

Birth of the Jaegerhorn

The Jaegerhorn story starts on my 21st birthday in March 1970, when I was given a recording of Mahler's 3rd Symphony. This was my introduction to orchestral music. Until then my record collection comprised brass bands and popular trumpet players.

I still own that record of Mahler 3. It is performed by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Rafael Kubelik. When I first heard the Posthorn solo I was enthralled. I had never heard anything quite like it; so wistful and soaring over the whole orchestra. I wondered what instrument was being used (my teacher at the time said that Posthorn was what people used to call the Flugelhorn). Players claim to have used instruments ranging from American Flugelhorn through C Trumpet, C Cornet, Eb Trumpet and Rotary Flugelhorn. In fact one player had a reputation for performing on a C Trumpet and taking his bow holding a Flugelhorn!

Moving forward to 2008

John Diamond, M.D. (Medical Doctor) and I had already spent some thousands of hours developing the Jaeger Bb and C trumpets. With this success behind us, we started looking at the various Corni da Caccia which are currently available. During a visit to the Frankfurt Trade Fair, I had the chance to play examples from several different companies.

After playing a handful of notes on each of these, the major deficiencies of their designs became apparent. Because the bell pointed to the side, all the sound was going into my right ear, making me feel very imbalanced. Another problem was the tendency for my right wrist to lock bent backwards. This is the same locking of the right wrist which Dr. Diamond warns about in playing regular rotary trumpets and flugelhorns. To avoid this, he recommends that the player should rotate those instruments anticlockwise (i.e. move the valve levers up) and lower the right elbow, so that the wrist is bent forward. These problems of the Corno da Caccia are entirely due to the way valves had been added to the original valveless instrument. The natural Posthorn had always been pictured with the bell pointing up.

Jerry Bruck, of Posthorn Recordings, owns a 1903 Posthorn pitched in C,

which he believes is very similar to the instrument that Mahler orchestrated. I played it at his home; it has a smaller bore and a tighter wrap than the modern Corno da Caccia, and plays really sweetly apart from the lopsided effect of the sound. I could imagine this instrument being wonderful in small ensembles.



The Jaegerhorn.

Believing that the most important criteria of all instrument design is the effect on the player and also believing that this instrument should be nicer to play, we set about some redesign work.

We purchased a standard Corno da Caccia with the Bell facing sideways and I played it by holding the bell vertically in an effort to assess how it would play if the two major



Ivan Hunter receiving the Mahler record in 1970.

Ivan Hunter



concerns were solved. The results were not good. It played terribly. There was no tuning centre and little relationship between high and low register. We owned it, so now we had to fix it!

The primary problem was in the lead pipe, so I replaced it with an American Flugelhorn lead pipe. This helped, so we started experimenting with mouthpieces. It was obvious that the instrument was going to need a large mouthpiece so we tried several before settling on the Jet Tone 1FL. Now at least the open notes were behaving themselves.

I dismantled the horn to turn the valve cluster 90 degrees. This brought the

valve levers up to horizontal and enabled the bell to be vertical. Now the horn could be played without the player being subjected to unnecessary stress. I visited Martin Seibold to have miniball linkages fitted to the valve cluster. What a difference that made! The valve action became so smooth!

The horn was now starting to play much better; notes slotting better, easier to hold and pretty slick in technical passages, so we examined the bracing. I released the lead pipe and bell sections which were heavily soldered together and suspended them at carefully determined points with small braces and short butt joints.

The adjustable lead pipe was still a problem so I put a brace from the adjustment ligature to the branch out of the first valve. This freed up the playing particularly within the staff. So then we addressed the weak high G. This is an essential note for the Mahler 3. The problem turned out to be around the 1st valve branch so I moved this new brace to the bell. That solved the problem.

We wanted to make the high B more secure. This is the final note of the Mahler solo. The issue revolved around the left hand holding position. Players would hold the bell below the valve cluster and tighten their wrist in the high register. Dr. Diamond noted that this caused a locking of the left wrist. Installing a thumb hook on the inside curve of the bell above the valve cluster

made the player feel more secure and able to release their left wrist; now the horn was balanced between the player's two thumbs. This made a remarkable difference to the ease and security of the higher notes. This difference was very apparent to the listeners. We have now ended up with a reliable 2½ octaves and some useful pedal notes.

This new horn is a variation of a Corno da Caccia (also known as Jagdhorn or Hunting Horn), so we call it Jaegerhorn. The name *Jaeger* is a German translation of my name, *Hunter*. We wanted to call our instruments *Hunter*, but discovered that there was already a *Hunter* trumpet made in China. The German name is appropriate, however, as so much of the initial research was done in Germany.

The Jaegerhorn is a real winner! It is able to take on Mahler 3 as well as Bach (Quoniam from B Minor Mass, Brandenburg 1 and even Brandenburg 2 in the lower octave).

And also, especially with judicious use of Trombone mutes, a wonderful Jazz Horn! The Jaegerhorn has the vibrancy that the Flugelhorn should have and warmth of the trombone's upper register. All of this being accomplished with the security of pitch of the Jaegerhorn being in the same register as the trumpet.



The 1970 National Band of New Zealand, where Ivan Hunter is playing in the Solo Cornet section.

Incidentally, although I have performed a lot of symphonic repertoire, including Mahler 1, 4, and 8, I have not yet played Mahler 3. Maybe that opportunity has been delayed, waiting for our Jaegerhorn!

Ivan Hunter currently works with John Diamond M.D. on the development of trumpets and other therapeutic musical instruments.

A past world champion cornet player and member of the National Brass Band of New Zealand, Ivan Hunter has, during his 50 year playing career been principal trumpet in symphony orchestras and stage shows, played on over 2000 recordings, and has

given numerous solo and ensemble performances in both classical and jazz styles. He has taught from Elementary through to Post-Graduate levels and is also an experienced Band, Orchestra and Choral Conductor and Arranger.

Originally from New Zealand, Ivan has performed in Japan, USSR, UK, France, Holland, Germany, Austria and Canada, and was considered Australia's leading brass specialist before settling in the USA.

His book Playing Trumpet the Trumpets Plus Way, is available online from eBookMall and his website is www.jaegerbrass.com.

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