



# The Copper Street Brass Quintet

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRASS QUINTET

511 Groveland, Minneapolis, MN 55403 | (612) 722-3667

www.copperstreetbrass.com

quintet@copperstreetbrass.com

### *The Copper Street Brass Quintet: Brass Student Learning Guide*

*Take notes on the various diagrams*

What is our job as musicians?

**We must always do our best to make a beautiful sound!**

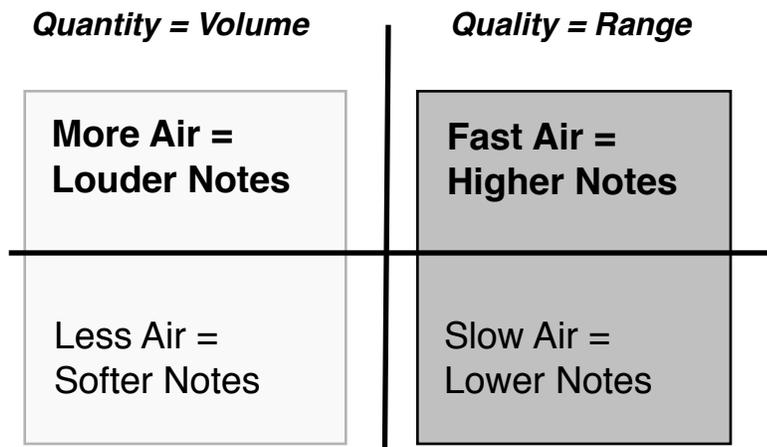
Whatever your ability level is on your instrument, you number one priority should always be to sound your best.

**It doesn't matter how high, loud, or fast you can play if you can't do it with a beautiful sound! If you don't sound good, nobody will want to listen to you!**

The key to playing with a beautiful sound is to KNOW WHAT A beautiful SOUND IS.

\*\*Find excellent players on your instrument and listen, listen, listen! You must have a great sound in your head to imitate when you practice\*\*

### The brass player's quadrant - How to use your air



Every note that you play fits into two spaces on the quadrant. For example: a high, soft note = a little bit of fast air. A loud low note = a lot of slow air.

To increase your range, avoid always thinking about blowing more and more air. This will cause you to blow your chops apart and over work your chops, causing the high notes to be even more challenging.

To work on controlling your air quantity and speed (which will increase efficiency, improve tone, and give you a nice shiny coat), begin by practicing exercises that are simple and you can play with a great sound and relaxed body, and gradually expand your range outwards in both directions. Make sure as you stretch your range that your sound stays the same and your body remains relaxed.

Here's a simple exercise that I like:

"I know I can play this without any trouble, so I start here."

"That sounded great and went well, so I will ascend by a half step."

"Was my body relaxed  
Yes. Did I sound great? Yes. Go up another half step..."

"That sounded great and felt comfortable, so I will ascend by a half step."

Continue to ascend until you become tense or sound suffers, always thinking to yourself about sound between each key.

I will continue to ascend until I notice that my sound isn't as good or my body is getting tense, then I will go back down a half step or so to a point where I am relaxed, and try to ascend again, being very focused on keeping relaxed and keeping my sound quality the same.

The keys to this simple exercise are:

1. Remain very focused on sound and relaxation, and work slowly. This isn't a contest to see how fast you can play scales and arpeggios. Make sure it is perfect before you move on.
2. Always start from a place of comfort and good sound, and strive to transfer that feeling and sound to other registers. If you work slowly and methodically, over time you will notice you add range and ease in your playing.

3. Avoid trying to make the exercise overly technical. The point is to focus on sound, not to have to worry about rhythms or fingerings.

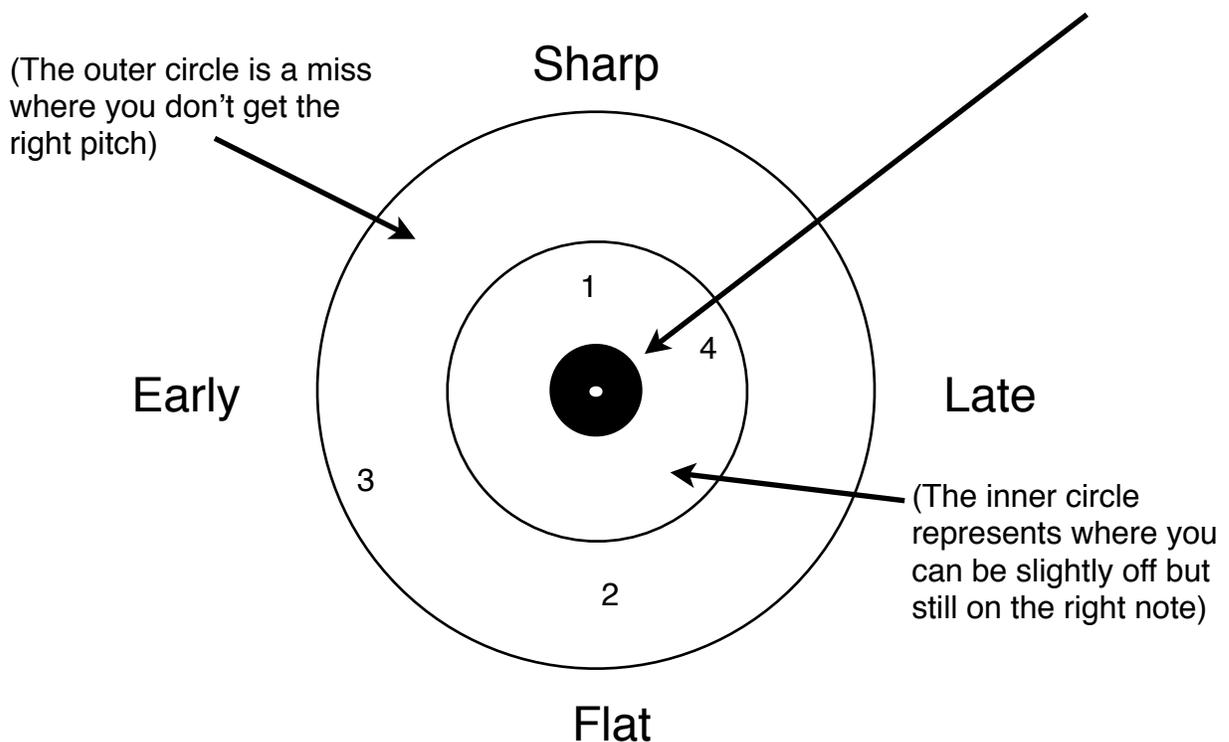
### Centering Your Pitch

Playing with good pitch is essential to playing with a beautiful sound. Good pitch (or good intonation) can only be achieved when you are playing in the center of each note.

How do I tell if I am in the center of the note?

1. It feels easy to play the note and to move your air.
2. The sound is excellent.
3. You aren't making major adjustments with your chops.
4. You didn't chip the front of the note.

Imagine a target, with the very center of the bullseye being a perfectly centered "G"



- 1 = a sharp G, the pitch is slightly high
- 2 = a really flat G, so flat it may even be a different note
- 3 = a flat G, but played too early (missed from below)
- 4 = a slightly sharp G, played a little late (probably chipped from above)

If it seems like there is a lot of space in the target for notes to be missed or out of tune, THERE IS! When you miss a note or play out of tune, you are missing the singular center of the pitch and are somewhere in the infinite space of the “not-center”. You can reflect on the way you missed the note to help diagnose how to fix it. If you chipped in from above, you were probably aiming too high and playing slightly out of time.

**When a note is missed or chipped, 99% of the time it is because the rhythm is bad immediately before the note.**

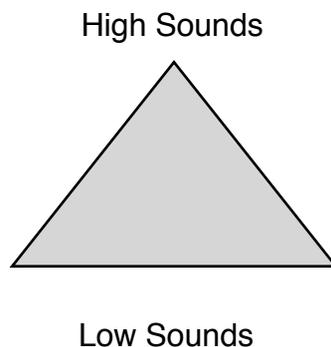
Brass playing is about aligning mental and physical techniques to make a beautiful sound. Imagine having to line up an inhalation, a slide position or valve change, a particular rhythm, and a particular dynamic, in a specific register without knowing exactly where the note should speak! Without good rhythm (subdividing in your head), it is very difficult to get all of those physical and mental processes to happen all exactly together. When we miss a note, it is usually because our coordination of one element is slightly off, and we use rhythm to help keep all the pieces together.

### **How to improve your “centered-ness”**

1. Make sure that above all, your tone is excellent. If you are playing with a good sound, you are probably doing the right things mentally and physically.
2. Always breathe in rhythm, even if you are playing a simple long tone. Establish some sense of time so you can line up your coordination.
3. Use your ears and a tuner to help identify how you sound when you are in or out of tune. Additionally, each instrument has some notes that need additional adjustment beyond just the main tuning slide. If you don't know what notes those are, just ask!

One of the best ways to tell if you have a good sound or good time is to play for someone else! Grab a friend and make a duet for warm-ups and try to match each other's notes exactly together and in tune.

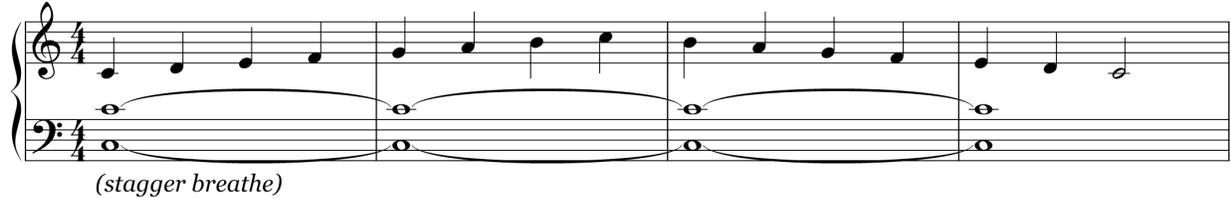
Once you add more people, you will want to consider balance, whether in a simple trio or in full band.



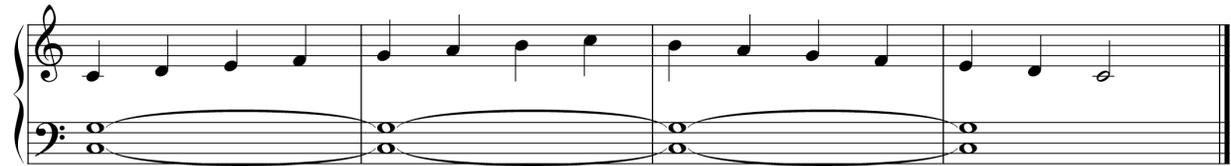
Low voices support the high voices by playing loud and full. Higher voices listen down to the lower voices for pitch (tuning). Lower voices often listen to the highest voice (or main melodic voice) for articulation, phrasing, and style.

## Simple group warm-up ideas:

- Unison(in octaves) 5-note scales
- Full scales in unison
- Full scales with a drone (octave or fifth)



The image shows a musical score for a 5-note scale in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff contains a scale starting on C4 and moving up to G4. The bass clef staff contains a drone consisting of two octaves of C (C2 and C4). The score is divided into four measures, with the drone notes held across all measures. Below the bass clef staff, the instruction "(stagger breathe)" is written.



The image shows a musical score for a full scale in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff contains a scale starting on C4 and moving up to C5. The bass clef staff contains a drone consisting of two octaves of C (C2 and C4). The score is divided into four measures, with the drone notes held across all measures.

- Full scales in canon (with or without a drone)

When playing with a drone pitch, experiment with which instrument sustains the drone (it doesn't need to always be the lowest voice). Listen carefully for tuning and matching when you move to each different interval with the drone. Try the exercises both in strict time and on cue.

**\*\*Try new scales! Experiment with playing in tune in less comfortable keys.\*\***

- Style/articulation/rhythm matching around the group
- Try chorales together (use published versions or simple read out of a hymnal...learn to transpose!)

## Things to think about

- Every member should be comfortable leading beginnings and endings of tunes and setting tempi.
- Work on starting together with no count-off, just breathe IN TIME together and play.
- Look around the ensemble and watch each other's movements/breathing to stay together.
- Have fun! Playing in a chamber ensemble is as much about relationships as it is music making. Problem solving as a group can be great fun but can also be stressful. Think carefully about your criticisms before addressing other ensemble members. The best groups know how to have fun and have productive rehearsals at the same time.

## Resources

### Online

- <http://www.youtube.com> (other than all the videos of cats, there are excellent videos of professional musicians that you can watch for free. Watch how relaxed the performer looks, listen to the tone quality, etc.)
- iTunes (a recording of anything you could ever dream of in better quality than YouTube)
- Instrument organization websites. Every instrument has one, and many offer helpful forums that you can read for answers to technical questions or to learn more about professional players.

### Sheet Music

<http://www.rkingmusic.com>

<http://www.hickeys.com>

<http://www.sheetmusicplus.com>

<http://www.imslp.org> (tons of free public domain scores and parts)

### Gear and Other Stuff

<http://www.musescore.org> (free music notation software)

<http://www.dillonmusic.com>

<http://www.wwbw.com>