

# Creating a great sounding low brass section in your ensemble!

## Bach Artist and Clinician Philip Brown

### 2014 Midwest Clinic, 9:30 a.m.

#### Tuning

- 1) Tuning to F? Not the best idea:

Many ensembles tune to a concert F. The problem with this is that concert F is very sharp on low brass instruments. When trombone players play any 1st position F, they need to pull out their hand slide to make the note be in tune. Euphonium and tuba students need to lip this note down. So, if we tune to F, chances are that your low brass section will be very flat on all notes except for F. The best note to tune to is concert Bb.

- 2) Tune using the tuba:

It's always better to tune your ensemble to your tuba. Students listen down to the lowest voiced instrument for pitch reference. You are also setting up the balance and timbre of your ensemble when you tune this way. The tuba usually has the root of the chord, which is even more reason to tune your ensemble using the tuba. If your ensemble does not have a tuba, teach the students to tune to the 3rd trombonist or the euphonium who often has the root.

#### Tone quality and sound production

- 1) Mouthpiece buzzing:

If you think about the mouthpiece being the instrument, and the instrument being the amplifier, it really makes sense to spend lots of time practicing on only the mouthpiece. When we buzz our mouthpiece there is very little resistance, so it makes it more difficult to center a pitch and create a beautiful tone. But, if your students are able to master this concept of creating a beautiful, effortless sound on their mouthpiece, you will be rewarded with resonant, unobstructed tone from your brass section. Buzzing in all ranges and at all dynamic levels from ppp-fff is important.

- 2) Breathing:

It is not possible to play a brass instrument correctly if we do not understand the basic concepts of the proper breath. We should focus on the wind passing through our lips and heading down to our waist line. Our stomach should come out when we breathe, but our shoulders should not lift up. We must stay relaxed while we take in the breath, especially since very often we need to breathe very quickly. Breathing in time, with a pulse thought of, is also very important to set us up for musical success.

#### Section techniques

- 1) Trombone slide or baton?:

The trombonist has a distinct advantage over other instruments when it comes to helping their section begin together. Because of the length of the instrument, it is easy for the first trombonist to cue in the section, using their long slide, giving a preparatory beat and downbeat just like a conductor with a baton. The first trombone can cue the entire low brass section, including euphoniums and tubas, with their slide. This will ensure that the section has a great strong entrance together!

2) Breathe together, play together:

One of the best ways for a section to know that they are going to enter together and continue to play together, is by breathing together. Taking a deep, audible breath that everyone in the section can hear ensures that all members of the section will start exactly together.

3) Balance:

The euphoniums and tuba in the section are at a disadvantage when it comes to being heard by the audience. Because of the low range, dark timbre, and the fact that their bells face towards the ceiling, they need to really play out! The tuba, being the lowest voiced instrument in the ensemble, must learn how to create a massive sound. All of the other sounds in the ensemble should fit inside the sound of the tuba. If the other students in the ensemble are focussing on the tuba sound, they will play with a warm, beautiful, rich sound on their instrument.

4) The power of the practice mute:

One of the best tools you can purchase for your students are practice mutes. Practice mutes are usually meant for practicing in areas where you don't want to be heard, but they serve another, more meaningful purpose. Practice mutes create tons of resistance when played. A student can blast notes into their instrument and almost no sound comes out of the bell. After some sustained long tones at a *fff* volume with the practice mute, have the student take the mute out and play the same way. You and the student will be shocked at what an awesome, big sound they produce! This exercise can be done as a section as well, practicing passages in their band music with the mutes.

### Articulation styles

1) Tongued articulations:

A proper articulation is one of the most overlooked aspects of educating brass students. Students must learn to place the tip of their tongue where their top teeth go into the top of their mouth. The air should blow down the tongue, and should never move without the air being involved. After the articulation, the tongue should end up back and down, allowing the air to travel through the mouth, then the aperture, and into the instrument. Have your students practice saying "Toh" to practice this technique.



2) Legato on trombone-against the grain:

Trombonists are able to play slurs two different ways. They can use natural slurs on certain intervals, but sometimes they need to use a legato tongue to eliminate a glissando that would otherwise occur. As a general rule, if the slide is moving out and the pitch is going up, or if the slide is moving in and the pitch is going down, then trombonists can do a natural lip slur, just like the type of slur a euphonium or tuba student would use. This is also the case if they stay in the same position and are slurring notes.

3) 3-Step process of learning legato on the trombone:

- a) Have trombonists buzz the legato section you are working on without tonguing any note except the first note of the phrase.
- b) Have trombonists play the entire legato passage you are working on as a glissando on their instrument, only tonguing the first note of every phrase.  
(They will hear some glissandos and will know where they need add in a legato tongue.)
- c) Have trombonists add in tongue where necessary, focussing on keeping their air flow uninterrupted and flowing forwards.

## Tips for the conductor:

### 1) Let them play!:

Brass players, especially the low brass, are able to produce a full, dark, resonant sound by using lots of air and learning how to control it. If you always are telling your low brass to play softer and back off, they will never learn how to control that huge amount of air needed to make a great sound. You will get some “blasting sounds” at first, but that’s OK. They will learn how to control their air, and you will be glad that you gave them the green light!

### 2) Show them confidence:

The low brass section in your ensemble needs some extra motivation at times from the conductor. Because the section is usually in the back of the band, it is more difficult to convey your musical thoughts to the low brass. When you want your brass to be heard, make sure that you are looking at them all the way in the back row, and showing them confidence in your facial expressions and conducting technique.

## Great method books for students:

- 1) Middle school/beginning high school
  - a) Sigmund Herring 32 etudes for trombone or euphonium
  - b) Rubank Intermediate volume for trombone or tuba
- 2) High school
  - a. Rochut Melodious Etudes Vol. 1 (for trombone, euphonium, or tuba)
  - b. Arbans complete Method (for trombone, euphonium, or tuba)

## Equipment:

Mr. Brown plays on Bach instruments exclusively. There is no other instrument that creates such a special, resonant sound! Bach makes the best trombone that is on the market today! All of these items can be found at Quinlan and Fabish Music. You can go to [www.qandf.com](http://www.qandf.com) to find these products and more information.

### Recommended trombones:

- High School and Advanced Middle School: Bach 42BOG, 42BO, Bach 42AG,
- Middle School and Elementary: Bach tb301

### Recommended euphonium:

- King 2280 Silver Plated

### Recommended tuba:

- Conn 12jw
- King 1135

### Recommended mouthpieces

- Small bore trombones and euphoniums: Bach 6 1/2 AL small shank
- Large bore trombones and euphoniums: Bach 5G Large Shank
- Tuba: Conn Helleburg