

BUILDING A BETTER TROMBONE SECTION

THROUGH THE
TROMBONE CHOIR OR ENSEMBLE

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EDUCATION SERVICES



Dr. Irvin L. Wagner teaches trombone studies at the University of Oklahoma School of Music. Dr. Wagner conducts the popular OU Trombone Choir as well as teaches applied lessons and methods. He holds two distinguished professorships at the University: David Ross Boyd Professor and Regents Professor. He also serves as Coordinator of Graduate Studies in the School of Music.

A noted performer, conductor, composer, arranger, guest lecturer, and clinician, he is a member of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and the conductor for many of that orchestra's pops concerts. Dr. Wagner has been invited to guest conduct or solo with numerous top orchestras and opera companies including the Austin Symphony Orchestra, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the Russian Imperial Orchestra in St. Petersburg, and the Kansas City Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Wagner's compositions and arrangements are in demand by many major symphony orchestras and trombone choirs.

Dr. Wagner is a founding member of the International Trombone Association and a Past President.

Dr. Wagner is an Educational Clinician and member of the Product Advisory Council for the Jupiter Band Instrument company.

INTRODUCTION

"No band can sound outstanding with a poor trombone section or poor trombone playing."

"The Trombone Section can make or break the band."

These statements certainly deserve attention. The Trombone Section is vital to the success of any large ensemble because it is here that the fundamentals and foundations of the band are determined. One might say, "I thought the trumpets determined the quality of the band." Of course they are necessary and important, just as are the other instruments; however, the trombones are the hidden core of the band. It's the trombones who "make the sound of the ensemble." Why is this? The answer has several primary components, most important are the principles of the acoustics of sound and the science of music. All sounds are made up of vibrations, and all vibrations produce sympathetic vibrations. This is especially true with low pitches in that they produce overtones which in turn blend with the same notes that the higher pitched instruments are playing. If the trombone section is in tune and producing a good quality tone, the overtones will dominate the higher frequencies and make the higher pitched instruments sound outstanding whether they are or not.

Consequently, the topic of this document, "Building A Better Trombone Section Through the Trombone Choir or Ensemble," is timely and important. This subject applies to both bands and orchestras, though for the purpose of our discussion, emphasis will be placed on the trombones in the band due to the fact that they form a major component of the overall sound and quality, while in an orchestra the basic sound and playing of the group is formed with the strings. The purpose of strengthening the Trombone Section is to ultimately make the large ensemble better.

What better way is there to accomplish the goal of improved quality than to do this as a group? This conserves the time and efforts of the director as well as the students. Start a Trombone Choir (as they are frequently called) or Trombone Ensemble, and the results

can be amazing. Trombonists playing together in an ensemble sound good, and are perhaps the most successful of the “same instrument” ensembles.

Now comes the question of what can be accomplished with the educational and musical experience of the Trombone Choir. What are the things that can be addressed in a Trombone Ensemble that will benefit our band? Isolating the trombones into an ensemble gives the opportunity to survey such musical matters as tone quality, articulation, style, blend, pitch, tuning, and reading.

TONE QUALITY

While working with the Trombone Choir, tone quality is the first aspect to which one should devote considerable attention. Work with the members of the ensemble as a group to produce a good and pleasing tone in a uniform manner. A good tone is usually defined as one that is full and rich. Get each member of the Trombone Choir accustomed to listening and producing this type of tone. In order to do this, individuals should be encouraged to produce enough air to properly fill up the instrument and play with a good “forte” volume. Encourage players to play in a relaxed manner, and at the same time, get a tone which blends with the other players. It is best to strive for plenty of volume, without any edge to the tone. The goal is to be able to produce a tone that has the same quality in all dynamic ranges, from “pianissimo” to “fortissimo.” Most young players will have a tendency to get too much edge when playing loudly. This type of tone is not pleasant for the audience, nor does it project well. A rich and full tone is more pleasant and will be better heard. The goal is to have the listener be literally overwhelmed with full playing and at the same time find it impossible to hear any single member of the group, producing a unified “wall of sound.”

ARTICULATION

Articulation is probably the second most important area of concentration. While producing a rich, full tone, one should not hear too much tongue in the initial attacks nor within the musical

phrase. When starting the tone, it is best to think of beginning the tone immediately without any extra accent or sneaking into the tone. A good rule is to “breathe and attack all in one motion.” When articulating in either a legato or staccato fashion (or any variation in between) in a musical phrase, the tongue should interrupt the tone just enough to clearly define the note or notes, but not change the color of the tone or impede the musical phrase.

BLEND

The blend is where playing in a Trombone Choir can really make a difference when the accomplishments are returned to the context of a full band. In the Trombone Choir, have all the members of the group strive to play with the same tonal concept whether playing soft chorales or other loud music. Work on this for a while and take the trombonists back to the band and see what a difference it makes in the overall sound.

STYLE

Style is another area where playing together as a group makes a big difference. Issues such as phrasing, taking breaths at the same time in a musical fashion, accomplishing dynamics in a uniform manner, and articulating together in an appropriate way are vital to making good music. Accomplishing these matters with the Trombone Choir will make them leaders in the total band.

PITCH AND TUNING

In the area of pitch and tuning, the Trombone Choir is the perfect place to do some extra work. Tuning chords, learning where the slide positions really are, adjusting the tuning according to the structure of the chord, and learning to constantly listen and tune to the other members of the group are aspects of musicianship to which attention can be given.

READING

Reading music together in an ensemble is very valuable. In a Trombone Choir each person must read or play his/her own part. A person cannot sit idly by while other players are playing the notes. In the Trombone Choir positive pressure can be applied to insist that everyone play their part. Furthermore, sight-reading ability can be greatly enhanced because each person must keep up with the group.

HISTORY OF TROMBONE ENSEMBLES

The use of trombones in raising the quality of musical organizations is not a new concept. The trombone is an instrument that has been around for about a thousand years, and throughout this long history, the instrument has always been used to enhance the quality of musical organizations.

Trombones have always been pleasing to the ear when used as ensemble instruments or in groups of three or more. In the United States, the oldest surviving musical organization is the Moravian Trombone Choir of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. This group has been in continuous existence since the 1730's and is obviously older than the country itself. Furthermore, they are a thrill to hear.

SUMMARY

Utilizing the positive benefits of trombonists playing together in a group will not only provide exciting musical and personal moments for all involved from the director to the audience, but also improve the quality of the large ensemble beyond measure.

ENSEMBLE MUSIC FOR THE YOUNG PLAYER

Following are some specific compositions that can be utilized in developing the Trombone Choir. In the use of duets, remember that large groups can play these together by using multiple players on each part. When selecting trios for young players, remember to select pieces that do not require bass trombone, as there are few young bass trombone players.

Young Players:

1. Most beginning Method Books have some duets which can be beneficial and fun.

Middle School and Junior High Players:

1. The Duets in *"Rubank Advanced Method, Vol. I"* are great.
2. The Belwin Master duets composed and/or arranged by Keith Snell are excellent and can be used at several different levels of player development.
3. *"Vere Languores Nostros"* by Antonio Lotti, arranged by Art Dedrick, published by Kendor, is a good trio example.
4. *"Trombone Ensemble Folio"* arranged by Edward McLin, published by Belwin. The material in this book can be used by trios or quartets.

High School Players:

1. The Duets in *"Rubank Advanced Method, Vol. II"* are excellent.
2. The Amsden Duet book offers hours of good playing material.
3. For trios, a collection of pieces written by Gerhart Banco call *"9 Miniaturen,"* published by Doblinger is very valuable.
4. For quartets, many possibilities exist for groups to play or take to contest. Remember that multiple players can be used on each part.
 - a. *"Achieved Is The Glorious Work"* by Haydn, arranged by Shumway, published by Ensemble Publications.
 - b. *"Landsighting"* by Edward Grieg, arranged by Erlin Liar, published by Byron-Douglas Publications.
 - c. *"Scherzo Caprice"* by Paul Koepke, published by Rubank.
 - d. *"First Suite for Four Trombones"* by Eino Olander, published by G. Schirmer.

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432L Lacquered Brass, drawn nickel silver outer slides, chromed inner slides, .500" bore, 8" bell, molded case
432RL Above 432L with Rose Brass Bell



438L Ergonomic Student Model, Lacquered Brass, nickel silver outer slides, chromed inner slides, .500" bore, 8" bell, contoured main branch, comfort handgrip, adjustable thumb rest, molded case



538L Ergonomic Student Model, Bb with F Attachment, Open Wrap, Lacquered Brass, nickel silver outer slides, chromed inner slides, .500" bore, 8" bell, contoured main branch, comfort handgrip, adjustable thumb rest, direct pull trigger, tapered rotor bearing shaft with nylon sockets, molded case

DELUXE TROMBONES

532L Bb, Lacquered Brass Body, .525" Medium Bore, chromed inner slides, nickel silver outer slide, 8.1" bell



536L Bb with F Attachment, Lacquered Brass Body, .525" Medium Bore, chromed inner slides, modified open wrap, direct pull trigger, tapered rotor bearing shaft with nylon sockets, 8.1" bell



534L Bb Solo Model, .495" Small Bore, drawn nickel silver outer slides, chromed inner slides, 7.5" bell
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740L Double Independent Rotor, Bb/F/Gb and D, Lacquered Yellow Brass Body, .562" Bore, inline rotors with tapered bearings, precision linkage, chromed inner slide, 10" bell
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