

FROM THE AUTHOR

It is my pleasure to introduce *The Quintet Playbook: Effective Strategies for Amateur or Pre-Professional Brass Quintets*. A large portion of my performance career has centered around chamber music, and more specifically, the brass quintet. My experiences have included instances in multiple groups as a doctoral student, a freelancer, a chamber coach, and now as a university professor. Each facet of my brass quintet experience has had its own set of unique challenges and rewards, and I have thus gained insight into the actions, habits, organization, and communication skills necessary to foster success as a brass quintet. Whether it's coordinating schedules, rehearsing repertoire, or effectively communicating with one another, the success of a brass quintet requires a great deal of organization, discipline, and teamwork.

Despite the increasing popularity of brass quintet in both secondary schools and institutions of higher education, many brass quintets are not properly trained on effective rehearsal techniques, communication skills, and organizational practices. The lack of experience and training in these areas increases the likelihood of the quintet never fully enjoying the musical and interpersonal benefits promised from participation in the activity. From my observed experience, many quintets are rehearsing ineffectively and without the proper tools and systems needed to make their time and energy worthwhile. This book aims to alleviate this problem.

This book provides practical strategies and techniques for addressing these challenges and achieving success as a brass quintet. Divided into four chapters: (1) Organization, (2) Quintet Fundamentals, (3) Rehearsal Techniques, and (4) Communication, readers will gain insight into running a successful quintet.

Throughout the book I will offer helpful tips, practical exercises, and suggestions that can be immediately applied at your next rehearsal. Let this book be a tool to increase your rehearsal efficiency, your musical enjoyment, and ultimately enhance your brass quintet experience.

- Jett M. Walker

PREFACE

While there are many variations to instrumentation, for the purposes of this book, the term *brass quintet* will constitute a group of five brass musicians consisting of two trumpets, one horn, one tenor trombone, and one tuba or bass trombone.

In Ch. 2: Quintet Fundamentals, each exercise will consist of three separate staves. The top staff will contain the music for Bb Trumpet I and II, the next staff is reserved exclusively for Horn in F, and the third staff will be shared by the tenor trombone and tuba (or bass trombone).

Example

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is labeled 'B♭ Trumpets', the middle staff is 'Horn in F', and the bottom staff is 'Trombone/Tuba'. All three staves are in 4/4 time and share a key signature of one flat (B♭). The notation consists of three measures. In the first measure, each staff has a half note. In the second measure, each staff has a whole rest. In the third measure, each staff has a whole note chord consisting of two notes: a lower note on the second line and a higher note on the second space. The notes are: B♭ Trumpets (G4 and A4), Horn in F (E4 and F4), and Trombone/Tuba (D3 and E3).

It is also important to note that this book is not necessarily meant to be read linearly. Depending on the situation, it might behoove an ensemble to digest the information in an order most beneficial to them. The important part is that the information be contemplated and implemented in a purposeful and meaningful way, no matter what order the ensemble chooses to go.

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CHAPTER 1: ORGANIZATION

“If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.” – Benjamin Franklin

Forming a successful brass quintet is a rewarding, yet tricky, endeavor involving numerous variables and challenges. Without a proper foundation of clear and concise structure, goals, and purpose, the quintet will never reach its full potential. In this section, I will provide prompts and directives to allow your group to ponder, discuss, and ultimately define the organizational structure of your brass quintet.

Defining the Ensemble:

A brass quintet is much more than just a collection of five musicians. It needs an agreed upon function and purpose to thrive. Keep in mind, this function and purpose can (and often will) change and evolve over time, yet it is vital the foundational purpose remain clear to all. Ask yourself, what is the purpose of the group? Is it a “gigging” quintet, in which your primary focus is entrepreneurial and financial? If so, is there a primary market or medium you plan to operate? Weddings, church services, touring, etc? If not a “gigging” quintet, perhaps your focus is more academic? Is your quintet formed in an institution, with a primary purpose of learning and performing the standard repertoire? Or perhaps instead to commission and perform new works, or perform works by underrepresented composers? Will you focus on educational outreach and travel and perform for music students of varying ages?

Is your repertoire or area of specialty a part of your quintet identity? Will you perform certain styles or genres of music? Perhaps only music composed specifically for brass quintet, or instead only transcriptions? Only new works commissioned by your quintet? Will you include contemporary or popular music in your repertoire?

It is also important to discuss where your group will draw inspiration. This does not have to be from only one ensemble. It might be useful to borrow inspiration from multiple quintets, creating an amalgam of attributes that will lead to your own unique identity.

Ex: The showmanship and flair of Canadian Brass, with the commissioning practices of the American Brass Quintet, along with the touring practices of Seraph Brass.

Role Designation:

Write down the designated role(s) each member will hold. Feel free to choose the roles which are most pertinent to your ensemble, or you may also start with the example list provided above.

Role #1: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

Role #2: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

Role #3: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

Role #4: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

Role #5: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

Role #6: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

Role #7: _____ Member: _____

Description of Duties: _____

To improve this skill, I have chosen a simple flow study inspired by Vincent Chicowitz. Play this in as many keys as you would like, preferably starting in a comfortable key and gradually moving to less familiar keys.

Flow Study #1

Vincent Chicowitz

The musical score for Flow Study #1 consists of two systems, each with two measures. The first system begins in C major (one sharp) and the second system begins in C minor (three flats). Each measure contains a melodic line in the top staff and a bass line in the bottom staff, with a middle staff providing a harmonic accompaniment. The exercise is designed to be played in various keys to improve flow and technique.

In addition to articulations such as those included above, don't overlook slurring as well. While this might be trivial for valved instruments, this is crucial for the trombonist(s) in the ensemble. They will need adequate time to learn how to match their legato style with the rest of the ensemble's valved slurring. Here is another Clarke-inspired exercise to aid your development.

Slur - Matching

Herbert Clarke

The musical score is titled "Slur - Matching" by Herbert Clarke. It is written for a quintet in 3/4 time. The score consists of two systems of music, each with three staves (treble, middle, and bass clefs). The first system contains four measures of music, and the second system contains four measures starting with a measure rest (marked '5'). Each measure is slurred across all three staves, and the notes are designed to be played with a consistent legato style across the ensemble.

Technique:

It is no secret that performing brass quintet literature requires a high level of technical skill on each instrument. However, little is discussed in terms of refining and applying these skills in a group setting. Below I have included simple exercises that if rehearsed consistently, will allow for your quintet to master difficult techniques and add an additional level of command and artistry to your performances.

This concept is similar to one presented by Wiff Rudd in his book *Collaborative Practice Concepts*. The quintet should select a simple melody and take turns performing it in different keys. Not only is this an excellent tool for ear training and key fluency, but it is also an opportunity to refine the matching of style and phrasing. Here is an example to get you started.

Rudd: Ear Training

Musical score for measures 1-12. The key signature is B-flat major (Bb). The time signature is 3/4. The score is written for three staves: Tpt I (top), Tbn (middle), and Tbn (bottom). The melody is played by Tpt I in measures 1-12. The Tbn part in the bottom staff plays a bass line starting with a whole note F in measure 10.

Musical score for measures 13-24. The key signature is A-flat major (Ab). The time signature is 3/4. The score is written for three staves: Tpt II (top), Tba (middle), and Tba (bottom). The melody is played by Tpt II in measures 13-24. The Tba part in the bottom staff plays a bass line starting with a whole note Eb in measure 13 and a whole note Db in measure 20.

Musical score for measures 25-36. The key signature is F# major (F#). The time signature is 3/4. The score is written for three staves: Tpt I (top), Tbn (middle), and Tbn (bottom). The melody is played by Tpt I in measures 25-36. The Tbn part in the bottom staff plays a bass line starting with a whole note B in measure 25.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNICATION

“The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood.” – Tony Robbins

Strong communication skills are crucial in order to ensure the members of the quintet are all on the same page, working towards a common musical goal. Effective communication leads to a more cohesive ensemble sound, tighter ensemble playing, and a more enjoyable performance experience for both the performers and the audience. Below are some thoughts and recommendations on building successful communication habits.

Giving/Accepting Feedback:

A large component of effective communication, especially in a musical environment, is learning how to give and accept feedback in a way which is both respectful and effective. Embracing these concepts will go a long way to ensuring the quintet experiences a rewarding collaborative process.

- Set Your Ego Aside: Remember, the point of feedback is to increase the level of the group, not to personally attack.
- Be Specific: When giving feedback, be specific about what you are hearing and what you would like to see improved. Vague or unclear comments only lead to confusion and negativity.
- Focus on the Music: Focus on the music and the performance rather than the individual members. Offer constructive criticism and avoid personal attacks.
- Listen with an Open Mind: When receiving feedback, listen with an open mind and be willing to consider other perspectives. Avoid being defensive and instead, see feedback as an opportunity for growth.
- Be Gracious: Be gracious when giving and receiving feedback. Express appreciation for the effort put into the performance and acknowledge the progress made.
- Praise the Positive: Instead of focusing on the negative, find ways to also praise the positive aspects of the quintet – both musical and nonmusical.

Team Building Exercises:

Team building exercises are vital for a successful brass quintet and will help improve communication, increase trust, enhance collaboration, boost morale, and overall improve your performance. While some quintets are formed by the members themselves and will prioritize friendships and shared interests, other quintets might be assigned or pre-formed (such as for a university or summer music festival). The level of familiarity between current members will determine the types and frequency of activities needed to build a strong rapport. I have included some ideas for exercises and activities which will help to develop collaboration, musical communication, and teamwork.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jett M. Walker, DMA, currently holds the position of Assistant Professor of Trombone at Western Illinois University. In addition to his work with the WIU Trombone Studio, he also teaches courses in conducting and performs with the La Moine Brass Quintet, the resident faculty brass quintet at Western Illinois University. His scholarly research is focused on both establishing and improving best practices for student brass quintets and adapting various applied-lesson pedagogies to the trombone ensemble setting.

Outside of his academic life, Dr. Walker enjoys a busy freelancing schedule. His performance credits include performances with the Cincinnati Symphony, Cincinnati Pops, Quad City Symphony, Battle Creek Symphony, Richmond Symphony, and Kentucky Symphony, and he has also performed with the Illinois Symphony, Cincinnati Opera, Dayton Philharmonic, Quincy Symphony, Queen City Opera, Carmel Symphony, Lexington Philharmonic, and Brazos Valley Symphony. A versatile musician and enthusiast of jazz and commercial music, he has also performed with the Cincy Brass, Blue Wisp Big Band, Joe Rogers Big Band, Seven Dutchmen Orchestra, Olmos Basin Brass Quintet, and numerous musical pit orchestras. His freelance work has allowed him to share the stage with such illustrious performers as Cynthia Erivo, Leslie Odom Jr., and most recently, The Who.

Prior to attending graduate school, Walker also served as a middle school band director for five years in central Texas. Bands under his direction were consistent recipients of the UIL Sweepstakes award among many others. He is also a proud contributing writer for the growing online journal *The Collective: Shifting the Paradigm for Critical Musicians*, and serves as a writer and album reviewer for the *International Trombone Association Journal*.

Jett received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Trombone Performance from the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Texas State University in Music Education and Trombone Performance, respectively. Jett is also an S.E. Shires Performing Artist and performs exclusively on Shires trombones.