

"An Intro to the McAfee Method Techniques"

Greetings to my horn playing friends in Nederland! My name is Andrew McAfee and I live in Raleigh, North Carolina, USA. I teach horn at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and played principal horn with the NC Symphony for 15 years (as well as other orchestras and ensembles). You can see my biography on my website www.hornlessons.org under the "About" tab. I am happy to have been asked to share what I have found regarding some horn playing techniques. I have been assembling them for my students into a horn book called the *McAfee Method* for over 15 years and will introduce a few to you here in this article. I hope that they will be a nice affirmation of, or complement to your existing technique.



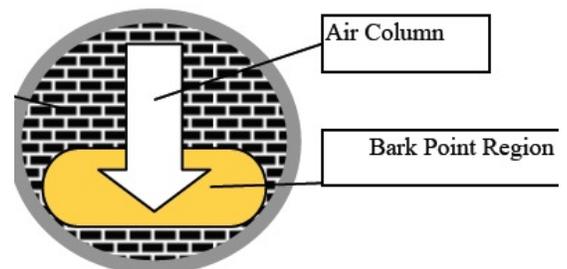
I think pretty much any embouchure will work in the middle range to some extent. Years ago, in my studies with Dale Clevenger, the principal horn of the Chicago Symphony, he introduced me to some concepts like "thick air" that took me years to integrate into my playing. There were also techniques to accomplish the smoothest slurs, softest and loudest playing, good endurance, a full tone, and others that prepared me for the extremes in music.

Now as a teacher myself, I want each of my students to be a better player than I am, be prepared for the most advanced challenges, and armed with tools that hold up under any circumstance and on any repertoire. Coming from the end point of the most advanced techniques I needed, under the most arduous playing conditions that I experienced on the job as principal horn of the North Carolina Symphony (hot summer outdoor concerts, solos, Mahler 5, Schumann *Concertstuck*, touring, 8am educational concerts, etc.), I have put together a set of foundational techniques that are designed to give stability to any playing situation. From day one of teaching a new student, I drill each technique individually, then build them together so they act as a dependable tool.



Through my personal explorations in trying to master "thick air," I discovered what I believe is a universal concept for all brass instruments. There is an optimal location to place the air column and that is weighted down at the bottom of each note. I explore this in my video "Anatomy of a Note" found on my YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/user/drewhealer1> and I also devote a chapter to it in the *McAfee Method* horn book. A sample is given under the "Free Stuff" tab at www.hornlessons.org.

I found that a solid note is first created by a firm bottom lip, which establishes a firm ledge or groove on which one can rest the air stream. A loose bottom lip will dissolve and sag the note flat, making the upper lip work to hold the air up causing a more pinched and nasal sound, less endurance, and more difficulty in slurring to other notes. Once the bottom lip is firm, one can then explore resting the air stream on the bottom of the note and finding the "bark point" (what I call the optimal place where the sound suddenly gets louder and brighter, where one can play the softest and loudest with the same intonation, slur the easiest to other notes, sustain the tone through the slurs, etc.). Like two magnets opposing each other, you'll find a cushion on the bottom of the note when you lower the air stream to this "bark point." Then you can rest the center of the lips because the horn is holding the air up to some extent. The notes will then float; you'll hear the most resonant tone, and feel the greatest response from the horn. Slurring becomes smoothly gliding from the bottom of one note directly to the bottom of the next note, not middle to bottom! That will chew the notes or become "twa-twa" playing as Clevenger called it. In order to master this resting the air down and moving to and from the "bark point," I found that there are five techniques that must be in place before one can take playing to the extremes and enjoy some consistency.



- 1) Flex the chin muscle downward
- 2) Place the mouthpiece below the bottom lip
- 3) Use 2/3 upper and 1/3 lower lip in the mouthpiece
- 4) Angle the mouthpiece down
- 5) Keep the tongue down



1) Flexing the chin muscle downward pulls the bottom lip down, which opens the center of the lips for a fuller sound, helps firm the bottom lip for a more solid groove, connects the chin muscles into the jaw bone so they can move as one (for slurs and Jaw Trills), and enables one to rest the air down on the groove for deeper connection with the instrument.

2) Placing the mouthpiece below the bottom lip pink line allows you to pull the air downwards and open the center of the lips more. There is a ridge of muscle along the bottom of the bottom lip that can act as a ledge under which the bottom rim of the mouthpiece can be placed so it won't slip upwards when opening the lips or pulling the bottom lip down with the chin. If the bottom of the mouthpiece is placed in the pink, one will tend to pinch and hold the air up. The upper range becomes weaker and the lower range sags in pitch because the bottom lip is not placing the air in the "bark point."



3) Using 2/3 upper and 1/3 lower lip enables the warmest sound for any brass instrument. In general, you want more upper lip than lower lip inside the rim or the sound will be too pinched, hard or forced.



4) Angling the mouthpiece down places less pressure on the upper lip so it is freer to buzz. The bottom lip is held firmer and the mouthpiece is pressed in more on it to stop it from buzzing. The higher you play the more equal pressure is needed but still the upper lip needs to be slightly more free and open than the bottom lip. The lower you go, the more you must angle down the horn and mouthpiece. Mouthpiece angle is also related to the teeth and jaw opening and closing. As the jaw drops, the mouthpiece stays pressed on the lower teeth and needs to change angle with it. There is one jaw height or position for every note. Lower notes have a lower jaw position. With your chin muscle firm, moving the jaw also moves the bottom lip, which is critical in holding the air constantly on the bottom of each note through the slurs, trills, and any movement up and down.

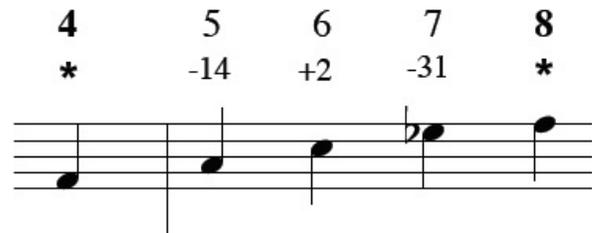
5) The purpose of keeping the tongue down is that you don't need it for anything except articulations. The most resonant sound is achieved when the tongue is resting down, flat on your molars like an egg is in your mouth. If it comes up, the intonation will rise, the air stream will lift off the bottom of the note (more trouble slurring) and the sound will become more nasal. Keeping the air "heavy" (a concept that I created to integrate the Chicago ideal of "thick air" to now having the air weighted down onto the bottom of the note) maintains a more solid connection with the horn and enables smoother, more relaxed and consistent playing. This is especially important in performances. The tongue loves to come up when the player is nervous.

Many players, when first learning these techniques, are not used to trusting their horn, their body, or the bottom of the note with this new weighty cushion of air, or totally relaxing the center of their lips while playing. There is usually a period of transition as the player learns about this new lower place to rest the air and also where to put the slides since the horn is being played differently. The rewards are well worth it. Have no illusions here. Mastery in any field takes years of hard work.

When you start playing at the bottom of each note, it's important to use the right fingerings to match the harmonic series, allowing you to play better in tune. Otherwise, all this good work will be ruined with lips squeezing and manipulating the notes in an effort to make the wrong fingerings play in tune. I have a harmonic series chart in my book and chordal intonation guide to learn chordal fingerings. A quick example is with a C major chord (F concert), the major 3rd "E" needs to be 14 cents flat and that occurs naturally when you play it open "0."



Looking at an F7 chord (Bb concert), if everyone plays all the notes on the thumb valve, all of the notes will ring in tune with each other, matching how the universe vibrates together on that harmonic series. When you are tuning in orchestra to a concert A, yes, play T2 on your E, not 0 or you'll be playing a note that is 14 cents flat.



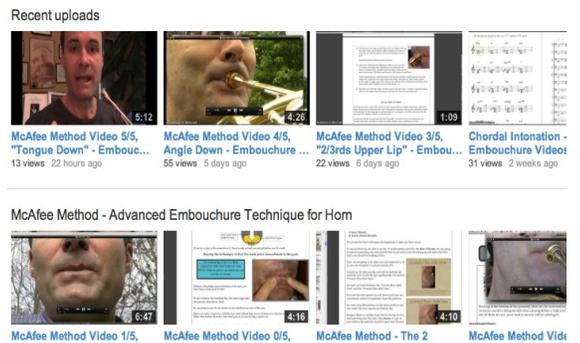
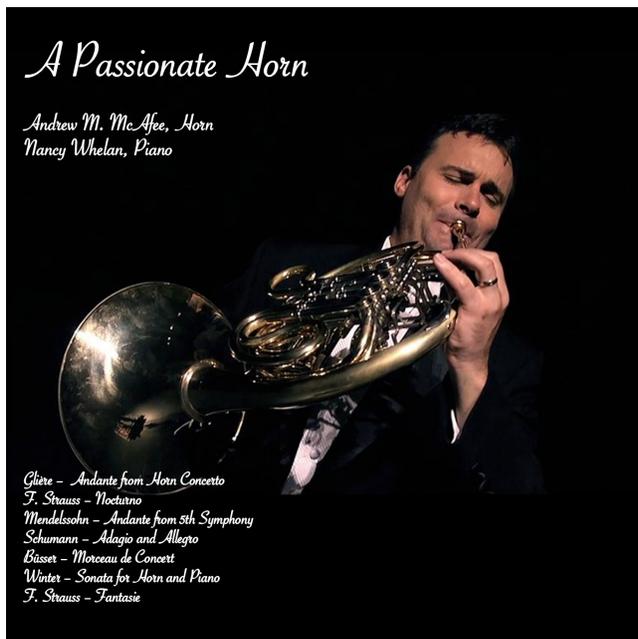
There is much more to cover like Sub-Tones, the "Law of Upward Slurs," etc., so I invite you to explore this further with the *McAfee Method*, hear my CD "A Passionate Horn" and see the technique videos on my website www.hornlessons.org and YouTube channel <http://www.youtube.com/user/drewhealer1>. I am available internationally by Skype for lessons or for just general questions or check ups.

All of these techniques are designed to improve the sound, create more joy and ease in playing the horn, and enable you to better express yourself through music. I hope some part of this introduction has been useful and I encourage you to incorporate these techniques if needed. I do not mean to step on anyone's toes, but just to share what has worked for me after years of searching. Thank you!

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McAfee Method and professional grade technique videos
www.hornlessons.org

Casual videos covering a variety of techniques
<http://www.youtube.com/user/drewhealer1>



The McAfee Method

Advanced Embouchure
Technique for Horn Players



Andrew M. McAfee

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