

FANFARE FOR MS POTVIN

This score is dedicated to Ms. Potvin, who very generously spends her time helping her students succeed in their musical endeavours.

A Little Bit of History and Theory

When roman horns were first used, they were valve-less hunting horns with a very brassy and harsh in sound. When music progressed into the classical period, the horn was increasing in popularity as more composers saw the soft lyrical side of the horn. It wasn't until the romantic times when valved horns came into existence as the French horns we know of today.



Figure 1 Examples of possible notes played with open fingering on a French horn

Due to their physical properties, all brass instruments are capable of achieving an infinite number of notes in their natural position (of which only a few are possible with human capabilities). Natural position usually means open fingerings for valved instruments and 1st position for slide instruments. Most brass players can hit a very low note (the lowest C in Figure 1) and the next note up with the same natural position would be the same letter note an octave above. If we were to continue, the notes would appear a perfect fifth, a perfect fourth, a major third, a minor third, a perfect fourth, a major second and so forth above the previous note. Notice that the intervals generally get smaller as the notes approach the upper registers. This makes it possible to get “pseudo notes” in between the natural notes, which don't tune perfectly such as the B \flat . A good brass player however, can adjust the tuning of those notes with a careful ear and their embouchure.

Since most notes are separated by major intervals (or intervals of the arpeggio of a major scale) it is often difficult to achieve the effect of a minor key when writing for valve-less natural horns. Pseudo notes usually come in handy here. Using E, G and B \flat (B \flat is the pseudo note) a diminished chord can be made. Another non-major chord can be made using G, B \flat and D.

This piece has been written for the valve-less horn but can be played on standard concert band F horns with open fingering.