

The World's the limit...

The age of the virtual music lesson is here! **Christopher Turner**, founder of Online Brass Lessons and Cornet Professor at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, explains how students can get quality tuition using the latest cyber technology



I've been using the medium of online lessons since 2013. From my office in South Wales, I teach students from all over the world including in America, Australia, Japan and throughout Europe, including in South Wales! At first it was a little daunting, but following hundreds of hours of online instruction I've been able to master and streamline my methods, enabling private brass students on the other side of the world to enjoy the same interaction that one would expect from a conventional lesson at a music conservatoire.

So what do you need to make an effective online lesson possible? In the simplest form and from a teacher's perspective, a computer, quality webcam with microphone and a high-speed Internet connection. However, the equipment you use will have a bearing on both the experience for the student and your effectiveness as a teacher. Here at Online Brass Lessons, I use a Mac Computer with HD Camera, plus a roaming Logitech Broadcaster Wi-Fi HD Webcam to provide different angles and close-ups of embouchure, aperture, and dexterity posture. I also use a Snowball Blue USB microphone and Topping TP30 MARK2 Digital Hi-Fi USB Amplifier with stereo studio speakers. The need for quality speakers is obvious, but a quality microphone will also be of great benefit to the student when demonstrating a particular technique or sound colour. With this in mind, I also suggest my students invest in a good microphone as most 'built-in' computer microphones condense the sound.

Finally, a secure Internet connection is key to a successful online lesson. Fibre connections now allow for super fast Broadband speeds, which continue to climb by the month, enhancing the quality of streamed video and sound. Through fast broadband, I recently played a duet with a student 'online' in Tasmania with very little time-lag at all and, with technology always improving, this kind of experience will only be enhanced.

The platforms I use are primarily Skype and FaceTime - both with equal success. If using a Mac,

it is easy to make a connection through FaceTime and signing up to Skype is also very straightforward. At Online Brass Lessons, we use PayPal to accept payment, ensuring that the whole learning package is a secure and truly online experience. Listed below are areas of consideration relating to the advantages and disadvantages of online instruction.

ADVANTAGES

- Distance is no longer an obstacle.
- Transportation issues are eliminated.
- Travel time and expenses are saved.
- Rescheduling a lesson is less difficult.
- No lesson time is wasted setting up, packing up, coming in or going out.
- Great teaching is available to all!
- The online dynamic tends to make the time spent with the student more focused.
- You can expand your teaching schedule far beyond typical after-school hours.
- Students can also record the lesson, and have it to play back and review afterward via apps like call recorder, etc.
- Parents are able to dial into their child's lesson from a third location.

DISADVANTAGES

- Dependent upon Internet connection: The student and teacher must both have a fast Internet connection, but even if they do, on rare occasions there are days when Internet backbones lag and ISPs experience trouble. I always advise family members at the student's house (and at the teacher's house!) to refrain from using the Internet during a lesson unless the Internet connection is extremely fast.
- Skype and FaceTime are excellent platforms, but glitches still happen sometimes.
- Up-front cost: High quality webcams and microphones, such as the Snowball Blue, can be expensive.

I can honestly say my 'online' students make progress just as fast as my 'in-person' students and students are always amazed at how well the online lessons work! I can highly recommend this learning platform to all and am delighted Online Brass Lessons will be offering lessons with the stars, including with Black Dyke's Richard Marshall, through this medium in the New Year. ■

Walt Lewis, an American cornet player living in Washington DC, had this to say about online tuition: "My experience with Online Brass Lessons and Chris Turner, in particular, has been outstanding. I'd been searching for the best cornet players to study with and, since the UK appeared to have the best brass bands, it made sense to start there. Living 'across the pond', the online lessons provide the perfect solution for me; once the technological barriers are overcome, with the right teacher it is a positive, analytical and encouraging method of learning. Online lessons with Chris are a joy; not only is he a brilliant teacher, he is more than at home with the technology and methodology required to facilitate a brilliant online learning experience."

Whether you're a teacher requiring assistance in setting up an online teaching studio, or a student keen to receive expert tuition, Chris Turner is willing to help with 'no obligation' advice and can be contacted through: www.onlinebrasslessons.com



Christopher Turner

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