

Fast Runs, High Notes, and Mutes, Basic Fare for Euphonium Parts

by Masahito Kuroda

The euphonium parts in band music cover a range of styles, from glorious solos that rise above the accompanying to supporting harmonies an octave above the tubas and fast passages with woodwinds. In troublesome passages many students have problems, especially with intonation, in projecting a resonant sound, and playing wide leaps. The musical excerpts cited here are from *The Band Prescribed Music List* of the University Interscholastic League or from *Teaching Music through Performance in Band*, edited by Richard Miles.

It is typical for young euphonium players to use much tongue and too little air. On the accented, descending line in *Variations of Scarborough Fair* by Calvin Custer (Hal Leonard) there is a tendency to tongue harder to project the accented note, but often it helps if each note is longer and richer and not played with harder tonguing. The tongue should merely clarify each note with a bit more volume, which is produced by using larger quantities of air. Although a shorter note is harder to project, even the 16th note should resonate. What the audience hears is different from what the player hears.



For a full *fff* on eighth notes, it takes even more air to produce the resonance, not harder tonguing.



In the first movement of the *Second Suite in F* by Gustav Holst (Boosey and Hawkes) there is one of the most famous and trickiest of the euphonium solos.

This middle register solo has to project over the trombone and tuba accompaniment. Natural and resonating sound projection with plenty of air is essential. An exercise to increase the air capacity is to inhale fully and to let

the air go without any body tension while exhaling. The key is to keep the process mentally simple. If the arms are raised overhead from the sides while inhaling, students can feel the body expanding. With the index finger on the lips exhale by blowing and feel the air moving past the finger. This focus on how it feels reduces the tension that often results from trying to blow hard. There should be no pause between one inhalation and exhalation and the next. Another exercise is for the

A second problem with this excerpt is the intonation. The 6th partial (F4, E4, and E^b4) on the euphonium tends to be noticeably sharp, which is a problem because the first phrase ends on F. Unfortunately F and E^b are the most common keys in band repertoire, and the euphonium contends with frequent intonation problems. One solution is to slightly open the jaw to lower the pitch. It helps to practice jaw vibrato and get the feel for bending a pitch, but this entails playing the note



student to blow without an instrument or mouthpiece while pretending to play the melody. Another step is to blow and finger the notes on the instrument without producing a sound or using the mouthpiece. The final step is to play the passage on the instrument with full resonance; at this stage students should not lip notes up or down to fine tune. The object of this is to become accustomed to playing with a resonant sound at a full dynamic level without body tension.

slightly off the most efficient center of resonance. To compensate for the drop in volume and sound quality, use more air and practice with a tuner to avoid overadjusting.

Another way to correct pitches is with an alternative fingering, as when the fourth valve is used to play high F, which is normally played open. Young players often comment that an alternate fingering seems awkward or does not feel right, and part of this is the

Masahito Kuroda is instructor of low brass at Northwestern State University. The musical excerpts in this article are selected from the *Band Prescribed Music List* (University Interscholastic league) and *Teaching Music Through Performance in Band*, edited by Richard Miles.



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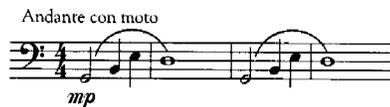
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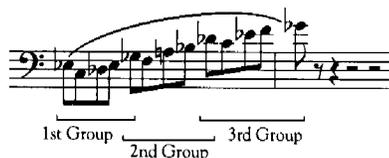
result of using more tubing, which generates a slightly stuffy sound. Again the solution is to use slightly more air so the melody does not lose beauty at the end of the phrase.

In *Toccata for Band* by Frank Erickson (Bourne) there are intonation problems associated with valve combinations.



Generally the more valves that are pressed simultaneously, the sharper the intonation becomes. The B2 in this excerpt is easily played in tune on a four-valve horn, while on a three-valve model the third-valve slide will have to be adjusted. Normally the tuning slide is out about 1/4 inch for the first and second valve combination to be in tune and with the third valve slide extended approximately 1/2 inch, the second and third valve combination is in tune. Here the second and third valves are used in combination only in one note in measure 85, and the third-valve tuning slide can be pulled more than normal to make the B using first, second, and third valves more in tune (pushing it back during the next long rest). This technique can be used for many grade two and three pieces that are written in B \flat or E \flat to make a three-valve instrument play more in tune.

There are difficult and repeated eighth-note runs in *Caccia and Chorale* by Clifton Williams (Barnhouse).



This excerpt is especially tricky on the parallel four-valve instrument that is common in school bands because the pinky finger presses the fourth valve. A common problem on a fast run like this is failing to press each valve completely. The best way to work on a run like this is to break into manageable pieces and gradually put them together. If the entire run is practiced as a unit, it will be difficult to eliminate mistakes. Start practicing five eighth notes at a time and use the fifth note as a bridge to the next group of eighth notes. Feel the valves touch the bottom and move on to the next five notes only when the flow is even. Then put these together as a nine-note run. Repeat this process



until the whole run can be played with perfect clarity.

The fourth movement *The Brisk Young Sailor* from *Lincolnshire Posy* by Percy Grainger/Fennell (Ludwig Music) includes a solo in the middle register that has to project over a thick accompaniment of woodwinds playing sextuplet runs.

Here the euphonium solo expresses the excitement of a sailor who is overjoyed to see his fiancée after his long voyage, and as with all good music making a good performance begins with understanding what the composer wants to express in the written notes. The discussion of sound projection in the Holst suite also applies here. The high E \flat in measure 22 is a sixth partial, which can either be lipped down by dropping the jaw or by using the first and third valve combination to lower the pitch. Unless the tune is kept in mind while playing, it is easy to overshoot the E \flat and hit an F using the same fingering.



Sixth partials are particularly difficult when approached from below or if a phrase begins on the 6th partial note.

In the opening of *Four Scottish Dances* by Malcolm Arnold/Paynter (Carl Fischer) the euphonium approaches the E4 from A3 with a lip slur in *forte*.

The lip slur will take increased air speed, but the E, which has a strong tendency to be sharp, gets overblown and becomes even sharper. The problem is compounded because the passage is played in perfect unison with the French horn. The French horn plays in the comfortable middle register and does not go nearly as sharp as the euphonium. The solution for this problem is to use more air to play the A, which is accented in the music, and to use the leftover air to hit the E instead of increasing the air speed to the E. Play the passage and hold the E and checking the intonation with a tuner.



ff molto marcato

In *Symphony in Bb* by Hindemith the D#4 in the euphonium part is even more exposed because it begins the phrase. One guide to finding the correct pitch is the first clarinet solo entrance on beat one of the measure, which is also D#. If the euphonium player listens to and sings this clarinet note in his head and uses the alternate fingering of first and third valve, if necessary, the intonation will improve.

Recent band compositions include more muted euphonium passages. Dan Welcher uses a muted euphonium effectively in his 1994 work, *Zion* (Presser).



Generally a mute will cause the pitch to be sharp, and this is compounded if the school mute is missing any cork, which results in the mute going too far into the bell and raising the pitch more. Students should check pitch with and without a mute against the tuner and adjust the main tuning slide when playing muted parts, marking on the music where to pull the tuning slide and push back in.

Playing wide intervals is often difficult, and the beautiful countermelody in the middle section of *Colonial Song*

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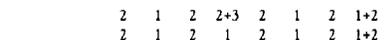
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by Grainger (Schott) has a climactic octave jump that is easy for the euphonium to miss.



It is common for young players to think of an octave jump as very wide, but the key to playing octave jumps is to understand that both notes are technically the same note and they can be played as though they were on the same line instead of thinking that they can be reached only by jumping to a different floor. One of the best exercises on octave jumps is exercise 9 on the chapter "Octave and Tenth" in *Arban's Method for Trombone*, arranged by Randall, edited by Mantia (Carl Fischer). The lower note should be played with enough velocity for good resonance and be used as a springboard to the top note. The concept is not to work hard to hit the high note but to use the air stream to reach for it gently.

The leaps in the famous solo line in *Children's March* by Grainger/Erickson (Schirmer) are even more difficult because the euphonium plays in the high register throughout the piece. The common problem here is that players use poor airflow, a pinched embouchure, and have excessive body tension.

A student who has difficulty reaching the B \flat 4 should play the melody many times an octave lower at a level of at least *forte* to memorize the exact intervals and get the body accustomed to using air freely and then play it as written. Plenty of air should be used on the note before the leap and the embouchure should not be pinched on the high B \flat .

Sometimes it helps to remove body tension in young players if they imagine that they are playing on a smaller, high-pitched euphonium on which the notes above the staff are in the middle register. This way it only takes relaxed playing with a faster air stream to play the passage. *Festive Overture* by Shostakovich/Hunsburger (Hal Leonard) has very fast runs that are only manageable if young euphonium players use alternate fingerings.

Throughout the piece the euphoniums play many fast eighth-note runs with the woodwinds, which is quite common in orchestral transcriptions. For inexperienced brass players the third finger is generally considerably

slower than the first and second fingers. The 2-3 valve combination in the middle of alternating second- and first-valve fingerings is difficult and the solution is to use the first valve to finger G \flat . Playing G \flat 4 with the first valve is not usually recommended because it tends to be flat, but because it is so short a note here it passes by unnoticed. It helps to mark the music as a reminder exactly where the two-one pattern begins and ends and where the chromatic scale pattern starts at the end of the excerpt.

Euphonium Excerpts from the Standard Band and Orchestra Library by Barbara Payne (Cimarron Music) and the *Euphonium Audition Advice* website by David Werden (www.dwerden.com/audition/index.htm) are excellent sources of additional information on this subject. □

Composition Contest

The Metropolitan Wind Symphony announces a composition competition for high school and college students from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The deadline for submissions is May 15, 2003, and the winner will be announced by December 31, 2003. The main prize is \$1,000, and the winning work will be premiered by the Metropolitan Wind Symphony. (617-796-9990; www.msw-boston.org/commission/student-2003.html)

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