

Difficult Trombone Passages In Standard Band Repertoire

by Larry B. Campbell

In the band repertoire there are a number of perplexing passages that often trip up inexperienced trombonists. Here are some suggestions that may help band directors who have little experience playing the trombone.

Grade 3 and 4 Compositions

In *Second American Folk Rhapsody* (Boosey & Hawkes) by Claire Grundman the glissando passage seems easy enough at first glance. The first and second parts should adjust the starting position to correct the intonation. In the first part the fourth position D1 should be lowered a half inch, while the second trombonist should raise the fifth-position B \flat by bringing the slide in half an inch. Try to make sure that students do not reach further than a half inch.

Down a Country Lane (Boosey & Hawkes) by Aaron Copland, *Creed* (General Words and Music, Co.), by William Hines, and *An Irish Rhapsody* (Boosey & Hawkes) by Clare Grundman are full of difficult legato tonguing passages. In the Copland the trombones play a legato crescendo to *ff* six measures before \square .

Musical notation for *Down a Country Lane* showing a legato crescendo. The first staff has a dynamic marking of *mf* with a crescendo hairpin leading to *f*. The second staff has a dynamic marking of *f* with a crescendo hairpin leading to *ff*. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes.

Musical notation for *Creed* starting with the tempo marking *Allegro moderato* and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes.

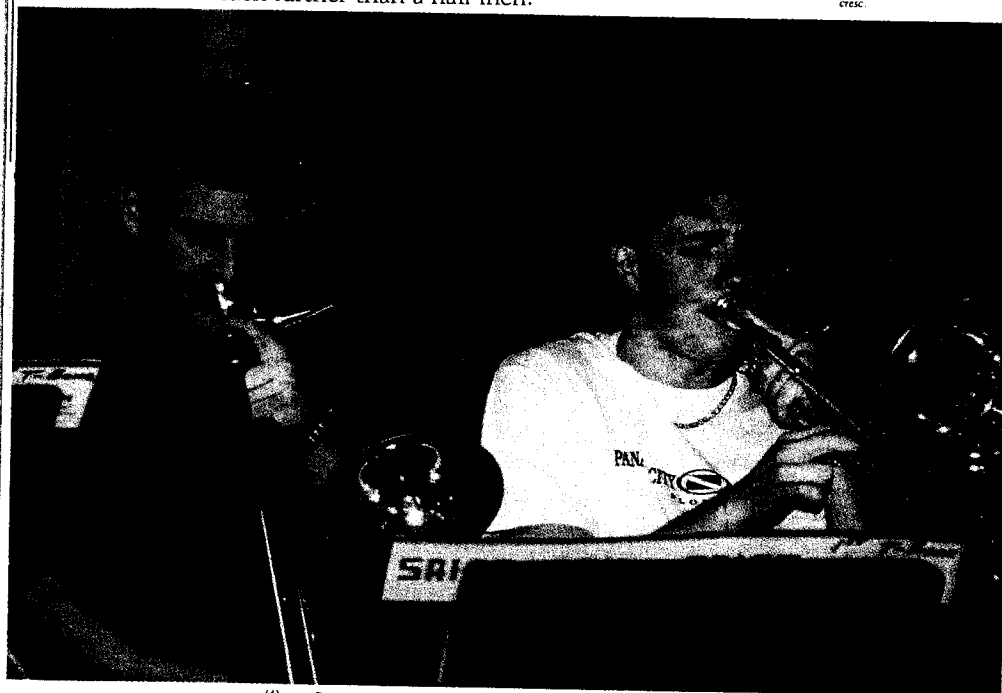
Musical notation for *An Irish Rhapsody* with dynamic markings of *> mf* and *<*. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes.

Musical notation for *THE MOREEN (The Minstrel Boy)* with a dynamic marking of *f*. The notation includes slurs and accents over the notes.

In such cases students should take full, relaxed breaths and avoid tensing the shoulders. Too much air force and a tight tongue will cause an explosive attack, which can be prevented by using the syllables *tu* or *tah* and later *du* or *dah*. It is easier for students to take relaxed breaths if they imagine blowing a feather out of the hand. The tongue should lightly interrupt the air stream just long enough for a smoothly-shaped legato phrase played with a rich, singing tone. The breath should not be held before playing each note.

The last note of the phrase is released when the air flow stops and should not be abruptly tongued. It is best for students to work on accuracy slowly before playing the passages at tempo. Regardless of the player's ability level, repetition will improve the phrase.

All trombonists should be able to play fast passages of short, detached notes. The opening of the third movement of Telemann's *Baroque Suite*, arranged by William Hill, and measure 28 of Susato's *Renaissance Suite*, arranged by Jim Curnow, are excellent examples of rapid, loud tonguing technique.



The trombones have a similar pattern in the Hines in measures 10-15.

Musical notation for the Hines passage showing a pattern of notes with slurs and accents. The dynamic marking is *f*.

Musical notation for the Hines passage showing a pattern of notes with slurs and accents. The dynamic marking is *f* leading to *ff*.

An Irish Rhapsody begins with accented *ff* notes followed by legato passages at measure 9.

Musical notation for *Second American Folk Rhapsody* showing a glissando passage. The notation includes slurs, accents, and dynamic markings of *f* and *ff*. The passage is marked with 'Solo' and numbered measures (4), (5), and (6).

Musical notation for the opening of Telemann's *Baroque Suite* showing rapid, detached notes. The dynamic marking is *f* leading to *f~p*.

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To show the beauty and grace of late Renaissance and Baroque music breathing should be deep and relaxed. The first trombonist in the Telemann should not press the horn into the lips when playing the high G to avoid excess pressure. With lip corners tight, the tongue should hit the top of the upper teeth on the Fs and Gs. For low F the tongue of the bass trombonist should hit the bottom of the upper teeth. The slight difference in tongue placement will help students to obtain the correct aperture throughout the range of the horn.

Grade 5 and 6 Compositions

Lincolnshire Posy by Percy Grainger is one of the finest works in band literature, and although it is not terribly difficult the trombones have some deceptive passages. In the second movement there is a sustained *ff* section in D^b major at measure 34. The decrescendo to *pp* in measure 35 on ascending quarter-note triplets to a high A^b on the first two beats can be tricky.

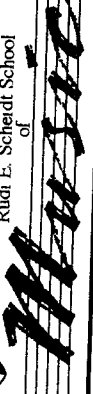


The player should take deep relaxed breaths and use air pressure rather than lip pressure to smoothly reach the high A^b. To practice evenness in the quarter-note triplets over the two beats students can clap the beats with the metronome while counting the three sets of triplet quarter notes.

The opening of the third movement, has a section of mixed-meter rests, which can be difficult to count. The easiest way to keep track of the rests is to count the eighth notes in each measure. The director should clearly differentiate between beat patterns with two and three eighth notes in $\frac{3}{8}$ meter.

Another difficult counting excerpt is from the third movement of Gustav Holst's *Second Suite for Military Band* in F Major: "Song of the Blacksmith". The final two lines of the trombone part have a consistent mix of on-the-beat and off-the-beat notes. Students should count the eighth notes to prevent early entrances on the quarter-note rests in the final two measures.

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Tapping the feet and counting aloud will help the entire band to subdivide the beat.



Incantation and Dance by John Barnes Chance (Boosey & Hawkes) poses another problem for the trombones: playing in the pedal range. Most problems in this excerpt are a result of tension and can be prevented by keeping the lips and cheeks relaxed, the teeth aligned, and the jaw dropped slightly.



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Larry B. Campbell received a bachelor's degree in performance from the Eastman School of Music and a master's degree in education from Southwest Texas State University. He has played trombone, euphonium, tenor tuba, and bass trumpet in many ensembles, including the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra, Eastman Wind Ensemble, U.S. Coast Guard Band, San Antonio Symphony Orchestra, New Orleans Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony. He teaches trombone and graduate euphonium at Louisiana State University and presents concerts and clinics throughout the United States, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan.

When students look down, they tend to open the lips into a better position with corners pulled towards the mouthpiece. Try to position the mouthpiece high on the lips where it almost touches the nose for appropriate upper lip vibration. Because it takes more air to produce pedal notes than pitches in any other register, a full breath and strong support are essential. Working on the embouchure in the pedal range builds muscles that help through the entire range of the instrument for both bass and tenor trombone students.

The range between low E and pedal B \flat is one of the most misunderstood and poorly-taught aspects of trombone playing. In the above example the bass trombone holds D \flat for ten beats before going to C \flat , B \flat , and pedal A.

However, a bass trombone with a single rotor cannot play C \flat because using an F attachment results in only six positions, not seven. The slide positions are also different when an F attachment is used. First position is still played with the slide all the way in but now sounds as F. Low E is still second position, but the player should add three quarters of an inch to second position to play in tune. Third-position E \flat with the F attachment should be an inch above the normal fourth position; D, normally played in fourth position, becomes fifth position; low D \flat is played in a slightly lowered sixth position; and for low C the slide should be in an extended seventh position. At this point the slide is almost off the end and low C \flat is not possible.

The player should use a double-triggered bass trombone for low C \flat . These come in two versions: B \flat , F, and E \flat or B \flat , F, and D, the latter of which is more common today. Both have two triggers, one in F and a second in E \flat or D. With an E \flat trigger the third-position notes with the F trigger depressed move to first position with both triggers. With a D trigger the fourth position notes with the F trigger depressed move to first position with both triggers.

Both trombones can play low C \flat easily and have independent rotors or triggers. The original bass trombones had a double trigger that was in F and only worked with both trigger depressed at the same time. These instruments were excellent although difficult to manage.

Incantation and Dance also poses rhythmic difficulties. Quarter-note subdivisions will make the passage in measures 91-94 easier. The bass trombonist should count carefully to play the low D in each measure at the appropriate time. The ability to keep a steady beat is necessary for such passages.

Four Scottish Dances by Malcolm Arnold, arranged by John Paynter (Carl Fischer) calls for multiple-tonguing, which occurs more often in music for valved or keyed instruments but is sometimes written in trombone part.

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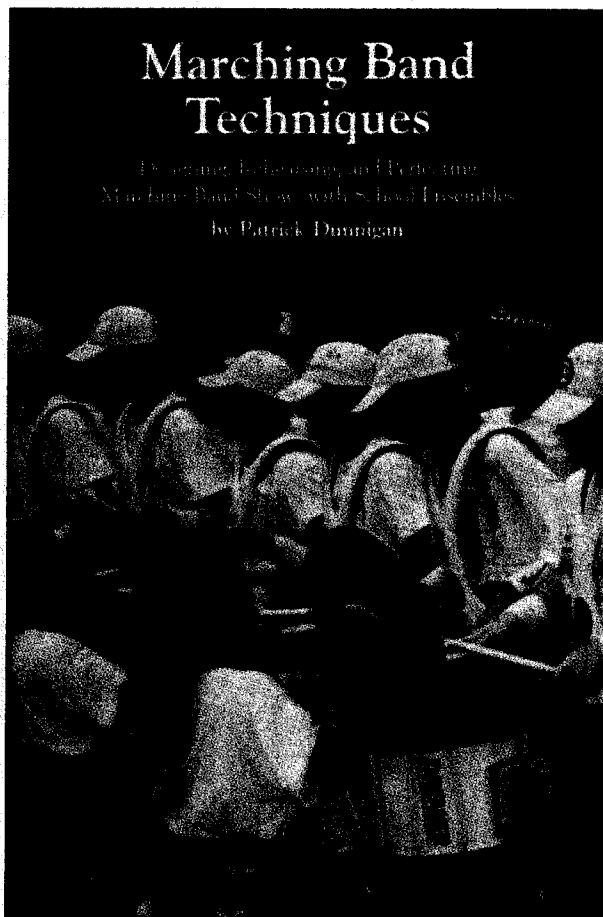
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Rehearsal marking **C** of the first movement has difficult, triple-tongued passages. Triple-tonguing can be played three ways: *tu-ku-tu-tu-ku-tu*; *tu-ku-tu-ku-tu-ku*; and *tu-tu-ku-tu-tu-ku*. All produce good results, but the last one is most effective. The syllables *tu* and *ku* should be practiced on repeated notes, scales, and chords until it becomes impossible to hear which one is used. The tip of the tongue moves up for *tu* while the back of the tongue moves up for *ku* for good multiple-tonguing. Once the *ku* syllable is clean, the performer will be able to play multiple-tonguings faster and more accurately. *Complete Method for Trombone* by Arban teaches this technique effectively.

At rehearsal marking **E** in the last movement of the *Four Scottish Dances*, the first and second trombones play glissandos in minor thirds. This is another example of how even slight differences in slide positions affect the tuning.



In the first trombone part the E to G have to be played from sharp fifth to sharp second position while the second trombones will go from flat fifth to flat second position because out-of-tune partials are used in both parts. Students should first tune the E and C# and then slowly glissando up to the G and E.

Whatever obstacles they encounter, students who listen to what they play and who try to play their best will realize that good performing can bring fun and pleasure. □