

HYPNOTIC BRASS ENSEMBLE



 STATE THEATRE
NEW JERSEY

KEYNOTES



photo: Ray Yau

State Theatre New Jersey is delighted to welcome you to our school-day performance of Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. The seven brothers perform a unique mix of hip hop, jazz, rock, and soul—brought to life with the brassy sounds of trumpets, trombones, and baritones.

These *Keynotes* provide information to help you and your students prepare for the performance. Included are discussion questions and suggested activities to help you make the most of your experience.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

In the show, the ensemble plays their original music, and discusses their process for composing and arranging their music. They also share their inspiring life stories: their struggles growing up in a tough Chicago neighborhood, their fight to keep their music their own, and what it is like to work together as family in the creative process. Band members invite the audience to participate in parts of the performance by clapping out rhythms, chanting, and other interactive activities.

cover photos (clockwise, from top): Ray Yau, Portia Marciello, Ray Yau

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State Theatre New Jersey—creating extraordinary experiences through the power of live performance.



TARIK GRAVES
"SMOOVE"
Trumpet



AMAL BAJI HUBERT
"BAJI"
Trumpet



GABRIEL HUBERT
"HUDAH"
Trumpet



JAFAR BAJI GRAVES
"YOSHI"
Trumpet

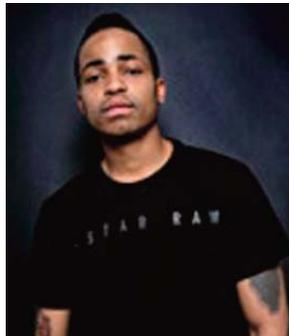
Hypnotic Brass Ensemble are seven brothers from the South Side of Chicago. Each boy began musical training with their father, jazz trumpeter Kelan Phil Cohran, at the age of four or five (except Smoove, who was three years old when he started playing). Their routine was strictly enforced by their father. Each morning, they would wake up at 4:30 or 5, then dress and eat before family band rehearsal started at 6am.

As they grew up, the boys played with their father as a part of the Phil Cohran Youth Ensemble. They toured around the country playing their father's compositions, as well as music by jazz legends such as Duke Ellington and Count Basie. Classical music (including Bach and Beethoven) was part of their repertoire, as well.

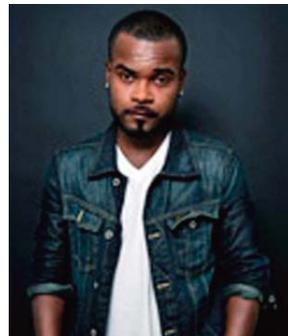
Through their teenage years, the boys were increasingly influenced by the music of their generation: hop-hop, reggae, and rap. Looking for the freedom to explore their own sound, they left their father's band in 1999 and formed Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. They began to compose, arrange, and perform in public. To retain their artistic independence, they chose not to sign with a record label. Instead, they played their music on the streets to expose their sound to new audiences and sold their CD to pedestrians.

Since then, Hypnotic Brass Ensemble has toured all over the world, and played with Def Jam, No ID, Blur, Prince, Mos Def Big Band, Snoop Dog, Mick Jones, De La Soul, among others. Their song "War" was featured in the film *The Hunger Games*.

The brothers' unusual and inspiring journey was captured in the documentary film, *Brothers Hypnotic*. The film explores their music, work ethic, and life—especially their experience being raised by their jazz legend father, Phil Cohran. After screening in major cities and festivals, it aired on PBS.



UTTAMA HUBERT
"ROCCO"
Baritone horn



SEBA GRAVES
"CLEF"
Trombone



SAIPH GRAVES
"CID"
Trombone



**"MUSIC
WILL TAKE
YOU
PLACES"**

The community that the boys grew up in was filled with crime, drugs, broken families, and poverty. The boys' father, Kelan Phil Cohran, believed that becoming strong musicians would help them overcome their surroundings; "Music will take you places," he said. He also believed that by sharing their music, his sons could inspire their community and bring joy and happiness to others.

The Hypnotic Brass Ensemble will be joined by their brother Malik Cohran on bass, as well as two musicians who are not their brothers: guitarist Kevin "VoEra" Hunt and drummer Xavier Hill.

Hypnotic Brass Ensemble changes their program for each concert, choosing which songs they will play based on their mood that day and also their feeling about what would be most appropriate for the specific audience. This helps keep their performances spontaneous and fresh. Here are two songs they are likely to play at this performance. Watch the videos and discuss:

“WAR”

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ggOVNYFIP7Q>

- Hypnotic Brass Ensemble composed this song for the movie, *The Hunger Games*, but video does not show scenes from the movie. From the images they chose for the video, what do you think the song means to the group?
- How does the music express these ideas? Be specific in describing the music in detail.



“CITY LIVING”

https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=pL2Ze2_EFu4

- Do you recognize any of the cities that appear in the video? Given the title of the song and the images in the video, what do you think is the message?
- Does the music remind you of city life? What qualities, specifically, make you feel that way?



MUSICAL INFLUENCES

The members of Hypnotic Brass Ensemble grew up surrounded by all kinds of music, which you can hear in the music they write and perform. Here are some of the styles that have influenced them the most.

Blues

Blues music was created by African Americans in the Deep South around the end of the 19th century. The lyrics to blues songs tell of hard times and harsh realities, such as racism, lost love, poverty, imprisonment, and violence. Despite this, blues lyrics are often humorous.

Spirituals and Gospel

Music from the Christian churches has greatly influenced many genres of African American music. Created by African slaves in America, Negro spirituals expressed religious faith while also lamenting the hardships of slavery. Gospel music, which came from this tradition, has greater focus on the lead vocal. Both genres use call and response.

Jazz

Jazz is truly America’s national music. Its roots are in African American communities in New Orleans during the late 19th and early 20th

centuries. Early influences included traditional West African music, blues, ragtime, gospel, and European classical and military band music. It evolved into many different styles and spread all over the world. Although there is no one single type of jazz music, common features include improvisation, syncopation, polyrhythms, call and response, and ‘blue’ notes.

Rhythm and Blues, Soul, Funk

These styles of popular music emerged in the 1940s-1960s, and are closely associated with African American artists. They feature strong rhythms that drive the music forward and make you want to dance. They were also an important expression of African American pride, culture, and identity.

Hip Hop

Hip hop was created by inner-city African Americans in the 1970s. The music has a strong beat that accompanies rapping.

VOCABULARY

IMPROVISTATION - Making something up in the moment, rather than planning it out ahead of time.

SYNCOPIATION - in a rhythm, putting the accent on a beat that you normally wouldn’t expect to be accented.

POLYRHYTHM - two or more rhythms played at the same time

CALL AND RESPONSE - one musician plays a musical phrase, and then a second musician plays another phrase responding to the first one.

BLUE NOTE - a note that is played or sung slightly sharp or flat. It gives the music a slightly sad (‘blue’) quality.

THE INSTRUMENTS

The brothers of the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble play trumpet, trombone, and baritone horn. These instruments all belong to the **BRASS** family. Brass instruments are also wind instruments—they make their sound by air vibrating through them, typically by the player blowing into the instrument.

Most brass instruments are made of a long metal tube that curves at least two times and ends in a flared opening called the **BELL**. The shape of the inside of the tube, called the **BORE**, can be **CYLINDRICAL** (the same diameter for the entire length of the tube) or **CONICAL** (the diameter gradually increases along the entire length of the tube). A cylindrical bore produces a bright, well-projected sound found in instruments such as trumpets and trombones. Instruments with a conical bore, such as French horns, tubas, and baritone horns, have a fuller, warmer sound.

At the opposite end of the bell is a metal **MOUTHPIECE**. Brass instruments are played by placing the lips on the mouthpiece and blowing while vibrating the lips. (The positioning of the lips on the mouthpiece is called **EMBOUCHURE**, pronounced AHM-boo-shoor.) By tightening or loosening the lips, it is possible to produce a limited number of different notes. To add more



Embouchure

notes to the range of the instrument, the player changes the length of the tube—shortening it to make higher notes, and lengthening it to produce lower notes. There are two ways to change the length of the tube. Instruments such as the trombone use an adjustable **SLIDE**. More common are **VALVE** instruments (including the trumpet, French horn, baritone horn, tuba, and euphonium). Pressing the valves allows the air to pass through additional lengths of the tubing, which produces lower pitches.

TRUMPET

Trumpets are the highest member of the brass family. They are used in many settings: in music ranging from classical orchestra and marching band to jazz and rock; religious observances; military ceremonies; and even horse racing.



Trumpets have been around for thousands of years, appearing in almost every civilization on the planet. The first ones were made from animal tusks and horns, conch shells, clay, and other natural materials. Silver and bronze trumpets were discovered in the tomb of King Tutankhamun in Egypt, and other ancient versions of the instrument were found in China, the Middle East, South America, Scandinavia, and Asia. For most of history, trumpets were used for religious and military purposes. They began to be used as musical instruments only in the late 14th or early 15th century.

Originally, the trumpet was played by using different lip positions on the mouthpiece to play the different pitches. The first valve trumpets appeared in the early 19th century, giving players more control and the ability to play a wider range of notes.

TROMBONE

The name trombone is an Italian word that means ‘large trumpet.’ It differs from the trumpet in more than just size, though. It changes pitch using a telescoping slide rather than valves. Trombone players must have a strong sense of pitch and tuning to know precisely how far in or out to move the slide for each note.



The trombone is in the low section of the brass family. It is played with the bell on the left side of the slide. The slide is held in the right hand, and the bell portion is held with the left. Trombones are an important part of classical orchestras, jazz and marching bands, and other ensembles.

BARITONE HORN

The baritone horn (sometimes just called baritone) works the same way as the trumpet, but its tubing is twice as long—nine feet, to be exact! It is held against the body with the left arm, with the bell pointing straight up. The valves are pressed with the fingers of the right hand. The baritone plays the exact same notes as a trombone and even uses the same mouthpiece. The baritone comes in different shapes and sizes, including a marching band version that has a front-facing bell. Baritones are often confused with euphoniums, which have a similar look and size.





“When we were children, we didn’t like or understand the need for so much practice and rehearsal. But now, there’s no horn players in the world touching our sound and what we can create because we spent all that time working at it.”

—Saiph “Cid” Graves

Like any skill, playing an instrument involves lots of practice and self-discipline, beginning with mastering the basic skills that are the foundation of every musician’s technique. When they were learning their instruments, the members of the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble always began practice by playing **LONG TONES** on their horns. Long tones are exactly what you would expect: you play a note into your horn and hold it at a steady volume and pitch for as long as your breath will allow. Then you go up or down and half step and repeat, ultimately going through the full range of the instrument. Playing long tones can seem boring, but it helps the musician learn to create a beautiful, even tone and improve breath control.

Phil Cohran, the boys’ father, insisted that “a long tone must be played flawlessly. One must understand simplicity—and anything that is worth anything lasts long.” To this day, Hypnotic Brass Ensemble include long tones in their daily practice.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In these excerpts from the documentary about their lives, Hypnotic Brass Ensemble play long tones and talk about why they always use them in practice, and describe the values they are committed to in their lives and their music.

www.pbs.org/independentlens/videos/the-principle-of-simplicity

www.pbs.org/independentlens/videos/an-unyielding-commitment-to-excellence



Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so everyone can enjoy the show.

Here are some important rules for being a good audience member:

- When the show starts, give the performers all your attention.
- Don't talk during the show.
- Stay in your seat.
- If you have a phone, make sure you turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.
- Don't take pictures or video of the show.
- Don't eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!
- If you liked the show, let the performers know by applauding when it's over.



Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. Official YouTube Channel. Performance clips, interviews and other content.

www.youtube.com/user/hypnoticbrassstv

Brothers Hypnotic (film documentary about Hypnotic Brass Ensemble)

<http://www.hypnoticbrassfilm.com>

Brothers Hypnotic. Exploration of the documentary film on the PBS program, *Independent Lens*

www.pbs.org/independentlens/films/brothers-hypnotic

How Brass Instruments Work – Al Canon. This video explores the physics of brass instruments and how they function, including animations, from TED-Ed.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYHfiQ4R7Bs

How Playing An Instrument Benefits Your Brain – Anita Collins. This video explores the impact on the brain of playing an instrument, from TED-Ed.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROJKCYZ8hng



photo: Portia Marciello



EDUCATION & OUTREACH SUPPORTERS

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