

Hand Stopping/Muting on the Horn

Hand Stopping and “Brassy” Effects

Among hornists, conductors and composers, there is often some confusion between the terms *bouché* and *cuivré*. Adding to the confusion, sometimes a part will say *bouché cuivré*.

Bouché means stopped; *cuivré* means brassy.

The most common problem is when the part only says *cuivré* (without the *bouché*). That means the passage should be played with a brassy sound quality, but not necessarily stopped. Many hornists and conductors misunderstand this.

Sometimes the spots marked *bouché* will have a soft dynamic marking. Rarely will a part marked *cuivré* have a soft dynamic. Loud stopped passages aren't difficult to be played “brassy.”

To obtain the right brassiness, I suggest using extra air pressure and a slightly tighter embouchure than would otherwise be appropriate for the passage.

It's much easier to get a brassy *cuivré* tone quality on a true French-style instrument than on the German-style horns used by most hornists (even recently by the French!). German-style horns have a wider bore and a larger bell throat than French-style instruments, and have rotary valves rather than piston valves.

Stopping has special challenges for people with small hands who are playing the extra-large-throated horns (Conn 8D, Holton 179, Yamaha 668) that are common among North American high-school students. Notes below the treble clef's bottom line (written, horn in F) get progressively more difficult to stop. The use of a specially-shaped metal mute (“transposing mute,” “stopping mute,” “gestopft' mute,” or “buzz mute”) is highly recommended. It seals the bell more effectively than the human hand.

Sometimes a composer calls for a “metal mute,” or a “brass mute.” Those terms create confusion and should not be used. Logically, those terms should be used when a non-transposing straight mute made of metal (as opposed to fiber or plastic) is desired. Composers should specify “straight mute-metal,” (or “straight mute-plastic,” “straight mute-fiber,” or whatever other material is desired) and “stopping mute” for a clearer indication to the performer of the composer's wishes.

Hand Stopping Advice

1) **Normal method, which works for people with large hands:** In general, transpose down m2 (half step) on F side of a regular F/Bb double horn. Note - For large-throated horns, have the right hand as far out of the bell as possible while still maintaining a seal.

Note – people with medium-sized or small hands will often sound somewhat more than a half step sharp when stopping the F horn. They must learn how to

- a) “lip” the stopped notes down, (usually some combination of reduced lip tension, lowered tongue arch, dropped chin/jaw/ corners, etc.),
- b) select alternate (flatter) fingerings, or
- c) pull out the main tuning slide (remembering push it back in before the next open marking!).

2) **Alternate method, for people with smaller hands:** Try inserting the right hand as far as possible into the horn, transposing down major second (M2, whole step) on Bb side of a regular F/Bb double horn.

Additional Notes On Hand Stopping/Muting The Horn

Don't confuse *sons bouché* (Fr: literally, “stoppered/corked sound”) with *sans bouché* (Fr: “without stopping”). The marking usually cancels an *avec* marking.

The Italian *muta* has nothing to do with using a mute. It is the instruction to change to a different transposition, i.e., *muta in D* (“change to horn in D”).

Hand stopping is frequently denoted by the symbol ‘+’ with or without additional instruction, and it is cancelled by the symbol ‘o’. The symbol ‘ø’ means half stopped.

Interesting Idiomatic Markings for Horn Parts

| English | French | Italian | German |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| open | ouvert, sons naturels, sons ordinaires | aperto, naturale | offen, gewöhnlich, natürlich |
| stopped | bouché | chiuso, tuffato con sord. la mano | gestopft |
| not stopped | | | nicht gestopft |
| half stopped | sons d'écho | eco | Echoton |
| mute | sourdine | sordino | Dämpfer |
| muted | avec sourdine | con sordino | gedämpft, mit Dämpfer, Dämpfer auf |
| not muted | sans sourdine, | senza sordino, naturale | ohne Dämpfer |
| remove mute | ôtez la sourdine | | Dämpfer ab, Dämpfer fort, Dämpfer weg |
| half muted | demi-sourdine | semisordino | halbgedämpft |
| brassy | cuivré | metallico | schmetternd, blechern |
| with | avec | con | mit |
| without | sans | senza | ohne |
| sound | sons | suono | ton |
| bell up | Pavillon en l'air | Campana in aria | Schalltrichter auf, Schalltrichter in die Höhe |
| change to | | muta | wechseln |
| distant, from a distance | lointain | lontano | entfernt |
| covered | | coperto | gedeckt |

Good Luck!!