

Hey Kids, It's a French Horn



The French Horn is a member of the brass family. It has a round, velvety tone that can be heard over other instruments without overpowering them. These qualities make it a perfect addition to the woodwind quintet, where it is sometimes seen.

History

The very first horns were made from animal horns. By cutting off the tip of the horn and buzzing their lips, players could sound notes to give directions to hunters. By the Renaissance Era horns were being made of metal tubing wound in a circle. These horns were small instruments, sometimes with just one loop and no valves. Hunting calls - a couple of notes played to a rhythm - were played by hunters while on horseback.

How It's Made

The french horn is made of many pieces of brass tubing, which are soldered together. Rotary valves (the lever thingies) and valve tubing are placed in the middle of the outer circle of tubing. If you were to unwind a french horn, the brass tubing could be up to twelve feet long!

How It's Played

To make a sound on the french horn the player buzzes his/her lips into a cone-shaped mouthpiece. If you were to watch a french hornist play, you would see that they keep the right hand in the bell all the time. This helps the instrument with tuning and tone production, giving it a haunting and distant sound. The french horn player can also place the hand tightly inside the bell for a special effect called "stopped horn". This effect gives the french horn a muffled and tinny, yet highly penetrating tone. At times composers will ask the french horn section for "bells up". This effect, with bells raised high in the air, creates a bright and brilliant tone quality.

Fun Fact

French horns are made of brass, a metal made of copper and zinc. Both of these metals are found in vitamins. This means that during your life you may eat an entire french horn - and it would be good for you!

