

“In Praise of Puchner English Horns”

by Dr. James Isaacs

Essay #1:

“I would buy one of the Puchner English horns sight unseen if it were like one of the two I tried. I would tell anyone to drop any plans to buy a new Loree and get a Puchner as fast as possible...”

The Puchner has a very nice warm sort of "cush" or "plushness" to the sound- but not any sort of dullness. You just never feel or hear the edges of the sound at either end of the dynamic spectrum.

At full blast, you get a HUGE sound that is still focused and very colorful, but with the sense that either you or your reeds would be the only limiting factor, and that the horn could give you even more.

At ppp it is warm and cushy. And at any volume you can get different shades of color...

I am still amazed at how loud or soft I could play on it. And I am amazed at how quickly it could go from one dynamic extreme to the other. Response is not just quick notes- it is shifts in dynamics and nuances of tone color. It could do everything- instantly. From linebacker to ballerina in a heartbeat. Velvet fist in a steel glove. You can seduce you audience, then knock their ears back an instant later.

I keep coming back to the color palette- it beats both Laubin and Loree, IMHO. It has the Laubin depth and power, but with the added color of a good C series Loree. It leaves all of the recent Lorees I have played "for dead." The Lorees seem dull and one-dimensional by comparison. (I am sure there must be some good late model Loree English horns out there- I just haven't played one).

I found these Puchner to be nothing short of fascinating. I could play one all day long and never get tired of it.

Again, I love Laubins, though I can't really get the clarity of color needed for great phrasing out of them. The Laubin's "dark and powerful" sound is impressive, but sometimes you need more bright colors to clarify your phrasing. I can not get this out of the Laubin English horns I have tried.

But the Puchner has it! And by "bright" I do not mean nasal or buzzy - I mean dark and covered, but with clarity in the highs- that sort of "ring"to the sound- or the mournful pleading melancholy of great English horn playing.

As I think about it more, it is more like a Laubin, though with a C series Loree added, and more nimble.

I did try his [Jurgen's] new "XL" bocals. CRAZY! He [Jurgen] said he was just looking at a tree one day and the idea came to him.

It really works! The horns sounded great on his normal bocals, but the new design "XL" adds a whole new dimension - it is like adding a turbo.

Did I mention that I liked the horn?

Thank you for telling me about these Puchner horns! I never would have gone there otherwise.”

Essay #2:

"Best English horns I have ever played - Period. End of story, Finito la fiesta, Ende von Lied, The Fat Lady has sung, Elvis has left the building, Game over, That's all she wrote, Ciao Bello, Punctum.

The power, dark sound and depth of a Laubin, with the lyricism of a fine Loree, though with something more and unique.

Very broad dynamic range from pp to ff, even scale, excellent response, easy 3rd octave, lovely and powerful sound, and - as you put it - it can shake the timbers. The range of expression and colors in the tonal plate is extreme.

I played two, and they sound very similar. They seem "Laubinesque," but you can blow more color into the sound- you can get the light to shine through the stained-glass window, and they can be nimble as well as powerful.

It is like a Loree with Laubin depth and power- but it is its own thing. Not a compromise, but a triangulation that has all of both, plus more of its own character.

The quality of the wood is superb- very glossy, shiny, tight grain- that is why the sound leaps out of the instrument and why it is so responsive.

I've never played a horn with a more attractive sound, or so expressive. And I could never reach the end of it, it would take as much as I could give it, yet respond beautifully to the softest breath.”

Essay #3:

“I was at a double-reed festival last weekend and got to play a lot of instruments, including 3 English horns - a Buffet, a new Loree, and a Moenning Diamante. All good, credible instruments...

The Buffet was decent. It has a nice, sweet sound, and the smallest sound of the three.

Not unlike their oboes.

I liked the Loree more. It was very good and colorful.

The Moenning was really the best of the three. It is a very fine English horn, but also very different from the other two.

It is more covered, darker, polished.

But- the Puchners I tried at the factory were WAY better. The Moenning has a nice sound, even scale, etcetera, though it borders on being dull and uninspiring. It was better with my Ross bocal.

The Puchner has everything the Moenning has, but a lot more. More power, more color, more variety and range of tone colors-etcetera. I could play the Moenning for a while, but lose interest.

I could play the Puchner all day and not get tired of it.

I have not tried the recent Marigaux, Laubin, or Howarth English horns, but I can not see how anyone could be making a better English horn right now than Puchner...

This weekend confirmed for me that Puchner is the class act in English horns right now.

Puchner is way ahead of everyone else.

Good times!"