

MUSIC TEACHER

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Musical Christmas gifts
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BRASS FOCUS

BEN GOLDSCHIEDER

Horn player with a
bright future

A BRASS ODYSSEY

Natural trumpets
and harmony

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Brass bands in Africa

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HOW TO...
Set up a primary concert band



NATURAL LEARNING

Legendary trumpeter and former Royal Conservatoire of Scotland principal John Wallace has been working with US-based Brass for Beginners on transporting a learning programme that has seen huge, cross-curricular success using natural trumpets. He told Rhian Morgan how it could be useful for schools in the UK

Brass for Beginners, an American organisation which introduces children to brass instruments through the use of natural trumpets, is to develop the project for the UK market. And who better to work with than brass and music education stalwart John Wallace, the former principal of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and well-known orchestral trumpet player and soloist?

Wallace has recently been working

on the scheme with colleagues in Chicago, where the programme has run since 2007.

'Brass for Beginners is a cross-disciplinary method for learning the fundamentals of brass playing using the natural trumpet as the primary teaching tool,' says Wallace.

'It's a story-driven approach, tracing the development and significance of lip-blown instruments throughout human history. It engages young learners and



The new BFB Tromba, a plastic natural trumpet

helps to place emphasis on musical outcomes while students develop the skills necessary for success on any modern brass instrument.

'Since it is a "learn by ear" method, and doesn't rely on reading music notation, the curriculum is able to introduce more complex and sophisticated musical content than is typically found in beginner brass curricula.

'This makes for a more rewarding musical experience from the outset, one that is more likely to keep students engaged as they develop the fundamental skills of brass playing.'

'A cross-disciplinary method for learning the fundamentals of brass playing'



NATURAL BENEFITS

The organisation believes that the natural trumpet – or a modified, child-friendly version of it – is a versatile teaching tool for learning the fundamentals of brass playing.

'When referring to the natural trumpet, we mean the standardised folded instrument – without valve or slide mechanisms – in use from the 16th to the 19th centuries in Europe,' says Wallace.

'Using a natural trumpet offers numerous pedagogical benefits. Valves and slides can be a distraction for beginner students, so a natural trumpet helps put the focus on the rudiments of brass playing, in particular sound production, articulation, and navigation of the harmonic series.'

Lip-blown instruments make appearances across millennia of human history and thus, Wallace believes, make effective and engaging cross-disciplinary material.

MORE THAN 60% OF STUDENTS WHO STARTED ON THE NATURAL TRUMPET ARE ENTERING MIDDLE- AND HIGH-SCHOOL INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC PROGRAMMES

The student-teacher resources book follows the adventures of a hypothetical 'first trumpeter' who takes students on a journey through time and across the globe, from the Upper Palaeolithic to the fall of the Roman Empire – at the same time bringing to life history, geography, mythology, philosophy, religion and science.

Wallace believes that the story pushes children to think broadly about how humans create, learn, share and adapt. 'They can also explore the visual effects of instruments, such as their size, colour, texture, and shape – and how that may have impacted, inspired or intimidated.'

The programme is currently used in America as part of the general music curriculum, in community-based music schools, and for PTA-funded after-school enrichment programmes.

'It was the success in the US, and growing interest there and abroad, that led us to make both the instruments and the programme more widely available.'

PUT INTO PRACTICE

The statistics are impressive: more than 60% of students who started on the natural trumpet are entering middle- and high-school instrumental music programmes, playing trumpet, horn, and trombone. Some students who started learning privately after finishing Brass for Beginners have returned to the natural trumpet to explore more advanced techniques, while more advanced students – who benefited from learning the natural trumpet and playing in natural trumpet ensembles – have gone on to perform in leading roles at various post-secondary institutions.

'Ultimately, any student's playing ability is based on many factors, including musical talent and personal motivation, but there's compelling evidence to show that after a year of playing the natural trumpet almost all beginning students have developed a solid technical and creative foundation for playing brass,' says Wallace, who hopes the UK-adapted programme will be embraced by primary schools and music hubs here.



'The natural trumpet helps put the focus on the rudiments of brass playing, in particular sound production, articulation, and navigation of the harmonic series'

BRASS FOR BEGINNERS CAN OFFER STAFF DEVELOPMENT – AS WELL AS ENGAGING STUDENTS IN A CROSS-CURRICULAR APPROACH AND MEETING THE WIDER OPPORTUNITIES CRITERIA

USE IN SCHOOLS

As a performer and teacher himself, Wallace is well aware of the difficulties many schools face integrating music into their classrooms. And as leader of brass ensemble The Wallace Collection, he has also seen how interaction with visiting professional musicians can enhance a music education project's success. He also believes that the Brass for Beginners programme can offer essential staff personal development training, as well as engaging students in a cross-curricular approach and meeting Wider Opportunities criteria.

'The natural trumpet turns out to be a very approachable instrument,' he says. 'Having presented at numerous educational conferences we've seen teachers from all backgrounds feel compelled to pick up the instrument and try it. Since the natural trumpet and its harmonic series are sometimes not well

understood, teachers are fascinated by it and enthusiastic about learning it for their own enjoyment.

'Since Brass for Beginners provides play-along resources, teachers who don't feel confident serving as the teaching model can simply enjoy learning alongside their students. Everyone has something to gain.

'Brass is pervasive in almost every cultural and historical context throughout human history, and the experience of playing brass is unique from any other instrument family, yet only a small percentage of school children have the opportunity to learn a brass instrument.

'This programme is for the general music classroom and we hope it expands the opportunity of learning brass playing for educators and students across the world.'

www.brassforbeginners.com