

IEI 2007 Panel Discussion: Buying a Euphonium

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This was originally a panel discussion during the International Euphonium Institute in Atlanta, 2007. It was recorded at the time, and recently was transcribed by Rick Floyd (many thanks to Rick!). You can also listen to the [audio file of this discussion here](#).

Brian Bowman:

They should get one they like. (*audience laughs*). [Seriously] There are several factors in selecting an instrument. First of all you have to decide what budget you're going to allow. Second of all you have to realize how you're going to use that instrument – what are you going to do – how serious are you. No use buying a very expensive instrument if you're really not going to use it that much. Then looking at all the varieties that are available – try them... try them out. Years ago there was one compensating euphonium available in the world. That was it. There was no choice. If you wanted a compensating euphonium, that was the only one you could find. Now I think there are probably around twelve or fourteen different compensating euphoniums or professional euphoniums available.

The next question is: do you really need a compensating euphonium? Or, could you get by with a non-compensating 4-valve euphonium? Cause how often are you really going to be using that euphonium? What type of literature are you going to be playing? So it's important to look at the usage, the budget, and your own preference. You can usually look at it sort of like deciding between cars... do you want a BMW, do you want a Lincoln, do you want a Cadillac, or would you be happy with a Ford? (*audience laughs*) – or a Chevy. They all will get you to where you want to go. Cause there's a lot of fine instruments available now.

But I think that's an important factor that you look at what is your desired result. I usually choose an instrument on the basis of the sound. That's usually my criteria. Find the instrument that gives me the sound, and the easiest way the sound I want can be produced.

Other issues you look at 'how hard is it to play in tune'? How hard is it to play comfortably? A lot of people choose an instrument that they really are not ready for, and they struggle [and think] oh, I'll grow into it. It would be better to maybe

learn to play on a smaller instrument and become a good player and *then* go to a more professional instrument when you're a little better off – rather than starting with something too big.

David Childs:

I think we're quite lucky in this day and age that the majority of professional model euphoniums are all quite good. They're all good. It's the player behind it that really makes them tick. I, like Dr. Bowman, think sound is one of most... well it is the most important aspect – but you must also think about things like the technology on the instrument. When I say that I mean things like the pistons, and that kind of thing. You don't want to be in a situation where you're on stage and your valve is sticking, or your trigger's not working, or bits are falling off.

So you've got to look for the craftsmanship, but the sound is the most important. With my students I always tell them to – if they can when they go into the store to try the instrument – is to take someone with them... someone that knows what they're doing because a lot of the time you'll be playing an instrument and it will feel so easy. It's not necessarily the instrument that feels the easiest to play that sounds best. There's often a compromise there. But we are lucky whether we're looking at Willsons, Sterlings, Bessons, what ever. The top range euphoniums – you usually can't go far wrong with them. So we're pretty lucky.

Eugene Dowling:

If you're buying for a school, sometimes... well right now in a music store, there's a beautiful old Imperial sitting there that has been modified with a bass-trombone mpc shank that plays actually better than the used Sovereign next to it. So you never know what's out there. Also it strikes me if it's going to sit in the back of the band room. Gosh, I know I've seen some tubas sitting in the back of the band room... think durability.

Adam Frey:

I think Marcus also hit a little bit on that... about the quality of craftsmanship. How imperative it is for research and design to have quality of craftsmanship. In the long run that especially since everyone here has been playing instruments for a long period of time that... make sure it's durable, that it's going to last, and that it's well made. I certainly think that's important.

David Werden:

I also agree on the comment that sound is very important. When you're judging sound – if you're a serious player – someone who is going to be going on to do some things with their horn... major in college... or at least a serious minor, sound becomes extremely important. I would not necessarily settle for a tryout in a practice room, but try to get into a room at least this size (small recital hall?). That's the bad news because it's kind of a hard thing to do when you're trying horns. I have found generally when trying a horn or mouthpieces that in a small room, a horn with a smaller sound with a small mouthpiece will sound better. If I

switch to a larger mouthpiece... ah gee, it sounds fuzzy and airy in a practice room. Get out into a hall and you start to see that the sound goes all around the room now better. Things like that can make a difference. So try to get into a reasonably sized room and then I'd have someone else go with you to listen from a distance away. Not just next to the bell – which can be very deceiving from what the horn really sounds like.

The fit of the instrument: If the person is mature enough to have achieved their rough body size – height anyway (size can change some ways later). The horn I just got was changed quite a bit from the older Sterling's in the way the lead-pipe comes across. It's now much more comfortable for me to hold it, but I have a very long torso for my height – my legs aren't very long. So I don't have to pad it nearly as much under the bottom bow for it to be at a comfortable playing height. Where if you were very short, that could be a problem. So again, how does the horn fit you... when you sit, when you stand, is it fairly comfortable to hold? We kind of alluded to that earlier.

And the other thing is if it's somebody that just wants to maybe have a music minor in college and go off and kind of keep it as a hobby and you're doing something else, then a cheaper horn might just be very fine. I would not be at all offended if I had... ah, I've seen a couple out here today that have the Yamaha 321's for example – four valve non-compensating Yamaha. It's a nice horn. Sounds pretty, plays nicely. I like a compensating horn because I like the bigger sound. But, you don't necessarily – depending on what you're doing – need to have a compensating horn. You can save a lot of money possibly.

The last piece of advice is – which has already been alluded to – don't buy something from eBay if you haven't heard of the brand (*Brian says, "Made in India", panel laughs*). I have heard from SO many sources that it is irrefutable evidence in my mind at this point that some of these brands are just not repairable. You take it into a repair shop and they may refuse to work on it. Or if they are foolish enough to try to work on it, they may take a soldering torch to it or something and find the thing falling apart in their hands or melting as opposed to just unsoldering a joint like they tried to do. So make sure it's a reputable brand. I'm sure you're wise enough at this point to look for that, but just thought I'd mention it because, "Wow! 250 bucks for an oval euphonium... brand new oval silver euphonium with case... only 250 bucks! How can you go wrong?" Well, you can.

Adam Frey:

I also want to make everyone aware that many of the larger retailers will provide an instrument on loan for a two week trial period that you can take and play on it. The only thing in the end that you're out is – if you decide to return it – is the shipping cost involved. When you're talking about a \$4000 to \$5000 instrument, \$125 shipping cost – you know – round trip if you don't like it. It's not a tremendous expenditure for making sure that it's an instrument that you like.

Obviously one of the great things about IEI is that there are a lot of people with a lot of different instruments and different mouthpieces and stuff like that so there's an opportunity to make a friend and ask, "what do you think about it?" and things like that. ~ *end of discussion on 'choosing an instrument' ~*