A Sound Only a Mother Could Love …

… developing a mature young band sound.

Presented by Douglas Akey

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Getting a Mature Young Band Sound

MAXIM: A Mature Sound is not related to the performer's age.

I. Why is a Mature Sound important?

A. Aesthetic development

1. reveals the composer's intent
2. music becomes its own reward

B. Secondary benefits

1. to impress:
   a. parents
   b. administrators
   c. colleagues
2. earn high ratings at festivals
3. improve working conditions

II. Five Steps to a Mature Young Band Sound

A. Technical Accuracy

1. use scale study
   a. teach basic fingerings
   b. teach appropriate use of chromatic/alternate fingerings
   c. develop fingering patterns
2. select music at the appropriate level of difficulty
3. use a unisonal technique book to develop abilities on the "neglected" instruments

B. Rhythmic Accuracy

1. establish steady time
   a. encourage mental subdivision
   b. provide an audible subdivision when needed
   c. do "hand-off" exercises
2. develop reading accuracy
   a. use rhythm studies
   b. analyze rhythm/counting
   c. practice rhythm recognition
3. improve synchronization throughout the band
   a. limit foot tapping
   b. emphasize active listening skills
   c. minimize visual cues
      i. conduct less
      ii. reverse the band set-up occasionally

C. Tone Production

1. disregard tuning almost completely (at first)
2. insist on correct, upright posture
   a. head, spine and bottom in straight vertical alignment
   b. explain the reasoning behind this requirement

c. motivational techniques
    i. give weekly grade on posture
    ii. dismiss the class one section at a time from best posture to poorest
    iii. make correct posture a prerequisite for advancement to next group
    iv. create your own motivational techniques

3. teach correct breathing
    a. disregard written dynamics until correct breathing is a habit
    b. use a full, forte sound at all times
    c. make breathing deeply a habit
    d. work to keep the air pressure steady
    e. work to keep embouchure set
        i. regardless of pitch
        ii. regardless of air pressure

D. Intonation

1. tune instruments visually (verifying tone production)
2. demonstrate intonation beats and how to eliminate them
3. help the students develop a list of pitch adjustment techniques (see: How Students Control Tuning)
4. follow a sequence for attention to tuning detail in music
    a. tune unison notes within sections
    b. tune unison notes between sections
    c. teach students the "bad" notes and how to compensate
    d. tune perfect intervals within and between sections
    e. teach students to favor major/minor intervals to achieve "just" intonation
5. address equipment issues (within the limitations of your situation)
    a. reed selection
        i. strength
        ii. brand
    b. mouthpieces
    c. instruments

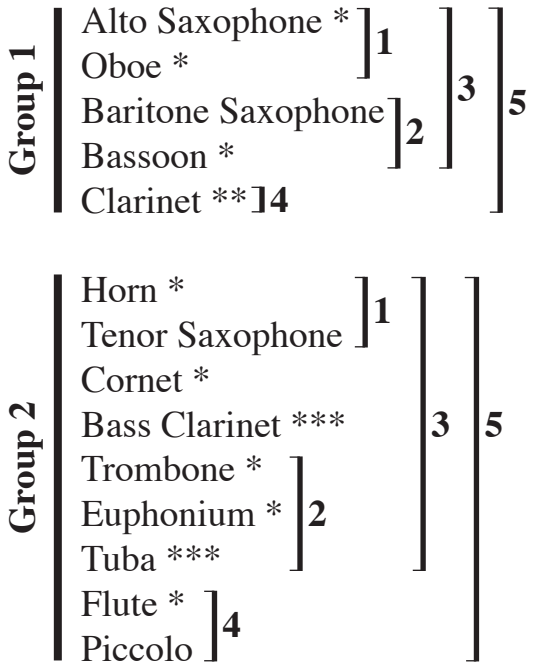
E. Musicality

1. Balance
    a. equal balance (Chorale)
    b. priority balance (Orchestral)
        i. bring melodic parts to the fore
        ii. bring moving lines to the fore
2. Articulation/Style
    a. start of notes
        i. force of air pressure
        ii. tongue placement and motion
    b. middle of notes – contour/shape controlled by air pressure/speed
    c. end of notes – release/shape controlled by air pressure/speed
3. musical direction
    a. constant dynamics (***p***, ***mf***, ***f***, etc.)
    b. gradual dynamic change (*cresc.*, *dim.*, etc.)
4. phrasing

Tuning Sequence

1. Play through a simple 4-part chorale.

2. Tune the sections in the following order using a visual tuning device.



* • After individual tuning, listen to the students in pairs and make adjustments.
• Have the entire section play the tuning pitches.

** • After tuning each row, listen to the students in pairs and make adjustments.
• Have the entire row play the tuning pitches.
• When all rows are done, have the whole section play the tuning pitches together.

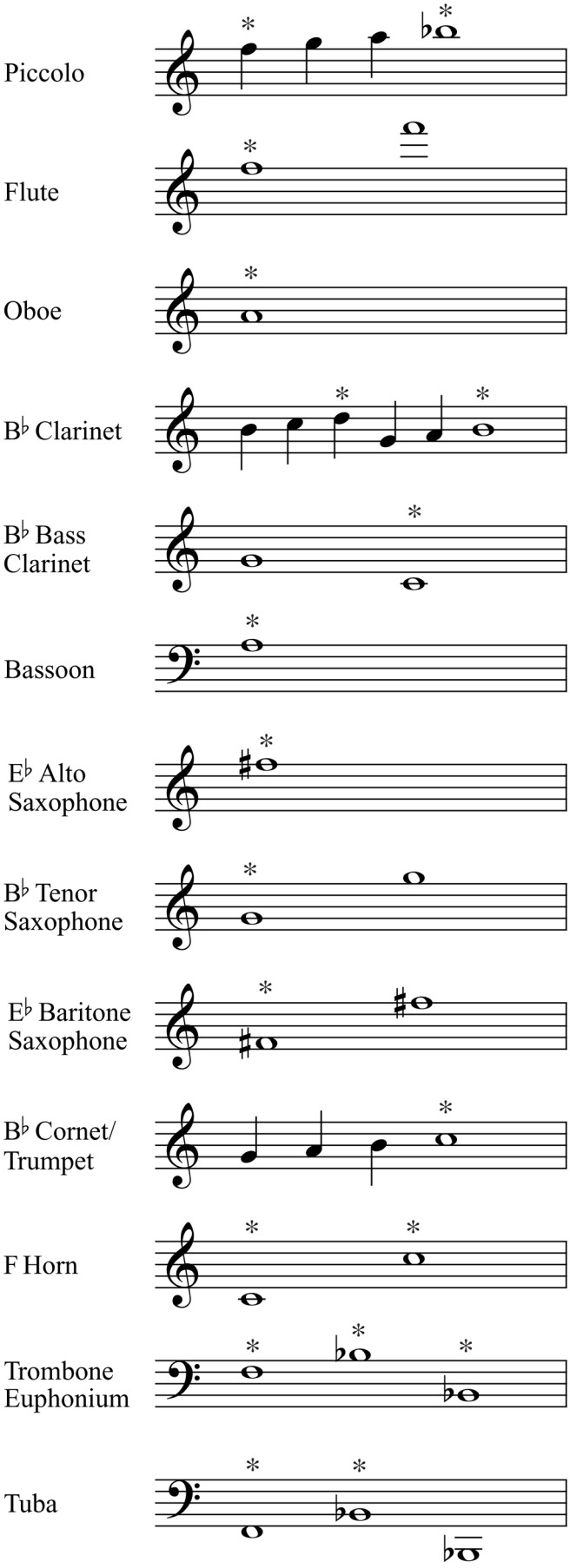
*** • Listen to the section together to determine if individual tuning will be required.

3. Have the sections play their combined tuning pitches in the groupings and order indicated above in order to assess the tuning (refer to Tuning Pitch Combinations). Retune as needed.

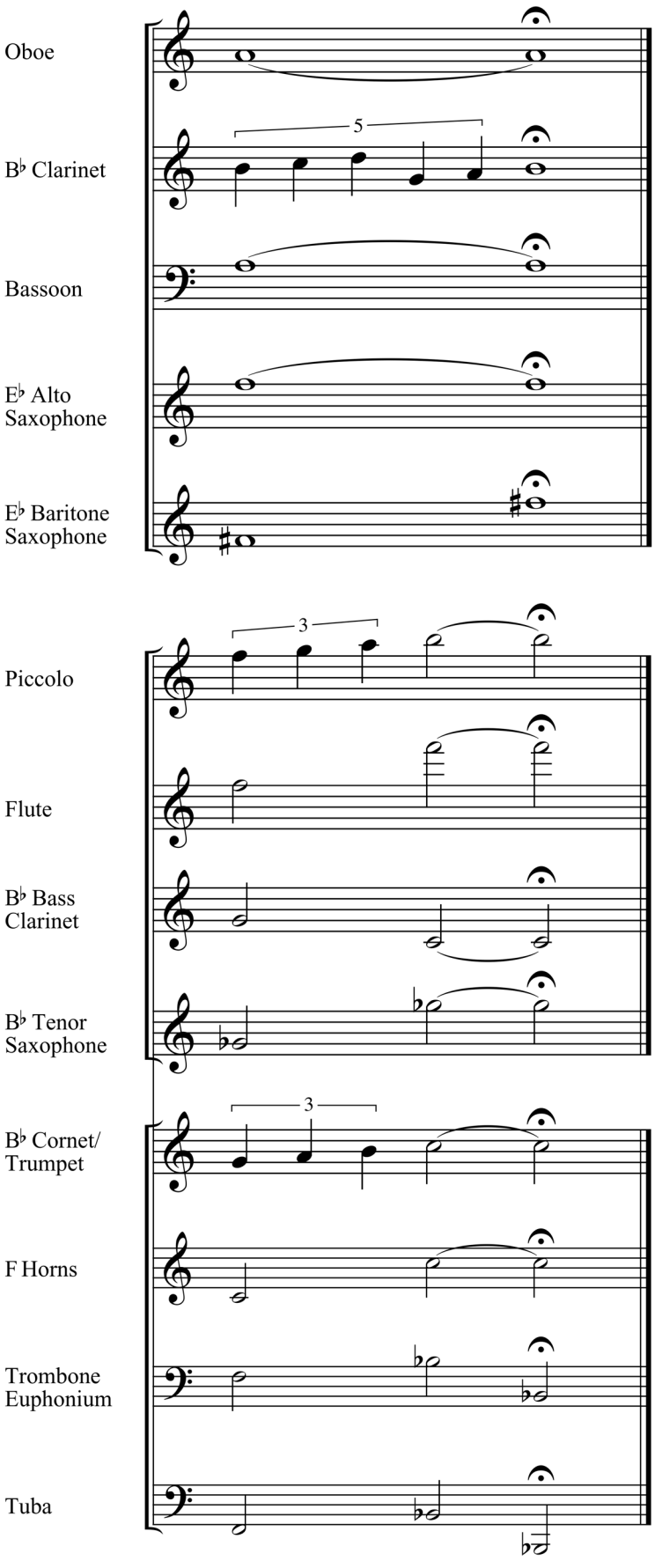
4. Play through the simple 4-part chorale again in order to assess the tuning. If tuning issues persist, play the voices of the chorale (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) separately so the students can better hear the tuning and make adjustments as they play (see: How Student Control Tuning).

Tuning Pitches

* indicates Primary Tuning Pitches



Tuning Pitch Combinations



How Students Control Tuning

ALL INSTRUMENTS (general)

↑
- make the air column shorter (push the tuning mechanism in)

↓
- make the air column longer (pull the tuning mechanism out)

FLUTE

↑
- use more air
- roll flute out
- direct air upward

↓
- use less air
- roll flute in
- direct air downward

SINGLE REEDS

↑
- use less air
- put more lower lip pressure on the reed

↓
- use more air
- put less pressure on the reed by dropping jaw

DOUBLE REEDS

↑
- use less air
- put more lower lip pressure on the reed
- put more reed into the mouth
- use a shorter bocal (bassoon)

↓
- use more air
- put less pressure on the reed by dropping jaw
- put less reed into the mouth
- use a longer bocal

BRASS (general)

↑
- use more air
- reduce the size of the embouchure aperture (tighten embouchure)

↓
- use less air
- increase the size of the embouchure aperture (loosen embouchure)

HORN (additional)

↑
- open hand in bell

↓
- close hand in bell

TROMBONE (additional)

↑
- make the air column shorter (pull slide in)

↓
- make the air column longer (push slide out)

BATTERY

↑
- increase head tension (tighten lugs) (push toe of timpani pedal down)

↓
- decrease head tension (loosen lugs) (push heel of timpani pedal down)