

Allen Vizzutti

Introduction *to* Mouthpieces



TRUMPET

About the Lesson

Allen shares his wisdom regarding the world of mouthpieces. How do we choose one? What criteria should we prioritize? He relates his own personal journey as well as the two key considerations he recommends everyone think about.

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Overview

We often look for the holy grail when it comes to mouthpieces. There isn't one. Everyone is different; what might work well for one person will not always work for another player. To select the best mouthpiece for ourselves, we end up making compromises. There just isn't a perfect one out there, but there is one that will allow us to play our best sound with ease.



Young students often start on a middle-size mouthpiece for both diameter and cup until they have developed the ability to play with consistency. From this point, it is worth testing different mouthpieces to see which is the best fit for them.

The criteria for finding a good mouthpiece are the sound and how it feels. When trying out mouthpieces, ask yourself:

- *Is the timbre and color good?*
- *How does it feel?*
- *Is the sound appropriate for the music I want to play?*
- *Is it helping me?*

You should play the smallest mouthpiece that you can play well. This does not mean playing with a tiny mouthpiece because it is small; choose the smallest mouthpiece that will enable you to play better.

Selecting and finding the best-fit mouthpiece is a long-term journey and it changes over time. Allen Vizzutti began his mouthpiece journey as he joined the Woody Herman Thundering Big Band after leaving school, experimenting with mouthpieces for this different setting.

As he traveled around, he tried different mouthpiece manufacturers, as each has its own tools and, therefore, varies from the other. They come up with different backbores, shapes for throats, and cup shapes. He asked each manufacturer to copy the mouthpiece he was playing; each would come out slightly different. If one came out better, he would switch right there.

Throughout his career, he has switched between many different brands in his search for a mouthpiece that works best for him. He started with a Schilke, then a Giardinelli, Bob Reeves, and Yamaha, and is currently using a Peter Pickett mouthpiece.

The two characteristics to consider when choosing or changing a mouthpiece are the ease of execution of playing and the sound character that you are getting on your trumpet.

There are compromises when figuring out these requirements. Vizzutti has chosen to take the middle route, where if he leans on his trumpet, it will be more commercial sounding. This approach is not necessarily the ideal sound for the setting, but it is part of the compromise of making it easier to play contemporary concerti.

He uses three mouthpieces regularly: two for trumpet and the third for flugelhorn. The one he uses 99% of the time is the shallowest; it isn't super shallow but is just the most comfortable one for him to play. It does have a brighter sound, and that is where the compromise happened for him. The second mouthpiece for the trumpet is a duplicate of the first, with a few shavings taken off the cup. There is a significant color difference between the two, and he uses the larger one for the C trumpet, E-flat trumpet, and piccolo. He uses it on the piccolo trumpet because with the smaller mouthpiece, for him, it would close off as he went higher and was less consistent with the notes speaking comfortably.

Quick Tip: *If you have trouble getting a full sound on a piccolo trumpet, get a mouthpiece you are comfortable with in the rim and the cup and get it with a larger backbore.*

Now, how do you find this mouthpiece?

Try every mouthpiece you can get your hands on. Your friends, teachers, and colleagues are all great resources for trying whatever they use or have lying around. You don't want to do this before a concert or a long practice session because it might confuse your face. It is also essential to use proper sanitation when trying out mouthpieces that others are playing on.

When you discover a mouthpiece or an arena of mouthpiece size that seems to work for you, including diameter and cup area, that's your launching point for buying mouthpieces.

If you are playing a mouthpiece that you like the sound on but can't play very well, your range is compromised, and you struggle with endurance, it won't improve. This is often the case with big mouthpieces, but weeks of trying will not make it easier. If it feels good from the beginning, there is a possibility there.

Vocabulary

Cup

The cup of the mouthpiece can come in many different shapes, depths, and diameters. The depth of the cup can affect your range, endurance, and efficiency when playing. A big cup size can make it more challenging to reach the higher register. One manufacturer's "C" cup might mean a different shape than another manufacturer's "C" cup.

Backbore

The backbore is the bottom part of the mouthpiece and refers to the diameter of the back, which can affect the resistance. A larger backbore will offer less resistance and can take more energy before closing up, giving a deeper harmonic structure in the sound.

Rim

The rim is the part of the mouthpiece that touches your lips. It comes in different diameters and shapes. Some prefer a sharper rim, while others want a wider, curved, flatter surface area. Your preference for rim size can be affected by the size of your lips. Some players also choose a gold plate or acrylic rim if they are allergic to a silver mouthpiece or have issues with it slipping on their face.

Throat

The throat is the hole in the bottom of the cup into the backbore. The shape of the throat affects the intonation and resistance. Having resistance can help things feel more stable to play instead of leaving it wide open, which will make it feel more slippery.

