

Choosing Your Instrument

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Good trumpet players can produce quality sounds even on low-end instruments. As long as a horn is built and working properly, a player will be able to use it with relatively consistent results. Having said that, no two horns are the same (although some manufacturers are VERY consistent). Each instrument will have slightly different intonation tendencies and a different feel while playing due to the bore size of the horn and other variables. When selecting equipment for yourself, the key is to find an instrument and mouthpiece combination that works best for you.

To begin with, make sure you have a mouthpiece that you can use with each horn you play so that your comparisons are "the same". Changing mouthpieces can drastically change the way an instrument feels when you play, and it is best to have a consistent standard to judge each experience by. If you've been playing for a while, you probably already have an idea of what kind of mouthpiece you want to use. For beginners, I recommend starting out on a mouthpiece that is the equivalent of a Bach 7C or 5C mouthpiece size. Most new instruments already come with a mouthpiece, though, so don't run out and buy one before you go to the music store. Instead, borrow one from a more experienced trumpet player or ask the music store if they will loan you one while you try out instruments.

When looking to buy a trumpet, it is always safer to stick with reputable brands. I recommend Getzen instruments. They are consistent, reliable, made in America, affordable, and make excellent horns at every level. Getzen and other manufacturers usually have several levels of product, such as student, intermediate, and professional model trumpets. The student models may be made of less expensive materials, and they often have less personal attention in the manufacturing process. Professional models are made of the finest materials and are often hand-made or tweaked by experts in the factory. Professional models also may have higher tolerances in the slide and valve assemblies, giving them excellent performance results, but making them more prone to sticking if not maintained frequently. Intermediate models fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. For a beginner, there really is no harm in buying a quality student or intermediate model. You will save money on the purchase, and they most likely wouldn't be able to notice a difference between that and a professional model anyway.

When trying out trumpets, use the same mouthpiece and try the trumpets all at the same time for a side-by-side comparison. Play the following on each instrument: long tones, scales (major and chromatic), slurs, loud and soft, various articulations. You may also want to have a tuner on hand to find out if any of the trumpets have strange intonation tendencies. You may also want to ask another trumpet player to accompany you while you

shop. When you're playing, often you get a very good idea for what the horn "feels like" to play, but you don't get a completely accurate idea of what the instrument sounds like to an audience. Having another person in the room is a great idea because they can tell you what you sound like from the audience's perspective. After trying out the trumpets, simply choose your favorite. When making the decision, consider how easy each trumpet felt to play as well as the quality of each sound you were able to produce.

Choosing a trumpet is a great adventure and can be very exciting. For consistency's sake, I recommend going through the process outlined above. However, this doesn't preclude the possibility that you might find a "gem" at a garage sale or online. With purchases like that, though, you must assume the risk of purchasing a horn that you end up being unhappy with. Playing three or four reputable trumpets side by side before purchase is the surest way to purchase a trumpet that will allow you to play well and improve over time.