonist does with the slide while playing.

The tuba is the lowest member of the brass family. Different varieties of tubas such as the helicon, sousaphone, and euphonium were invented during the brass band period (1800-1920) and are still used today in bands and orchestras.

The Brass Instruments featured in today's concert are the Bb, C, D, Eb, G, and piccolo trumpets, Flugelhorn, French horn, trombone, euphonium, and tuba. These instruments are all made of brass, but are plated or coated with different materials which make them appear gold, silver, or brass colored.

To produce a sound on a brass instrument, the player creates a vibrating air column by buzzing the lips into a cup or funnel shaped mouthpiece. This vibrating air is channeled through tubes of different length by depressing the valves or moving the slides on the instrument.

Much of the music featured in today's concert was originally written for various instruments (often not for brass instruments) including the human voice, strings, woodwinds, and percussion. These pieces have been transcribed or arranged to fit the instrumentation of the brass family. The following shows the brass instrument and other instruments similar in range (how high or low in pitch).

TUBA Vocal bass, String bass, Baritone Saxophone, Bass Clarinet, Contra Bassoon

TROMBONE Vocal tenor, Cello, Tenor Sax, Bassoon

FRENCH HORN Vocal alto, Viola, Alto Sax, English horn

TRUMPET Vocal soprano, Violin, Soprano Sax, Flute, Clarinet, Oboe

For Discussion:

1. A Brass Quintet is a chamber music ensemble. This means that there is no conductor. How do the musicians start pieces together? How do they know when to stop playing? Is there a leader?

A. The first trumpet player is usually the leader because the first trumpet parts usually have the most notes. This player usually tips the trumpet bell to conduct the beginning and end of pieces.

2. To play in tune with each other, the performers must adjust their instruments during the performance. In what ways do the players adjust their instruments?

A. They make the instrument tubing longer or shorter by pushing in or pulling out the slides. The further out the slides, the longer the instrument and lower the pitch becomes. The further in the slides, the shorter the instrument and higher the pitch becomes.

3. During the performance, the performers will empty liquid out of their instruments. Are they spitting on the floor? Why do they do this?

A. When one blows warm air into an instrument, the air inside the instrument becomes warmer than the air outside the instrument. The moisture condenses, forming puddles or pockets of water and oil inside the instrument. It's like blowing warm air slowly against a mirror and watching it fog up (a student might try this). This water must be emptied or the instruments start to gurgle and sound like they are under water!

4. Which instrument does not have valves?
The trombone.

5. Which instruments can play the highest notes?
The trumpet, and the French horn.

6. Which instruments can play the lowest notes?

The tuba and trombone.

7. Why does the French horn player put a hand in the bell of the instrument?

It has become the traditional sound based on early horns that had no valves and changed pitches by moving the hand in the bell and tightening and loosening the lips.

8. Do instruments plated with silver sound different than those plated with gold or a clear lacquer?

In theory, yes, but practically speaking, not really. The sound of the instrument is more dependent on the individual player's concept of sound and ability.

9. Why do the trumpet players use so many different trumpets?

Each trumpet has a different tone and sound. Changing trumpets adds variety and color to the overall sound of the group. Plus, it's fun to watch!

10. Do women play brass instruments?

Of course, many professional and amateur musical organizations employ fine female brass players. Men and women play the same instruments all over the world.

11. Are brass instruments more difficult to learn than instruments from the woodwind, string, percussion, or keyboard family?

No, all instruments have their own special challenges, but with regular practice one can learn to make music and enjoy playing in a group with others.

12. Is the human voice an instrument?

Yes, it is the first instrument and all other instrumentalists try to imitate the natural beauty of the human voice.

13. Is the saxophone a member of the brass family?

No, even though it is made of brass, the saxophone belongs to the woodwind family because it uses a vibrating reed on the mouthpiece to produce sound. Brass players all vibrate their lips into a cup shaped mouthpiece to create sound. This is called "buzzing".

BONUS QUESTION) When is it too late to learn to play an instrument?

It is never too late to make music a part of your life. Start today, start tomorrow, **JUST START!**