

A FEW THINGS YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE HORN BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK...

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Why do we put our hand in the bell??

Well, the first and quickest answer to this is that the horn doesn't play in tune if we don't put our hand in the bell. However, there is a historical explanation to the question: A very long time ago before our instrument had valves, a couple of hundred years ago in fact, horn players had to use the right hand in the bell to play diatonically, or up a scale. Without the hand in the bell and no valves, you can only play some notes in a C Major scale for example: C, E, G, B^b, and C. Putting the hand in the bell at various degrees of cover over the opening can produce the notes in between. So, when valves were invented in the early 1800s and put on the horn, the basic structure and posture (the way we hold it) stayed intact—thus, the right hand tradition of keeping it in the bell remained and is part of our posture.

Why do horn players have to transpose??

We transpose because before there were valves, horn players were still expected to play in different keys. Composers, however, did not write in keys other than what they wanted to hear. It was up to the horn player to put their horn in the right key with crooks. Crooks are tubes of metal pitched in different keys (different lengths) that were added to the horn. This is essentially what we are doing today when we push down a valve; we are adding tubing of different lengths. After the right crook was put in, the horn player would use the right hand in the bell to play all the notes in that key. Since the horn has valves now we obviously don't need to use crooks but when we play old music that was written for those crooked horns, we must still put our horn in the right key (the key that the composer wants to hear the piece in). We do this in our minds and it's called *transposing*.