

Horn Position

On the Leg vs Off the Leg

Conventional wisdom requires beginning horn players to put the bell of the horn on their right leg when playing. Young players continue to play with the horn on the leg as they grow and develop from roughly ages 11-18. Most players change shape and size dramatically during those formative years, however, they usually do not change the way they hold the horn. This can cause the horn to be held incorrectly, resulting in issues with tone, endurance, range, etc. No other instrument in the band or orchestra has this same issue. Why then, do horn players continue to rest the horn on the leg? Is the horn too heavy? Is the player not strong enough to hold the horn off the leg?

The average double horn weighs approximately 5.5 lbs and the average single horn weighs approximately 3.5 lbs. Consider that the 5.5 lbs is distributed between both arms and most of the weight is resting on the right hand. That is not very much weight to hold for even an eleven year old student. The average weight of a trombone is slightly more than a horn. Yet trombone players hold their instrument with a single hand!

To eliminate issues that can develop from the horn being held on the leg, the answer is to hold the horn off the leg from the beginning.

When you hold the horn, the leadpipe should be at a 30-45 degree angle from your face. Put the horn on your leg. Where is the mouthpiece striking your face? Is it your chin? Or perhaps your nose? Do you have to adjust your body to fit the horn? If so, you are either too short or too tall for the horn. You should hold the horn off the leg to make sure you keep the optimal angle.

Even if the player is the perfect size to hold the horn on the leg, playing that way is a sound issue. No matter how diligent the player is about pointing the bell outward from the body, the horn will still sound distant and not project to the listener. Experiment playing a passage of music on the leg, off the leg, and finally standing. Notice how the sound becomes clearer and fuller as the three position are struck. What is the horn most known for? Its sound! Play off the leg for the most optimal sound and projection.

Transitioning from one the leg to off the leg can be a bit challenging, but not overwhelming. The first challenge is the left hand. If the horn player has small hands, it may be difficult to keep the horn from sliding. A very useful tool to help hold the horn with the left hand is a duckfoot or hand strap. The duckfoot can be soldered on the horn by a repair technician. The Alexander hand strap is also soldered on the horn. However, a more economical hand strap costs around \$25 and is wrapped around the horn and attached with Velcro. The second challenge is fatigue. At first it will be tiring to hold the horn for prolonged periods of time. However, this quickly passes as the player's body gets use to the shift in load.

In the end, the benefits outweigh the challenges. Hold the horn off the leg!