The euphonium has always been an important member of concert bands and brass bands. On early band programs, where transcriptions of orchestral works were common, the euphonium served well as the cello of the band. Euphonium players came to expect interesting and challenging parts to play.

In playing original band compositions and arrangements from the past couple of decades, I frequently see euphonium parts that are less interesting and challenging than parts for the other instruments of the band. In some cases the euphonium is absent altogether. Perhaps because it is not a standard member of the orchestral brass family, some composers are not as familiar with euphonium as they are with the other brass instruments.

Characteristics and strengths

A large, conical bore gives the euphonium a dark, powerful tone. The instrument can fill a room with beautiful sound, and it is nearly as fluid in technical passages as a cornet or trumpet. Vibrato is a normal component of the euphonium sound, and can help create a singing quality in lyrical phrases.

The rich sound of the euphonium is perhaps best suited to playing melodies and countermelodies. Good examples of such use of the instrument can be found in almost any Sousa march. *El Capitan*, for one, demonstrates both melodies and countermelodies scored for euphonium. While euphonium doubles melody throughout most of the march, it is given a simple but brilliant countermelody the second time through the first strain.

My favorite example of a euphonium solo is in the first movement of Holst's *Second Suite in F for Military Band*. The euphonium's inherent richness is useful in Broadway medleys as well. It is often the best choice for playing melodies originally sung by the male lead in the show. A classic example in this style is the song "Some Enchanted Evening" from *South Pacific* by Rodgers and Hammerstein. No other instrument has such an appropriate color for this solo as euphonium.

In many arrangements countermelodies are covered by the horn section. Horns certainly can be effective in some circumstances, but often euphoniums produce better results. Horns possess a regal quality that is attractive in some contexts, but euphoniums are a better choice when a singing quality is desired.

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The name tenor tuba well describes one of the euphonium's roles. When used to carry the upper octave of the bass line the euphonium blends easily with the tuba; and in lighter passages, it can carry the bass line alone. The euphonium is also an effective supporting voice useful for doubling cornet or clarinet melodies at the octave. It can add body to the horn, trombone, or saxophone sections without necessarily standing out as an extra voice.

Weaknesses

The beautiful sound of the euphonium can be a drawback in some cases. If it is used to double melody throughout an entire piece, the arrangement will sound monotonous because of the dominant nature of the euphonium tone. Also, when allocating notes of the chord, each of the three or four trombone parts usually plays a separate note, but the euphoniums are often written in unison. This results in the euphoniums' chord tone being much stronger than any one of the trombone's notes, which can produce an unbalanced chord.

Usable Range

For high school players, a G4 is the top of the normal range, and B♭4 above it is optional for better players. The best playing range is B♭2 to F4; this is usable in almost all contexts. A high school player might become tired playing in the range from C4 upward throughout a piece.

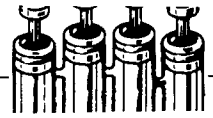
The top of the range for a college player is at least B♭4, possibly as high as C5 or C♯5. The best melodic range is between B♭2 and B♭4; continuous playing above D4 could be tiring.

E2 is the lowest note possible for many high school players using three-valve instruments. Melodies start sounding tubby below E♭3 but are certainly playable down to around A♭2 with no particular difficulty. A good range for bass lines is from E2 up to F3 or G3.

At the college level four-valve euphoniums are the rule, so the writing is less restricted. Low range extends down chromatically to B♭1, and most good players can reach F1. The pedal notes (that is, the notes below B1) might sound rather aggressive, but that can be useful for doubling bass trombone pedals in jazz or commercial writing. Bass lines are possible down to C2 because of the fourth valve. Low-range limitations for melodic lines are similar to those described for high school players, due to the nature of the instrument.

Clefs

Concert pitch bass clef and B♭ treble clef are standard for euphonium in this country. Because there are players who are comfortable in one or the other but not both, it is wise to supply euphonium parts in both clefs. While tenor and alto clefs are studied by most college players,



they are not used for concert band euphonium parts. Treble and bass clefs should never be mixed within the same part. Bass clef is concert pitch, while treble clef is transposed up a major ninth from concert pitch, similar to tenor sax or bass clarinet.

Mutes

Euphonium mutes once were quite rare, but now are seen even in some high school band rooms. Therefore, the entire brass section may now be muted when necessary. The only type of mute commonly used on euphonium or tuba is the straight mute.

The euphonium's large sound is not particularly flattered by a mute. Although in ensemble passages this is not a factor, muted euphonium should be used cautiously in solo passages. The muted euphonium is a good choice for supporting the bassoon section and is also useful for producing light bass lines.

The horn section frequently uses a full stopped sound, produced either with the right hand sealing off most of the airway in the bell or via a special mute. A similar sound also can be produced on euphonium by placing a music folder tightly over the bell. Doing so will raise the pitch a half step. If the full stopped sound is called for, a footnote in the score describing the technique might be helpful, because most players are not yet aware of it. Providing a transposed ossia line would also be wise, as most euphonium players are not comfortable making half-step transpositions.

Divisi

Considering the strength of the euphonium's sound, it is unfortunate that American concert band publications often write euphoniums in unison, even though every other brass section is divisi. In chordal passages, the unison euphonium section can contribute to an unbalanced chord because of the strength of its sound. Additionally, unison writing ignores a potential of very strong harmony from the euphoniums.

Euphoniums frequently double cornet melodies at the octave. When the cornet section is written in harmony, the euphoniums can be divided the same as the first and second cornets. Alternately, one euphonium can double the melody while the second is used on a countermelody or a bass line.

When doubling a harmonized trombone section the euphoniums ordinarily should be divided the same as the first and second trombones. If the first trombone is already strongly doubled – by the horns, for example – the euphoniums should double the second and third trombone parts. In the latter case the euphoniums have a much stronger harmony. Similar rules apply when euphoniums double horns or saxes.

Another good use of divisi euphoniums is to extend the harmony of the horn section downward. The first euphonium can double the fourth horn and the second euphonium can act as a fifth horn. I suggest doubling the fourth horn because this voice is often in an awkward register and may not be as strong as the upper horns.

Special effects

Some sounds that euphoniums can easily produce are largely ignored by writers. Euphonium players are traditionally ambitious and willing to take on any reasonable challenge.

Modern band works often ask the horns to produce an upward rip. Euphoniums are just as capable of this technique, and adding them to the horns can make the difference between a rip that is difficult to hear and one that is prominent. Good rips can be produced between two widely spaced pitches, or may be an unpitched ascending sound. Tubas can also do effective rips, so a large range is available using tubas, euphoniums, and horns.

By using the half-valve technique, euphoniums can play a trombone-like smear. The sound is not as strong as a trombone's gliss, but can easily augment the sound of the trombone section in such a passage. It can also help to smear through pitches that trombones cannot manage because of the limitations inherent in slide smears.

Alternative ensembles

Two standard chamber ensembles use euphonium: the brass quartet, usually made up of two cornets, horn, and euphonium; and the euphonium-tuba quartet, which includes two euphoniums and two tubas. A few other ensembles use euphonium as well: brass sextet, with two trumpets, horn, trombone, euphonium, and tuba; or the larger euphonium-tuba ensembles. Other possibilities exist as well. A quintet consisting of two trumpets or cornets, horn, euphonium, and tuba makes a very workable ensemble. The valved euphonium enables technical passages that are awkward for the slide trombone, and the blend of the lower instruments is better because the euphonium's conical bore (as opposed to the trombone's cylindrical bore) matches the conical bore of the horn and tuba.

The euphonium can be a powerful and compelling voice within the concert band. Certainly a composer produces the best ensemble music when he fully understands all the instruments available, and the composer or arranger who uses the euphonium to its fullest advantage will enhance his music. □