



Searching for the Right Mouthpiece

First of all, let's get one thing straight: there is no dream mouthpiece! There is no mouthpiece that is going to make anyone play and feel better overnight. Because the body goes through changes every day, playing a wind instrument cannot feel good all the time. Some days a person's playing feels great and other days it might feel downright horrible. The secret is to make your playing sound good every day no matter how you feel. Working for consistency is an important part of becoming a reliable player.

Too many trumpet players search all their lives for the "right" mouthpiece. They might change mouthpieces every six months or carry five or six mouthpieces with them all the time, trying to figure out which one is best.

Some players change mouthpieces for every different type of playing requirement. The high note mouthpiece, the orchestra mouthpiece, the combo mouthpiece, the section playing mouthpiece, the solo mouthpiece, the lead mouthpiece. Where does it all end? I do agree that many players may need to have different equipment for some different types of playing but playing mouthpieces that are wildly different and switching constantly can actually hurt one's consistency and endurance, in my opinion. The best way to use more than one mouthpiece effectively is to either have custom made mouthpieces that are consistent as far as the rim and width, or use a system such as the Warburton System, where you can change cup depths and backbores, but keep the exact same rim and change other aspects of the overall mouthpiece.

I have used the same basic mouthpiece for the past 40 years. There have been some minor refinements over the years, but no drastic changes. Most of my life I have done all my playing on one mouthpiece. I have always felt that you should change your APPROACH to different types of music, not just switch mouthpieces constantly. Using say, a Bach 1 1/2 C for classical playing and a Schilke 13A4a for jazz lead playing is just too much of a transformation for your chops to handle. Everything is different about them.

If you are playing the Hummel Concerto, you use a whole different approach to the horn than if you are playing lead in a big band. You THINK differently. I use my mind like a computer. If I am playing in an orchestra, I put the orchestral program in the computer. If I am playing in a jazz combo, then the jazz combo program goes in. It also helps to have practiced and listened to recordings in each style that you are called upon to perform. Another way to put it is that you lock the stylistic approach you need into your mind.

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My belief in mouthpiece size is much different than some teachers that I meet. They will instruct a student to play bigger and bigger mouthpieces. My feeling is that you should play the smallest mouthpiece that is comfortable for you and gives you the sound, endurance and flexibility that you want. Notice that I did NOT say to play a "small" mouthpiece. If a 3C works well for you, why keep trying to get bigger and end up with a 1C or something similar? Many times, especially in high school situations, I see young players forced to play mouthpieces that are so big that they get discouraged because they have no endurance or range. The other thing that gets to me, is seeing a high school trumpet section where all the students are forced to play the same huge mouthpiece. Some teachers have the mistaken impression that if all the students play the same mouthpiece, they will sound the same. My answer to that is simply.....WRONG!! Everyone is different and must be allowed to use equipment that complements their individual musculature and playing characteristics.

A larger mouthpiece does not necessarily give you a bigger sound and a smaller mouthpiece does not necessarily give you a smaller sound. Larger equals darker and smaller equals brighter, might be a simplified way of putting it. I have heard some fantastic lead trumpet players that use small mouthpieces and have huge sounds!

Other situations where different mouthpieces are required are: playing higher pitched horns, such as Eb or Piccolo, cornet and flugelhorn. These require different cup depth and even shape of the cup, as well as throat and backbore. The cornet and flugelhorn work much better with a "V" shaped cup for the sound that is desirable in those horns. Again - my cornet and flugelhorn mouthpieces have the same rim as my trumpet mouthpieces.

The flugelhorn presents a special challenge in that it is NOT a trumpet and should not be approached like one. It needs a much deeper "V" cup and usually a more open throat and backbore. Flugelhorn should be played with a lighter "touch" than a trumpet and played with even more finesse. It should be played more "tenderly" to bring out it's wonderful dark sound.

In choosing a mouthpiece or even a series of mouthpieces, first decide what kinds of playing you do most. A person leaning towards big band lead playing would certainly not use as deep a mouthpiece as someone who is leaning towards being a symphonic musician. The mouthpiece must enable a player to do his or her job as comfortably and consistently as possible.

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