

The Brass Quintet... it's not just for contest anymore!

By William S. Richardson, Northwest Missouri State University

Many students involved in great music programs, middle school through university, benefit greatly through an aggressive focus on chamber music. Chamber music typically features one person per part, offering a more "soloistic" type of playing in a smaller ensemble setting than the school band or orchestra. In addition, this music offers more opportunities for self-expression and, most important, is very fun to play.

For brass instruments, our primary chamber ensemble is the brass quintet (two trumpets, horn, trombone, and tuba). While like-instrument groups (trumpet trios, quartets, etc.) are fun, I feel that the brass quintet is a diverse, dynamic, and potentially more engaging performance medium for all brass players. There are always occasions to perform with a brass quintet, so resist the habit of waiting until February to "throw something together" for solo and ensemble contest. Talk to your band director about prospective performances at local churches, social functions, and other events.

As brass players, one of our most important jobs is to listen to outstanding live performances and recordings. Professional quintets like the Canadian Brass, Empire Brass, Army Brass Quintet, Dallas Brass, St. Louis Brass Quintet, Boston Brass, American Brass Quintet, Rhythm & Brass, and many others have helped to promote brass instruments and brass music over the past 30 years. Try to purchase recordings by these ensembles and see them live whenever possible.

It is easy to begin rehearsals with some long-tone scales, either unison or in thirds. While playing these "warm-up" exercises (between 5 – 10 minutes), make sure to focus on breathing together, playing with a good sound and in-tune, and developing a common style of articulation with the other four quintet members. It is also helpful to do some lip slurs and faster articulated scales before moving on to practicing music.

A very brief list of high school level quintet compositions and arrangements is included below. Please feel free to purchase some of these pieces, form your own brass quintet, practice (and perform) year-round, and enjoy!

Selected List of Brass Quintet Music

The Canadian Brass Book of Easy Quintets by Walter H. Barnes
Publisher: Hal Leonard Corporation

Contrapunctus I by Johann Sebastian Bach/arr. by Robert King
Publisher: Robert King Music Company

Es ist ein Ros' Entsprungen by Johannes Brahms/arr. by Lewis Niven
Publisher: Robert King Music Company

Scherzo by John Cheetham
Publisher: Western International Music

Symphony for Brass, Op. 5 by Victor Ewald/arr. by Robert King
Publisher: Robert King Music Company
(quite a bit more difficult than the other quintets listed here)

Three Scott Joplin Rags arr. by Arthur Frackenpohl
Publisher: Edward B. Marks Music Corporation

Rondeau by Jean Joseph Mouret/arr. by Robert King
Publisher: Robert King Music Company

Sonata from Die Bankelsangerlieder by Anonymous*/arr. by Robert King
Publisher: Robert King Music Company
(recently attributed to composer Daniel Speer)



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