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MARTIN SAUNDERS, COLUMN EDITOR

## THE TRUMPET MOUTHPIECE: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME?

BY MARTIN SAUNDERS

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## THE TRUMPET MOUTHPIECE: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME?

BY MARTIN SAUNDERS

For many young trumpeters, the trumpet mouthpiece being used is the one that came with the instrument when it was purchased. As long as the player is achieving a good tone and has no problems with endurance or facility, this choice of mouthpiece is probably just as good as any and a change is not necessary. However, there are times when a change is necessary and when it comes to trumpet mouthpieces, *one size does not fit all!*

There are many variables that affect what the mouthpiece will do for the player, and the marriage of the mouthpiece to the trumpet can be a delicate balancing act at best. Each part of the mouthpiece has a different function that will allow the player to achieve the best results from the instrument. Rim size, cup size, the bore, and the backbore of a mouthpiece can all affect the playing characteristics of the trumpet in different ways. For those who do not know what each component does, here is a brief description: The **rim** of the mouthpiece varies greatly in size, and so does the contour of the rim. What we “feel” when we play is the inner diameter of the rim. This ranges from narrow to wider rims, and from very steep, sharp contours to more rounded edges. The **cup** of the mouthpiece has many different configurations from deep to shallow, and from more of a bowl shape to what’s considered a more “V” shape. Cup design can greatly affect the overall tone of the trumpet. The **bore**, or throat, controls the amount of air pressure and the air resistance. Typically, this factor does not need to be tampered with—the standard #27 bore is common and works well for most players. The **backbores** in trumpet mouthpieces have various designs, shapes, and sizes. In general, the “tighter” backbore will produce a brighter sound but with greater resistance, and a more “open” backbore will produce a larger volume of sound but will require more breath since there is less resistance.

So, how do you choose which mouthpiece is right for you with so many possibilities and combinations? Some say that if you play two different mouthpiece models and good results are achieved with both, the larger size might be best if you want to produce more sound. Others, especially many modern performers, say the exact opposite, stating that there is greater efficiency and less strain using the smaller mouthpiece. In my opinion, the player must consider a few key things when choosing a trumpet mouthpiece: What kind of tone are you

trying to achieve? What demands do you have when playing the trumpet? What styles and articulations will you be playing? What feels comfortable to you?

All of these questions address factors that are integral to your success. If you’re playing in a concert band or as a soloist, a nice round tone is probably desired and precise articulations are a must. Chances are that you’ll want to choose a more “stock” mouthpiece (one that is a standard model by a standard mouthpiece maker) that allows for that type of tone, allows you to play throughout the registers easily (upper, middle, and lower registers), and will be comfortable over the long haul of playing a concert or recital. However, if you’re playing in a jazz ensemble or marching band, you’re probably after a brighter tone and greater efficiency. A recommendation is to choose a mouthpiece that perhaps has a shallower cup and tighter backbore, and/or perhaps (but not always) a smoother inner diameter of the rim for greater comfort. If orchestral playing is your goal, you may need something that will allow for a darker tone and more volume. In this case, you might try a mouthpiece with a larger cup and backbore size. Many players believe that you need a larger rim size as well, but in my opinion the rim width has more to do with lip contour and shape that necessarily achieving a “bigger” sound.

Since trumpet mouthpieces vary greatly, the best thing you can do is go to a music store and try some. Try several models and brands and see what you like and dislike, and find one that seems to fit your concept of sound and the way you approach playing the trumpet. Remember that sound concept (the sound in your mind) is most greatly responsible for what you sound like and that you’re trying to find equipment that complements that concept; don’t rely totally on your choice of trumpet mouthpiece to make you sound a certain way. Finally, getting a local professional trumpeter’s qualified opinion is a great idea. Since we play from the mouthpiece end of the trumpet, we cannot always accurately assess what’s coming out of the bell!

*About the author:* Martin Saunders is associate professor of trumpet and jazz studies at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. Prior to teaching at Marshall, Martin spent seven years in the Air Force Band program at Offutt AFB in Omaha, Nebraska.

