



Euphonium Technique

by Brian L. Bowman

Brian Bowman's long career as a euphonium soloist began in a grade school band his father conducted. Later he earned solo positions with both the Navy and Air Force Bands and promoted the euphonium through performances and master classes. After 21 years with service bands, he became chairman of the wind department at Duquesne University.

The characteristic euphonium timbre, like the tone quality of any wind instrument, has essential components. Pitch affects every aspect of the sound: with a sharp pitch, the tone is often strident; when flat, the tone becomes flabby, hollow, and without substance. Next in importance after pitch is the center or core of the sound; without a feeling of center the pitch just waffles around. Think of a good tone as a doughnut with a rich cream filling rather than one with a hole in the center. Using objects or shapes, such as round or oval, to visualize the sound helps many players stimulate the correct tone.

Next comes tone clarity. The euphonium sound should not have extra noise from a buzz or air leak. Consistency is important; players should strive for the same color and tone quality on every note, and both derive from air support. With good breath control the sound has a lifted rather than a pushed quality. A steady air flow will keep the sound moving so it doesn't simply pop out of the bell.

Students can solve most problems by focusing on pitch, tone, and air support. It is difficult to describe beautiful sound. William Revelli asks how anyone can describe the fragrance of a rose without having smelled it; the same applies to developing a good sound. A pinched tone indicates tightness; students should strive to play with an open throat and a round sound. There are many little tricks to teach students to play with a good sound. Instead of simply telling them to play with a better sound, describe the sound as vividly as possible. When the tone is squashed like a flat piece of paper suggest one that is round like an apple.

The secret to progress is for students to learn how to listen to themselves. I find that the most successful teaching occurs after students realize that they are not playing as well as they have in the past. This indicates that they are both listening and have raised expectations. This is exciting for me to hear because it indicates that students are making progress. It is important for students to become dissatisfied with their playing without being discouraged. Dissatisfaction often leads to

perseverance while discouraged students often quit trying or stop playing the instrument. It is a hard thing for the fragile ego of a musician to handle failure or criticism. A wise man once said that criticism should be examined in two lights: if it is true, then take it; if it is untrue, then forget about it. It is important for musicians to develop sensitivity in their playing as well as a tough enough skin to accept criticism and turn it to their benefit.

Several method books develop musical skills. Walter Beeler's book I for baritone and euphonium is excellent for beginning students but is better for private lessons than with a class. With a good mix of exercises the book will prepare students for volume one of the Rubank Advanced Method for trombone/baritone, which moves students into scales, melodic studies, etudes, duets, and solos. From there I recommend the second Rubank volume or the Arban book.

The Arban book is excellent for developing clarity, speed, and style of articulation. Exercise 11 is good for clarity and consistency and I use exercises 18-36 in the syncopation section to work on tonguing and speed. Rafael Mendez recorded these exercises with the epitome of style and clarity. These sections are a good review for professional players. Go right into the scales, playing the majors as written with attention to clean, clear articulation. Unfortunately there is only a small section on minor keys, but students should transpose exercises into the obscure keys, such as B major instead of B \flat major. Using the exercise 4 pattern on ascending and descending scales develops fingering patterns. Practice with a metronome in all keys, gradually increasing the tempo.

The chromatic studies are important, especially the chromatic triplets, and the interval studies on page 126 are especially valuable. Use the chord and other studies in the printed sequence. Unfortunately the bass clef edition does not have the melodic studies found in the treble clef book; the Concone studies or Rochut melodious etudes make a good substitute. Concone seems to work well for younger students and the Rochut for more advanced study.

Multiple tonguing is the next area to develop; the secret to triple tonguing is the enunciation of

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the *ku* or *gu* syllable. It is effective to practice this syllable fortissimo; this is harder but gives the breath support to make the syllables equal. Have students repeat the *ku* syllable slowly and evenly, about one per second at a forte dynamic and until the tonguing is clean. Then use one of Robert Lambert's tricks, changing the syllables to *tah - tak - kah*. Adding a *k* to the end of the second syllable cocks the tongue for the third one. Practice this pattern slowly for precise rhythm and a good tone before speeding it up. At a faster tempo it is normal to slip into the harder uvular sound, *dah - dah - ga*, which uses the middle of the tongue and produces a very firm sound. Arthur Layman, the famous euphonium soloist with the Marine Band, said the secret to learning triple tonguing is practicing it two hours a day for two years. This statement is haunting and true; because triple tonguing is the first skill that slips after skipping a day of practice: the speed and clarity of the articulation erodes that quickly.

Although Arban's exercises are terrific, the best incentive is to play a solo that uses multiple tonguing. When I was a freshman in high school, my father assigned me *Bride of the Waves* by Herbert L. Clarke. I couldn't triple tongue for beans so I walked around school muttering the syllables. People probably thought I was a little crazy, but I learned to enunciate syllables.

Vocalizing is a good way to practice multiple tonguing, saying the syllables and then working with the mouthpiece alone. I carry a mouthpiece in my car and practice multiple tonguing while driving to and from work. This is otherwise wasted time and good tonguing only results from extensive practice.

Students should also work to expand their playing range. At one time the euphonium range extended only to the C#5 in *Morceau Symphonique*, but now such pieces as the Curnow *Symphonic Variants* end on F5 after 18 minutes of playing. The upper range develops with coordinated breath and embouchure control.

After acquiring a solid midrange and a stable embouchure, approach the upper range by playing step-wise or intervals beginning on G3 (1 & 2). Play one octave up and back, slurring an arpeggio in quarter notes, holding the upper note. Move in half steps up to Bb, when you reach G, add one note at a time up to F.

Leonard Falcone devised another valuable exercise that begins as softly as possible on F4 with a crescendo and decrescendo, then slurring an arpeggio down two octaves and back to the F. Take the horn away from the lips and start again up one half step, trying to go as high as possible, resting between arpeggios. Most students cannot make any crescendo or decrescendo initially but the effort presents a different approach to the high range. It is easier to play high notes softly, but pouring more air into the instrument develops muscle strength and the arpeggio down supplies flexibility, relaxation, and bridges the gap between the upper and lower embouchure.

Over a few months students can expand their range by three half-steps with patience if the exercises are not overdone. Frequent rest is important in high range work because muscle tissue is torn down and needs time to rebuild. Donald Rheinhardt taught students to hold a pencil in the center of the embouchure to strengthen the muscles. One student thought that if a pencil is good, a

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drum stick would be better, and his embouchure became so stiff and muscle-bound that he couldn't play a note. Remember the old adage: a little medicine will cure and a lot may kill, especially in the upper range.

Students should make octave transpositions and change clefs when working on range exercises because the euphonium repertoire includes bass, B \flat and C treble, alto, and tenor clefs. Accomplished players can learn F transposition to add horn music to the literature. My philosophy in learning clefs is to think of the pitch as it sounds. In B \flat treble clef a C equals a B \flat in bass clef. For any transposition think of the sound of the pitch.

The secret to a lightning quick technique is using a metronome and practicing slowly. Musicians can learn a work only through painfully slow practice that includes listening for tone quality, intonation, clarity of articulation, and absolute rhythm. Set a metronome on 60 and move it up one click when you can play the exercise perfectly. This methodical pace eventually develops into clean, clear articulation, clarity of fingering, tone quality, accurate intonation, and musicality.

The first thing students should do with a new exercise is to examine it without the instrument; sing it or sit at a piano and learn it without the instrument. Then play it at a slow tempo from beginning to end, without stopping or making mistakes. Mistakes indicate the tempo is too fast. Students should gradually move the metronome speed up, so by the end of the week they have played the exercise many times without mistakes. Playing at tempo too soon in the process assures making — and learning — generations of mistakes. I use this formula in preparing for auditions or performances.

Slow practice develops phenomenal control of rhythm, tone quality, and articulation and creates a feeling of success. Many young students lack the discipline for slow practice, but those who develop patience will build solid rhythm. Playing in rhythm with a metronome can be frustrating because the metronome sometimes seems irregular and contrary to the student's sense of rhythm. Even after students think they have developed the ability to play perfectly in time, they should periodically check themselves against a metronome. Slow practice takes a great deal of time but pays big dividends.

Many students don't practice, they rehearse or play. According to Harvey Phillips, practice is working on the things you cannot do. Progress does not result from playing the things you have learned or the tunes you like. Performing offers the challenge of a higher level of concentration; practice sessions should reflect that level, but will never provide quite the same burst of adrenaline. I encourage students to perform as frequently as possible in any situation, whether for a ladies-aid socie-

ty or for friends. I wish all practice rooms had wallpaper depicting a cheering crowd at Carnegie Hall. It would change practice habits and have a positive affect on progress. Music is not a solitary art, but one of communicating with other human beings.

In performance the physical skills produce the sounds, and musical skills convey the emotions and ideas. Too often lessons focus on the physical skills without applying them to the art of communicating with listeners. A varied schedule of practice and performances will have tremendous benefits in preparing students for auditions. Playing with several bands will develop sightreading skills and the ability to scan a work for its style and technical challenges. One secret to good sightreading is knowing so much literature that there is little that is unfamiliar. Can you imagine a violinist at an orchestral audition not being prepared to sightread a symphony by Beethoven or Brahms? Most students who win auditions prepare by learning the literature. Many school bands do not play the finale of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony or transcriptions in which the euphonium plays demanding cello parts.

Students interested in a military career should compile a book of excerpts because 90% of these auditions are centered on sightreading. For many orchestral instruments the excerpts to be studied are taken directly from the original part, but that is not the case for euphonium. There used to be a series of excerpt books called the *Baritonist's Studio*, but it has been out of print for the past 50 years. Whaling Publishing now offers a new book of excerpts currently used by military bands, but it does not include everything. Players can get ahead by compiling collections of excerpts that might in-





clude the demanding euphonium solo in Schoenberg's *Theme and Variations*, the solos from the Holst suites, the Hunsberger arrangement of Shostakovich's *Festive Overture*, the *Pineapple Poll*, transcriptions of overtures by Rossini or Von Suppé, and Sousa marches. It is amazing how poorly many musicians play the challenging euphonium part in *Stars and Stripes Forever*. Listen to recordings until many of these works become familiar.

When I was on the audition committee of the Air Force Band, we listened for what type of sound candidates produced and whether it would fit with the band's concept of tone. Equally important was the candidate's ability to play in tune and with rhythmic stability. At auditions, there is a semi-final round for the top four or five players; here flexibility makes the difference. Candidates may be asked to play an excerpt a little differently; often I played along to see if they could match intonation, style, and rhythm. There are many extremes in auditions, and some players who perform a beautiful legato Rochut etude cannot manage something with articulation, while others play through an old-style solo at 90 miles an hour with the most terrible sound and intonation imaginable. The ultimate goal should be to mesh melodic and technical abilities.

My mother often said that the least someone can do is to look their best. Auditions are not always held behind a screen because mistakes have been made by hiring people solely on the basis of their playing skills. Be prepared to stare the judges in the eye, in effect saying that this is your best effort. Confidence comes from preparation and experience, and most players who win auditions exhibit confident attitudes.

I also recommend purchasing the best equipment possible. As the saying goes, a poor workman blames his tools. Stay away from shallow cup mouthpieces and ones that are too wide. Instruments are expensive but there is a wide variety available; at least five companies make four-valve compensating euphoniums for professionals and there are better quality student models patterned after professional models. Unfortunately, the compensating euphoniums are made overseas, and prices fluctuate with exchange rates. American manufacturers should be challenged to come up with a professional quality euphonium.

Career changes often happen unexpectedly so never become complacent. When I left the Navy Band to join the Bicentennial Band as the soloist, I wasn't sure that was a good move, but it turned out to be an outstanding opportunity. I regard my new teaching career the same way and hope that it will allow me to do more for the euphonium. The military bands were a wonderful opportunity and a good vehicle for developing an awareness of euphonium but the instrument has capacity beyond

that framework.

My goal is to build greater respect and understanding of the euphonium. Many students and directors do not understand what a true euphonium sound is and try to imitate a trombone or tuba. The euphonium has a recognition problem and is commonly confused with the baritone horn. They are similar instruments, and I am not offended by nomenclature but prefer the word euphonium because it is never mistaken for another instrument. When I played for women's clubs as a youngster, they would announce me as a baritone soloist. Invariably some little lady would be disappointed because she thought I was going to sing. The word euphonium comes from the Greek "well-sounding" and should inspire players to create better sounds.

I want to work with more orchestras and have performed concertos by Jan Bach, Anthony Vazana, and Trevor Madsen with symphonies in Washington, D.C., Kentucky, Japan, and Paris. I encourage incorporating the euphonium into brass chamber music. At one time the brass quartet using a euphonium was popular, and a resurgence of these small groups could boost the instrument's popularity as would integration into large brass ensembles, such as the Summit Brass.

Euphonium players have more opportunities in jazz since Rich Matteson and Ashley Alexander brought this style into public view. The euphonium is the perfect instrument for incorporating new jazz ideas. What Chuck Mangione did for the flügelhorn, some future players could do for the euphonium.

Now is an exciting time for the euphonium. When I was in college teachers encouraged me to switch to trombone because there was no future in euphonium except in military bands. Unfortunately students still hear that today. If everyone held that philosophy, no one would study music except the few who felt sure of winning auditions for the major symphony orchestras. Students may have to look more diligently for employment but there still are opportunities for well-prepared musicians. Musical skills are important and so is personality. Be an entrepreneur; read bulletin boards; enter the competitions for euphonium that have grown by leaps and bounds. A recent solo competition in Japan had 100 contestants and organizers expect 150 this coming year. Competitions in the United States include the annual Falcone competition in Michigan and a new competition sponsored by the Summit Brass at the Rafael Mendez Brass Institute in Arizona.

The battle for recognition continues. Students should develop as fine musicians who happen to play euphonium, as this in turn will enhance the instrument and create uplifting music for audiences. It always has been the key to success in my life. □

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