Back to Basics

How to Make Your Band Sound Like an Organ

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W183 McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Keysto Stotz
Skiatook High School Band (OK)

About Us.... *and why this topic?*

- Band directors at Skiatook Schools
- Small School Band, Oklahoma 4A (less than 650 grades 9-12)
- BME - University of Tulsa
- MM Instrumental Conducting - Wichita State University
- Amateur Organist

About Us.... *and why this topic?*

How many times have we told our bands or students that we want them, or a certain passage, “to sound like an organ”? Well, organists are baffled by this comment and ask,

“*What in the world do they mean by THAT?*”

About the Pipe Organ

- The pipe organ is known as *The King of Instruments.*
- It is one of the oldest instruments.
- It is the largest wind instrument.
- Modern organs use constant and consistent air controlled electronically by a wind box.

About the Pipe Organ

- A pipe organ consists of both wood and metal pipes. Some pipes could be as large as 40 feet tall, while others are the size of a pencil.
- Organs have multiple manuals, or keyboards, and various stops to facilitate changes and movements between pre-set registrations. Pulling a stop, or knob, allows the air to enter the pipe at a constant speed.

Limitations

- Organs are equally tempered, meaning the 12 notes in the chromatic scale are divided equally in pitch, so there is *no opportunity to adjust pitch* like other wind instruments.
- They also have *no ability to crescendo or decrescendo.*
- However, there is a pedal to add more stops and shutters to mute and soften notes, but they do not have the same effect.

Limitations

- The achievement of a “legato” style is extremely different and harder to achieve on the organ.
- The sound of each individual organ is dictated by the hall or space it occupies.

Comparisons

- Organists can give immediate color shifts by changing manuals, or keyboards.
- Organs have the ability to have constant and perfectly regulated air flow.
- Furthermore, attacks and releases are precise everytime due to the mechanics of the instrument.

What Do We Want To Imitate?

- The idea of constant and consistent air is one of the most basic and difficult fundamentals we teach our students.
- Precise and clean attacks, as well as releases of notes.
- Vertical alignment is easier on the organ because it is played by a soloist.
- Organists have to think Horizontally, not Vertically.

What Do We Want To Imitate?

- The quick changes in color and instrumentation, *while maintaining pitch.*
- Above all, we want to *imitate the overall sound of a pipe organ,* which is achieved by creating resonance in the space with perfect balance and pitch.

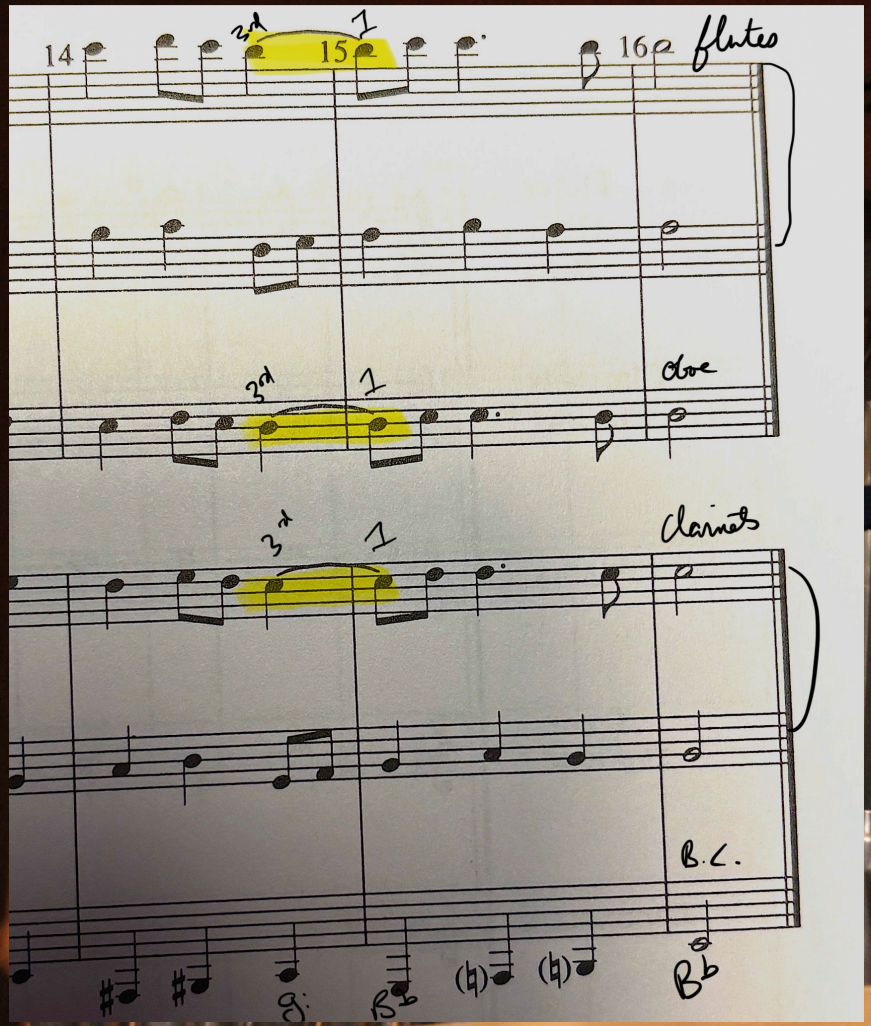
Rules of the Chorale

- Suspensions are Money ($)
- Repeated notes are not the main focus
- Non-Chord Tones are Hard!
- Think Horizontally

1. Suspensions are Money $$$

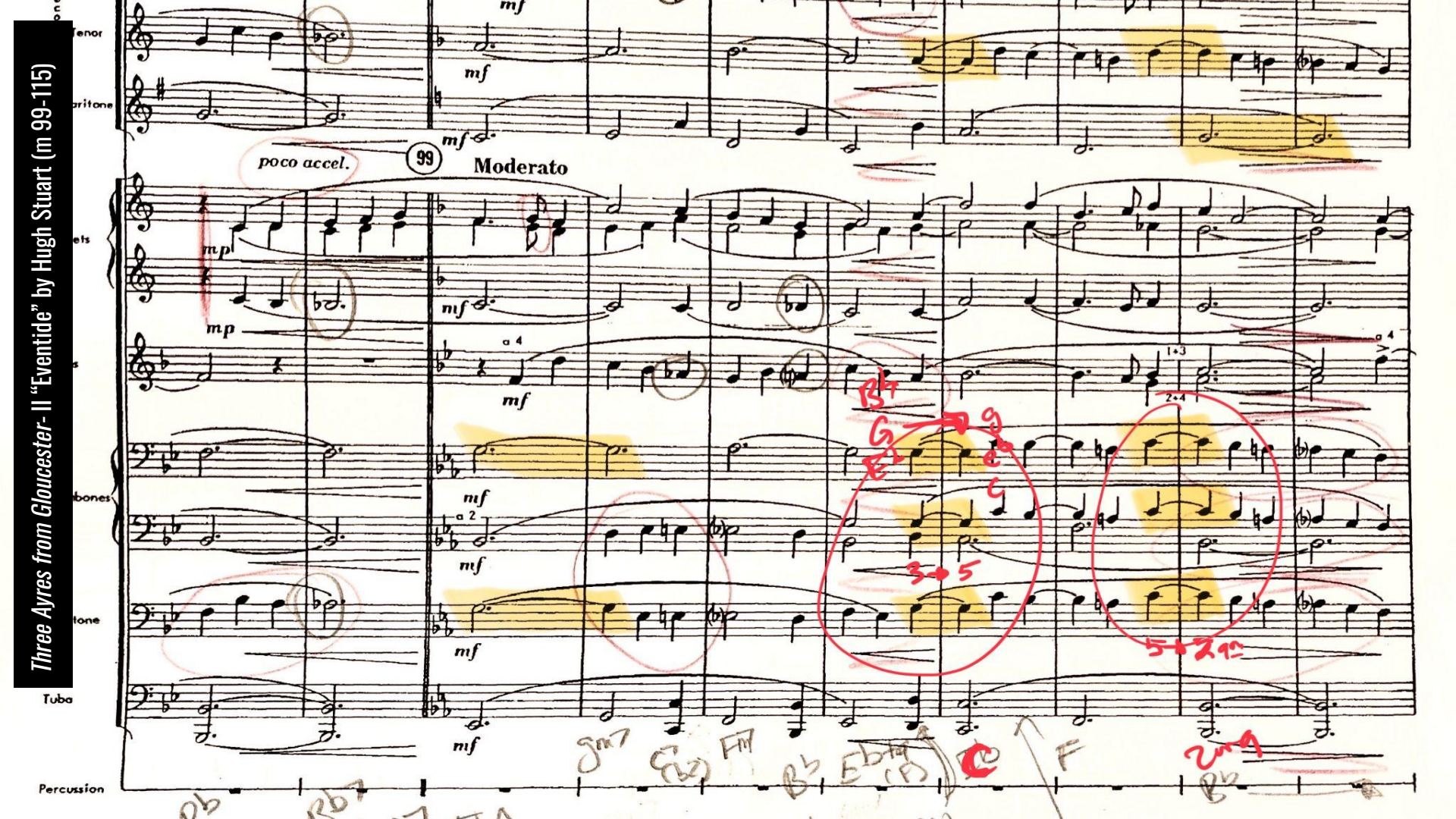
- Determine whether the tie across the bar (to the same note) is the root or fifth of a chord, or if its an extension.
  - (7th, 9th, 11th, 13th, etc.)
- Roots and fifths need to be perfectly in tune, and do not adjust as much on the second chord.
- This is usually a note we play ad nauseum (Bb, F, Eb) and students should be comfortable on those pitches.

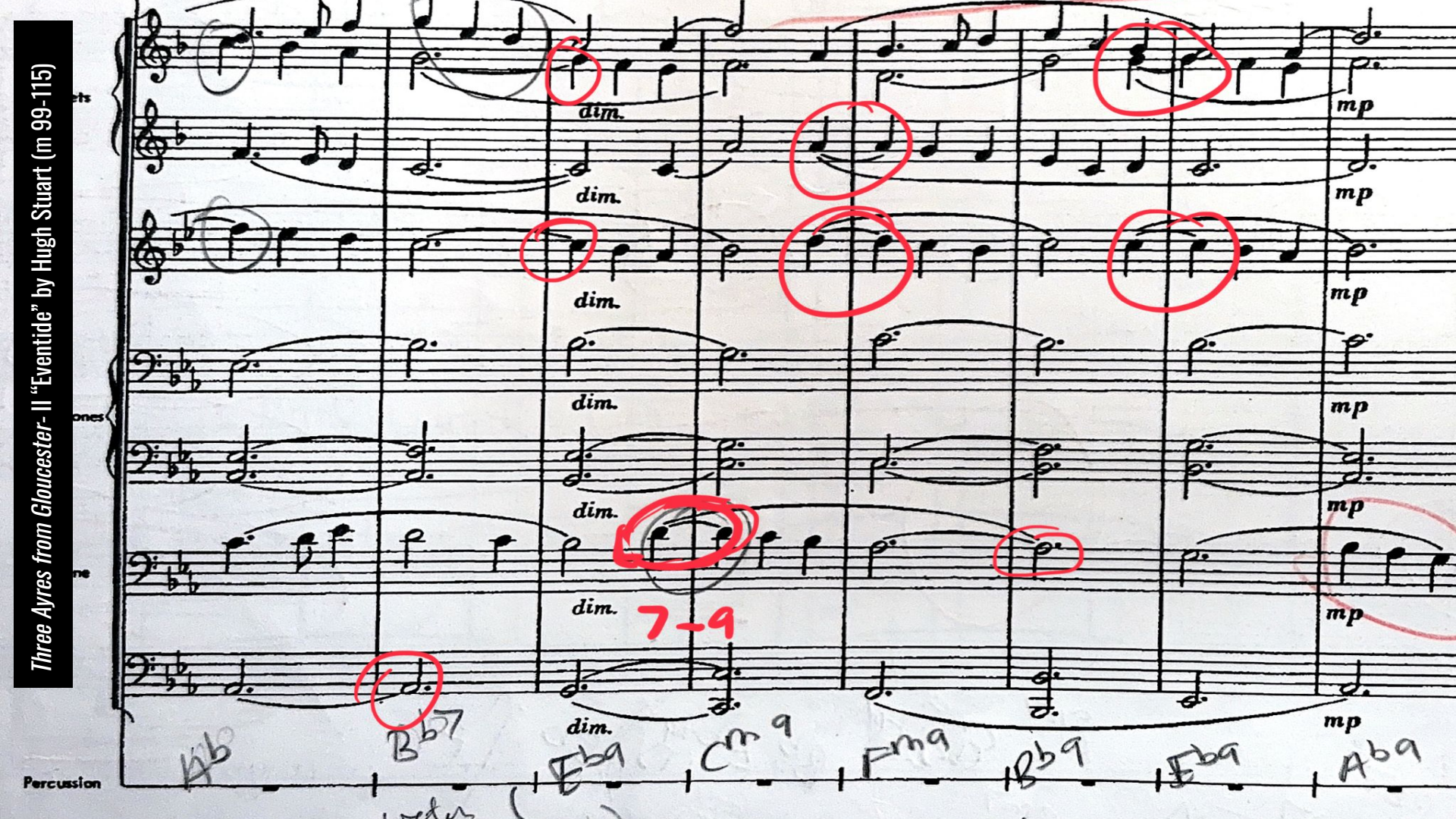
Bach and Before for Band by David Newell- Chorale no. 4 m 14-16



1. Suspensions are Money $$$

- Often, it is our lower chair players that have these notes.
- Take care to give them confidence, don't neglect them.
- If the suspension is an extension, determine what type and tell the player(s) to adjust the pitch accordingly on the second chord.


Three Ayres from Gloucester- II "Eventide" by Hugh Stuart (m 99-115)
Tenor
Baritone
poco accel.
99
Moderato
mp
mf
a 4
a 2
1+3
2+4
Tuba
Percussion


Three Ayres from Gloucester- II "Eventide" by Hugh Stuart (m 99-115)
dim.
mp
7-9
Percussion

1. Suspensions are Money $$$

- All suspensions need to have full duration.
- There is nothing worse than a chord not resolving the way it should because of timid players.
- Organists have the luxury of keeping their finger down on the note.

Many times I was chastised in lessons for breaking a tie.

2. Repeated Notes are not the Main Focus

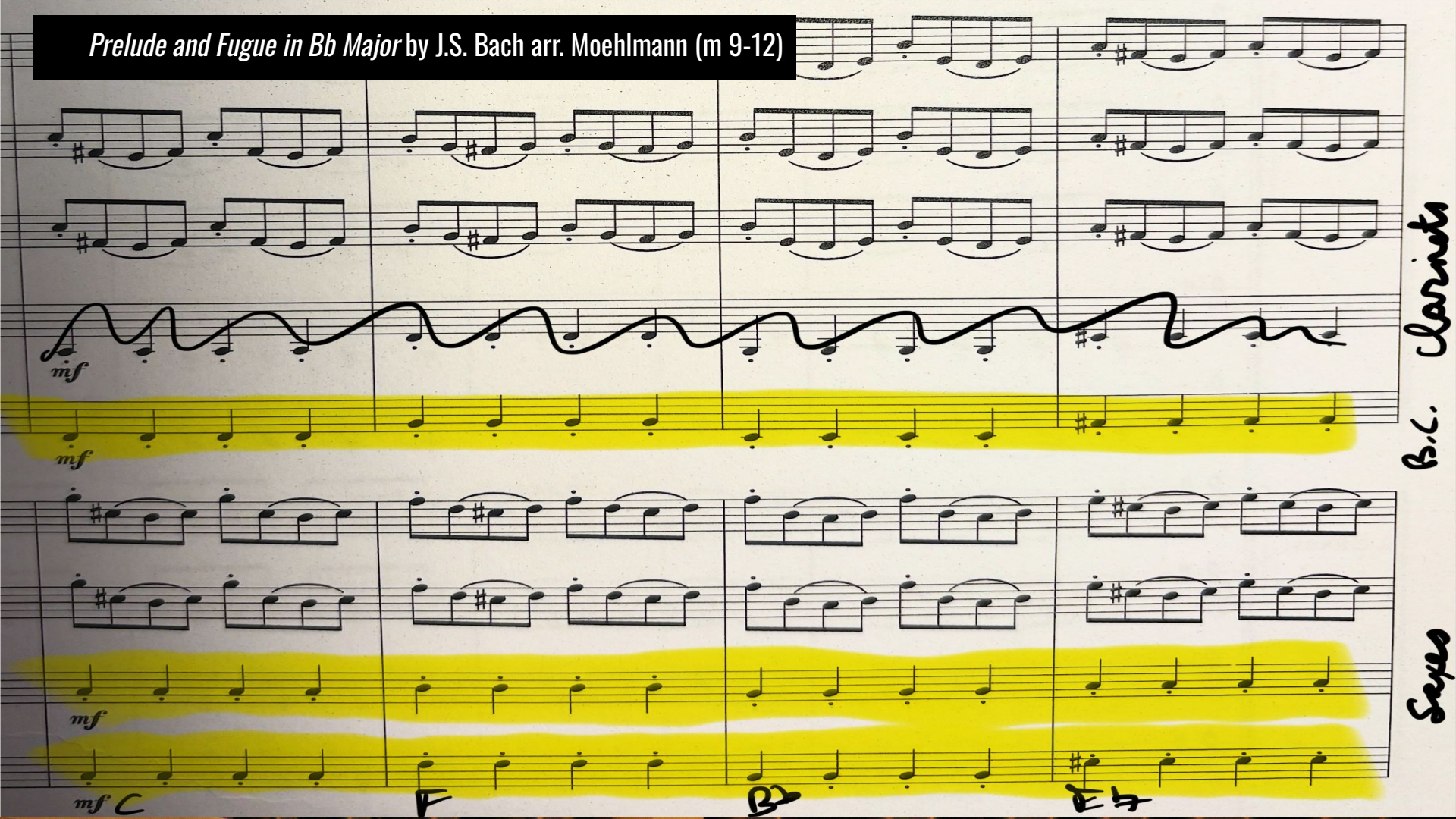
- Tell students that EVERY NOTE they play has a function and role.
- Even if its a single note in a grouping of nine, or the same note 20 times in a row.
- Always ask, “What’s my role on this note?”

2. Repeated Notes are not the Main Focus

- MOST repeated notes are not outside the triad of the underlying chord, again, probably roots or fifths.
- They need to be locked in on pitch, not worrying about adjusting to everyone around them.
- The first time they are important
- They are there for the band to listen down to them.

2. Repeated Notes are not the Main Focus

- If repeated notes are too loud, there is no clarity.
- Chords will not resonate without good balance throughout.
- An organist would recognize these pitches and put them on a different registration or manual (or both) to adjust balance.
- Think of a pedal being played by your foot (toe or heel)

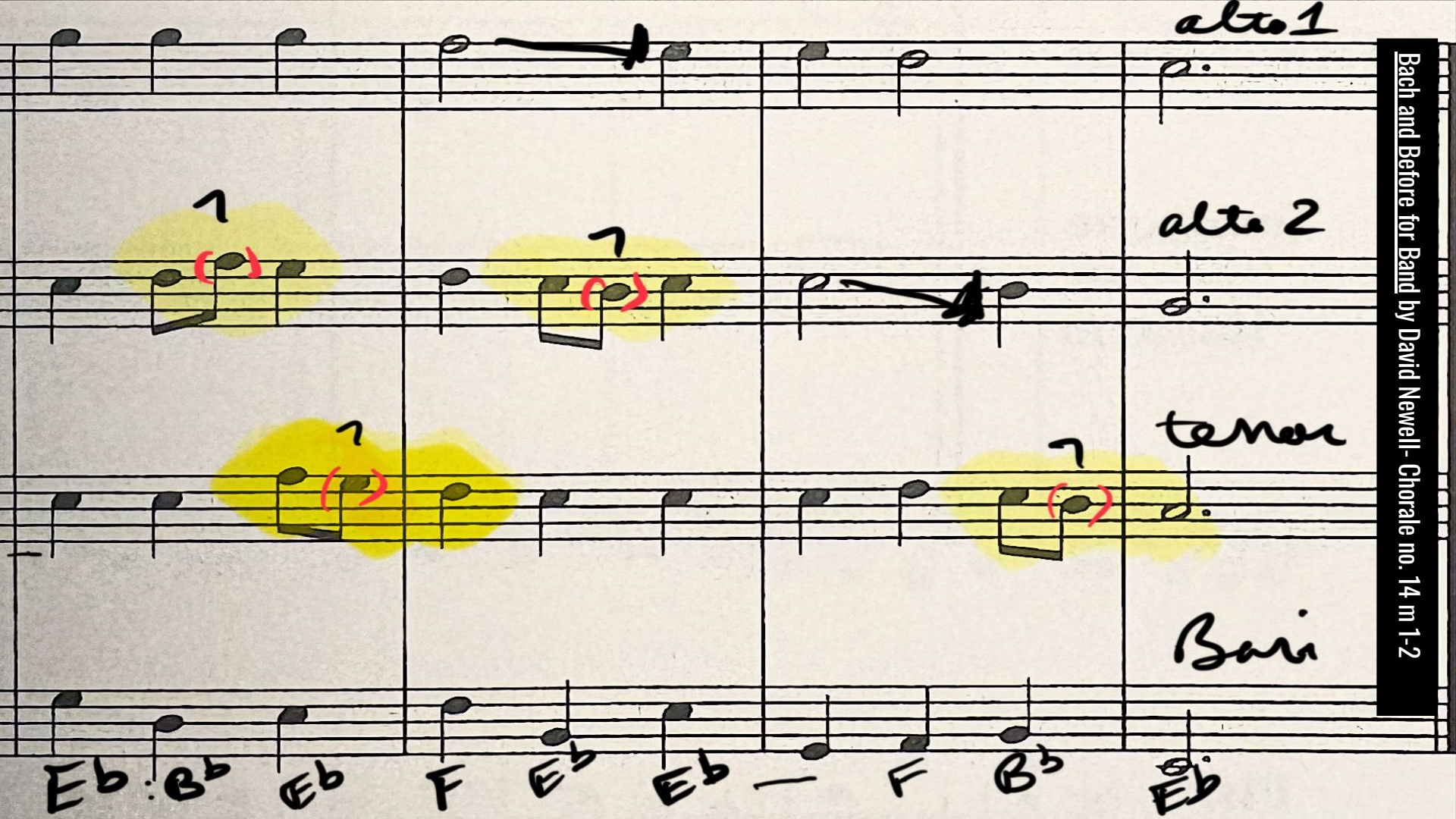

Prelude and Fugue in Bb Major by J.S. Bach arr. Moehlmann (m 9-12)
mf
mf
B.C. clarinets
mf
mf
Saxes
mf C
F
B♭
E♭

3. Non Chord Tones are Hard!

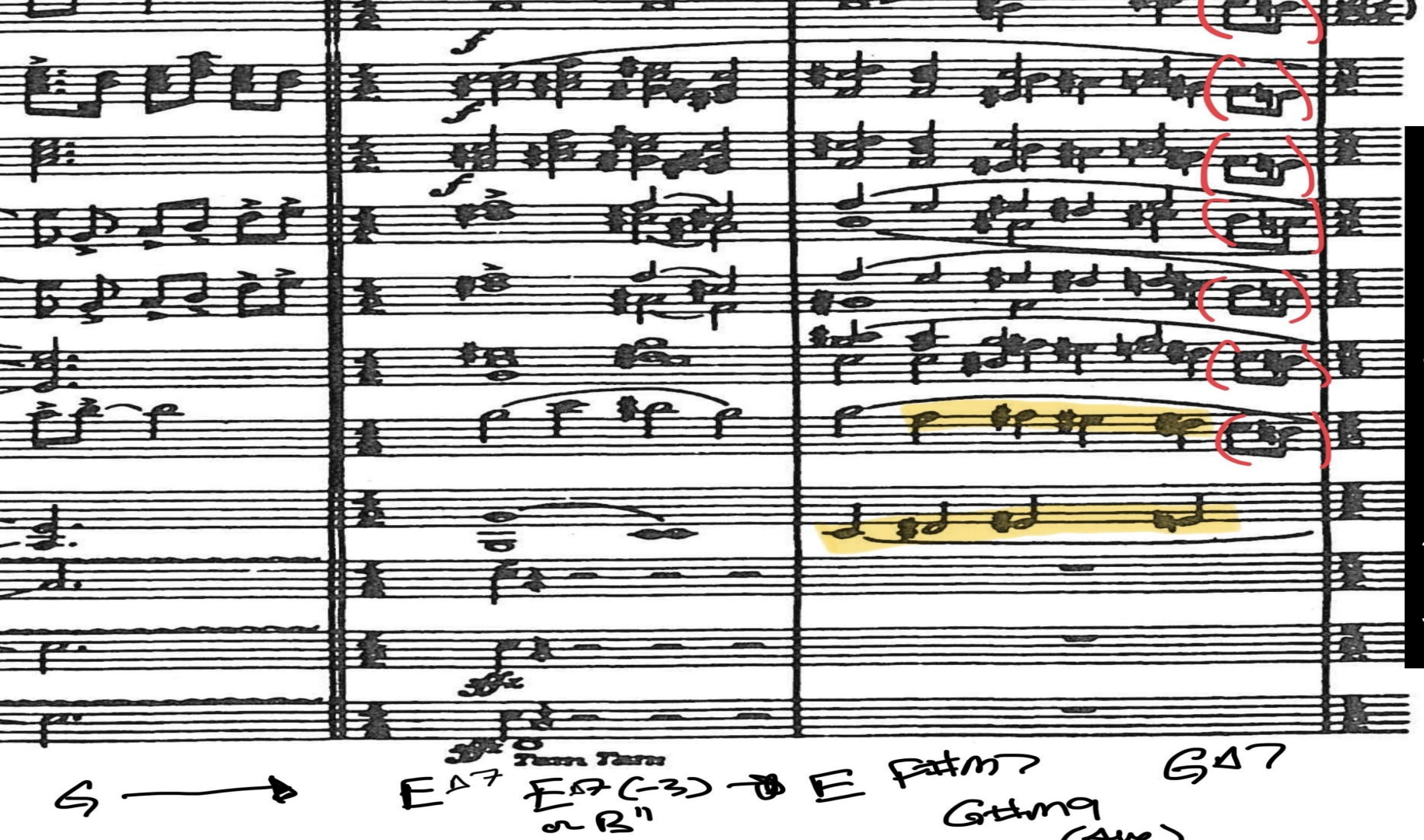
- They just are. Any notes that are not part of the main chord (that you work everyday usually) might not be the hardest when it comes to technique, but your students need direction on what to do with them.
- The further we depart from the fundamental notes we are familiar with, the more you have to rely on the ears of your students and players to be confident and in tune.

3. Non Chord Tones are Hard!

- Take time and isolate the players or instrument groups that have the main chord and slowly add the non chord tone players so they will know who to listen to.
- Have students mark their tuning tendencies on each one of those notes.
- Confidence is key, players need to know to play each note with the confidence to know how they fit into the ensemble.



Bach and Before for Band by David Newell- Chorale no. 14 m 1-2



Chorale and Alleluia by Howard Hanson (R.M. 21)

4. Think Horizontally

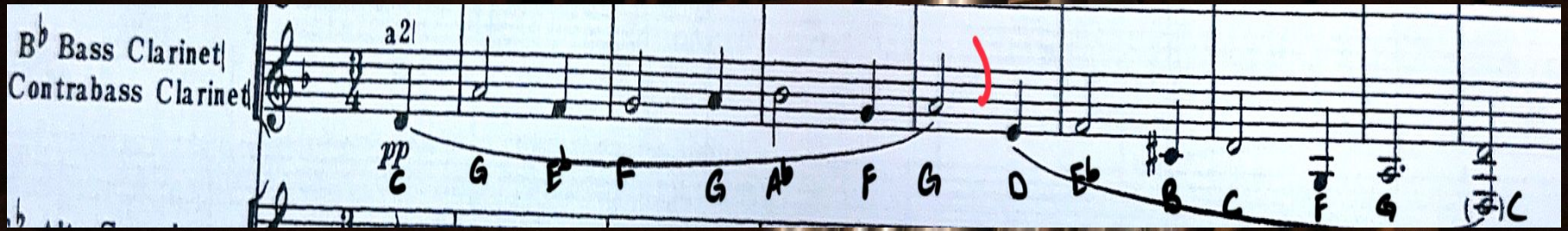
- Not only do we need to think about vertical alignment, but sometimes we need to think about what's going on with the x-axis of the music, the shape of the line.
- Without the ability to naturally crescendo or decrescendo, organists have to rely on ‘agogic’ or time accents for emphasis.

4. Think Horizontally

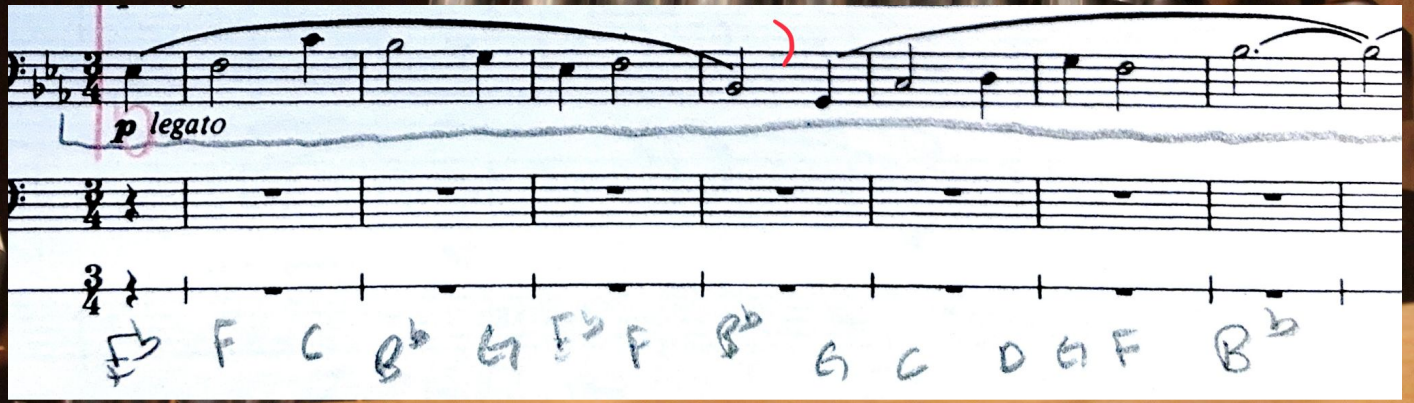
- Each note has the same air, making for a rich full sound no matter how long or brief a note is.
- Whenever appropriate, keep the shape of the line full, constant, and resonant. Shifts in instrumentation and color need to be seamless and full of confidence, just like if you were to switch from one manual to another.

How would the opening statement of Holst's First Suite sound if every note was approached like a singer?

Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor by J.S. Bach arr. Hunsberger (m.1-8)



First Suite in Eb for Military Band I. Chaconne by Holst (m. 1-8)



Conclusions

- Consistent air, like billows or wind chest.
- Seamless color shifts. (Instrumentation)
- Room for greater interpretation of dynamics.
- Importance of Inner parts. All notes sound at the same volume on the keyboard.
- Exposure to Great Literature. (historic)

Resources

- Bach and Before for Band by David Newell: Four Part Chorales from the 16th, 7th, and 18th Centuries, KJOS
- *Three Ayres from Gloucester* by Hugh M. Stuart, Hal Leonard
- *Prelude and Fugue in Bb Major* by J.S. Bach arr. Moehlemann, Alfred
- *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor* by J.S. Bach arr. Hunsberger, G. Schrimer, Inc.
- *First Suite in Eb for Military Band* by Gustav Holst ed. Sir Colin Matthews, Boosey & Hawkes
- *Chorale and Alleluia* by Howard Hanson, Carl Fisher
- *Illumination* by David Maslanka, Maslanka Press