

Trumpet Blog

Blogging anything & everything trumpet

How To Play A Flugel Horn

Most trumpet players approach the flugel in the same way they approach their trumpet- put it to your face and blow! Although this works, it might not be the best way to get the most out of your instrument. As I covered in my last post, the two instruments are constructed differently and their use and even playing style are different.

Both the trumpet and the flugel horn are played basically the same. Both also play the same range of notes with the same fingerings. The difference between the two lies in the application and playing style of the player. The flugel lends itself to the ballads and the trumpet works well on the up tempo “shower of spit” type of playing. For those of you who are now saying to yourself, “I can play just as fast on the flugel as I can on the trumpet”, so can I but I choose not to do so for the fast notes on a flugel tend to get blurred and lack the clarity that the trumpet exhibits. I have the same thinking about fast notes played on a tenor sax as apposed to fast notes played on a tenor sax. Most people would agree that Charlie Parker “Bird” would have sounded great on either sax but the alto fit his tremendous speed which would have been lost if he had performed the same notes on a tenor. Even though I’m sure many may disagree with me on this last comparison, I feel very strongly that the flugel is best suited to the ballads and the trumpet to the more speedy passages.



The range of the trumpet and flugel as I have previously stated is the same but I will add that I can play higher on my flugel than I can on my trumpets. This is also true when I play high notes on my cornet. The cylindrical instruments seem to play easier in the high register. I can also play higher on a euphonium than I can on a trombone even though they are the same length. One problem I also find when playing in the upper range of the flugel, the notes are easier to play but are also harder to play in tune. Moving from one

high note to the next seems to be easier but I also find that those same notes have less center to them. Another problem with playing high notes on a flugel is the fact that the flugel's highest notes start to sound like a trumpet and if you want that sound you should be playing on a trumpet.

Intonation on flugels is the most often complaint we hear. Advancement in flugel horn design has improved very slowly as I stated in my previous post and intonation is at the top of the list for most complaints. One solution would be to purchase a flugel horn with four valves. The fourth valve will allow you an alternate set of fingerings which could improve your odds at getting your notes in tune. One disadvantage of the additional valve is the additional weight to the instrument. I have owned four valve flugels and along with the additional fingerings, the added fourth valve will also allow you to increase the number of notes at the bottom. The extra length of tubing will give you several additional low notes which is handy, especially if the arrangement extends below the traditional low F# on the three valve instruments. Whether you choose the three or the four valve instruments should be based on the improved intonation, added weight and added cost. After owning and playing both styles and I most often prefer the three valves and use the slides to help with the pitch problems.

When playing your first note on a flugel, you will probably be amazed at how easily it speaks. The reason for this is that the flugel mouthpiece has a different cup design than the trumpet mouthpiece. Trumpet mouthpieces have a rounded bottom in the cup and a flugel horn mouthpiece is shaped more like a funnel; more similar to the inside of a French horn mouthpiece. The air tends to flow through a flugel horn mouthpiece more easily than a trumpet mouthpiece. In many ways the flugel horn is closer to a French horn than it is to a trumpet.

Your decision as to how to hold a flugel is something you will have to determine. Some hold it like a trumpet and others play them with the most unusual hand positions. Your final decision as to how to hold your flugel will come with time. One thing you should consider when deciding is how easy is it to move the valve slides if they are equipped with levers to extend the slides. Most flugel horns have a spring loaded mechanical addition to extend the third slide. This is something you should definitely have on your instrument. My current flugel is a Conn Vintage 1 and the low D is not a major problem to lower but the C#, as with most three valve instruments, requires that the third slide be extended all the way out in order for the instrument to play in tune.

I have been asked many times, "How much time should I practice on my flugel horn"? When you first purchase your new flugel (or used), you need to spend some time on it in order to get used to the change in resistance, intonation and response. After you have become good friends with the instrument, set it aside and keep the valves oiled until it is needed. Seldom do I hear of any trumpet players that spend a lot of time practicing on their flugel. If you have an upcoming recital or an important recording session, then you get it out a few days before and reintroduce yourself but you needn't practice it as much as you do your trumpet.

This concludes my post on how to play the flugel and in my next post I will discuss some of the top flugels on the market today.

PUBLISHED BY



Bruce Chidester

Bruce was a member of the faculty at the University of Northern Iowa, School of Music in Cedar Falls from 1969 until his retirement in 1999. He has performed with many well-known entertainers such as Bob Hope, Jim Nabors, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gorme, Anita Bryant, Carman Cavalara, Victor Borgie, the Four Freshman, Blackstone the Magician, Bobby Vinton and John Davidson. [View all posts by Bruce Chidester →](#)

July 11, 2011 Bruce Chidester Trumpet for Beginners, Trumpet Equipment, Trumpet Tips, Trumpet Tools & Guides, Trumpet Trends & News

12 thoughts on “How To Play A Flugel Horn”



Chris. Taberner

August 21, 2011 at 11:43 am

“I have the same thinking about fast notes played on a tenor sax as apposed to fast notes played on a tenor sax.”

One of those tenors should be an alto.

Interesting article, I used to play Tenor Horn. Now tenor, Alto and Soprano Saxophone. I’ve been checking out flugelhorn and trombone recently, for some reason.



Bruce Chidester

August 21, 2011 at 7:10 pm

Thanks for stopping by and leaving your comments.

The combination of trombone and flugel is wonderful but when I was a student at then, North Texas State, I watched a rehearsal of the One O’clock and one of the charts had Lou Marini playing a unison line with Bill Stapleton on flugel and I thought that was the most unbelievable sound. THEN, I was

blown away when Larry Ford played a harmon mute doubling line with the guitar player and that was out of sight.

Is't it sad that the rest of the world is unable to get excited about these great combinations?

 **Michael Agunbiade**

December 3, 2014 at 11:49 am

Hello, I just bought a 4 valve flugelhorn. How can I be perfected in playing it? I play trumpet & cornet at the moment.

Thank you for your help.

 **Bruce Chidester** 

December 4, 2014 at 7:48 am

Congratulation. I haven't had a four valve for a long time. I'm jealous.

Get used to using the fourth valve if the horn has issues in intonation on D's and C#'s.

Use fourth valve in place of D 1-3 and fourth and second for C# 1-2-3.

If it is close with regular fingering, use the fourth valve only on sustained D's and C#'s.

Also enjoy the added lower notes for these are great notes to extend your options when playing jazz.

What kind of horn did you get?

 **Amy H**

June 12, 2015 at 2:58 pm

Hi

How would you go about improving the sound on a flugel? I can't buy a new one (unfortunately) and want to get a deeper, more horn-like (less cornet) sound.

Thank you

 **Bruce Chidester** 

June 12, 2015 at 7:33 pm

First make sure you are using a true flugle mouthpiece. Flugle mouthpieces are shaped in the cup area more like a French Horn (funnel shaped) than a trumpet or cornet (cupped shape) mouthpiece. Many times the manufacturer will indicate a flugle mouthpiece with an “F” letter.

If you are playing on a true flugle mouthpiece, you should look into a deeper funnel and/or a larger throat. A mouthpiece switch is much cheaper than a different horn.

Let me know what you find for I may be able to come up with something more for you.

 **Catherine**

June 30, 2015 at 6:04 pm

Is it possible to teach yourself how to play the flugelhorn

 **Bruce Chidester** 🧑

July 1, 2015 at 11:31 am

Learning to play a flugle is just like learning to play a trumpet with a couple exceptions-

1. Don't expect the flugle to play like a trumpet. It plays more like a cornet and should not be expected to have the bright, cutting tone of a trumpet.
2. Do most of your practicing on your trumpet and play the flugle when needed. Practicing “all the time” on your flugle will hurt your trumpet playing.
3. Don't try to over blow your flugle and think of it as a warm, less aggressive instrument when compared to the trumpet.

I hope this helps and enjoy the beauty and warmth of the flugle for it is a wonderful instrument when played as it should be played.

 **Patrick Eliason**

July 16, 2015 at 11:40 am

Way back in the late 70's, when signing up for the school band, I wanted to learn to play the Flugel Horn. I was convinced to learn the French Horn with the intent to move to the Flugel horn at a later time. They wanted a French Horn Player in the School band, everyone else was playing Trumpet or Trombone, and my older brother was already playing the French Horn so the rental fee was already a sunk cost.

I have always enjoyed the deep tones of the French Horn, and I can still pick out that majestic voice in the back ground of so many movie sound tracks. Now that a few years have passed, I find my self waxing nostalgic and I would still like to learn the Flugel Horn.

My question is: how drastically different are the playing styles between the two horn types, and setting aside the 35 years of not practicing, does this seem like an attainable goal for a 50 year old dreamer?

Any Insight would be most welcome, and I thank you for your time.

 **Bruce Chidester** 👤

July 21, 2015 at 8:14 am

Not only is it possible, but I highly encourage it.

As long as you play the Flugle as it should be played (play in the middle and low range with a dark sound) you will find it to be a very enjoyable experience. You already have the sound in your head from your Horn playing background.

If you need some material to help with your comeback, check out our lessons on line at...

<http://www.trumpetlessonsonline.com/>

 **adam**

August 11, 2015 at 2:42 am

do you think it is bad to get a 4 valve for your first flugalhorn

 **Bruce Chidester** 👤

August 11, 2015 at 11:12 am

A four valve flugel is what everyone should have in their arsenal.

If you can afford the extra money, go for it.

It will also be easier to sell if you ever want to get rid of it.
