

THE REVIEW JP STERLING 374



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I have been invited to review the John Packer Sterling euphonium by a company in Singapore called Music360 and I am giving it an honest and unbiased review based on my play testing and I hope it can be useful for anyone who is interested. There are many instruments out there now that are very cheap and claim to be better than well known brands. There are also some well known brands with long histories who sell instruments at very high costs. Whenever you are going to buy a new instrument you absolutely should think about how much you want to spend, you should think

about what you realistically need the instrument for and you should play on any instruments you are interested in. Don't just presume the most expensive is the best 'for you' or the cheapest is the worst 'for you' and of course don't just choose the instrument that you think looks the best. The sound you make and ability to do what you want to do should be the main factors. Some instruments have been designed in collaboration with some of the very best players so listen to advice from people who know what they are doing. **-MG**

The JP Sterling comes with a lockable hard case. It seemed to be of a good quality inside and out. Inside the case there is space for accessories but no space for music.

The instrument was silver plated and when inspecting the instrument from a visual point of view it looked very well put together, all plating and joints looked perfect and I couldn't find any imperfections on it. There was a clear join mark around the bell which was quite prominent but you do often see that.

The instrument was heavier than I expected it to be. It felt sturdy and strong. I spent a few days basically using the instrument to do my normal practice and really enjoyed playing it. I played through some of my normal exercises and also played through some solos. I would have liked to take the instrument to a brass band (or any ensemble) rehearsal but that was not possible. I recorded most of my testing and created a video with small snippets at the request of MUSIC360.

Initial thoughts were great. It felt good to hold and very comfortable for me. It felt solid and the valves were very smooth. It responded very well to the air through a series of soft, long, low warm up exercises and I was impressed with the sound I could create, it was warm and full with little effort. After a while of playing I realized that the way I was holding it while standing or sitting was causing me to push the main tuning slide in and I needed to adjust how I held it a little to avoid this happening.

I continued working on some flexibility exercises and again it felt easy to play and I could do everything I wanted to do. It responded well across the mid and low range and again I felt the sound was full and warm. Switching from open notes to notes that required the 4th valve felt very natural and the sound was consistent with ease of blowing.

I then worked on some tongued scale exercises and started to feel that the thickness of sound and size of sound was not working in the instruments favour for me especially in the lower registers. Clearly very



suitable for the British brass band sound but I felt I couldn't get enough clarity through fast tongued scales lower down. The sound was thick and I couldn't get the punchiness that I wanted but again over time I could get used to it and adapt. The instrument would certainly sing above any ensemble in a flowing slow melody, but I would need to work harder to cut through enough in lower technical passages. However, for the wind band player I think this would help to blend better with the wider variety of sounds so what is a negative issue for one person could have a positive slant for someone else. I was also starting to find the valves were a bit heavy for me. I am used to light bouncy valves and obviously this is down to player preference again so I wouldn't say this is a negative thing as you could always experiment with different springs. The valves were smooth and free and very quiet which is the main thing and I know lots of players who hate light bouncy valves! I actually don't think I oiled the valves at all, they didn't need it.

It seemed to respond well at loud dynamics with only very mild vibrations. I do find this is a big issue with cheaper instruments as they can feel like they are falling apart when you give it everything you've got but I am sure that the JP Sterling would cope with the power most modern players want to exert! On the flip side I found it very easy to play soft dynamics, it was effortless.

I then moved onto some high register work and felt that this was its best register (concert high F and the octave plus above). It felt free and easy with a much clearer direct sound that I like. I didn't need to work very hard to achieve what I wanted.

During my testing, the JP Sterling didn't have any funny buzzing or ringing noises or water trapped in odd places which can make unwanted noises and this is a sign of its quality.

Intonation and tuning are obviously very important but can of course vary from player to player. I was very happy with the tuning and the normal 'problem notes' were certainly no worse than other good euphs I have tried. However these suspect notes would normally be fixed with a trigger, which is a luxury that the JP Sterling doesn't have (but doesn't really need). Adding the 4th valve put top concert Eb, E and F much better in tune (as they were all quite sharp as you might expect) and then I just found that middle concert Eb was quite flat but it's nothing that more time with the instrument wouldn't solve. Sometimes using the 4th valve to correct the naturally sharper notes

is a good option but I did feel that there was a slight change in tone when using the 4th valve in the upper register so this wouldn't be suitable all the time. You can of course look at other alternative valves (and some euphoniums leave you with no option other than this) but I felt the JP Sterlings tuning was very good and wouldn't cause problems for anyone.

Overall I really enjoyed playing on the JP Sterling. It is highly suitable for brass band euphonium players but is versatile enough for any ensemble and a player of any age or ability. For the money you really do get a high quality instrument and I would advise anyone to try this euphonium even if you are planning to buy one for double the money. This instrument could really help any young player grow into something great and I doubt they would need to buy another instrument for a long while but at the same time, a more experienced player who may have had a few instruments during their time and never felt they have found the right one could look into the JP Sterling safe in the knowledge that they would be getting a very good quality instrument and excellent value for money.