Editing for Concert Band, Part 1

by John Kirsch, Rudder Middle

Each year we are faced with a band that demonstrates different qualities than the year before and for concert contest, we must demonstrate security in precision and quality of sound. Many times a concert band piece needs to be adjusted to help attain these goals.

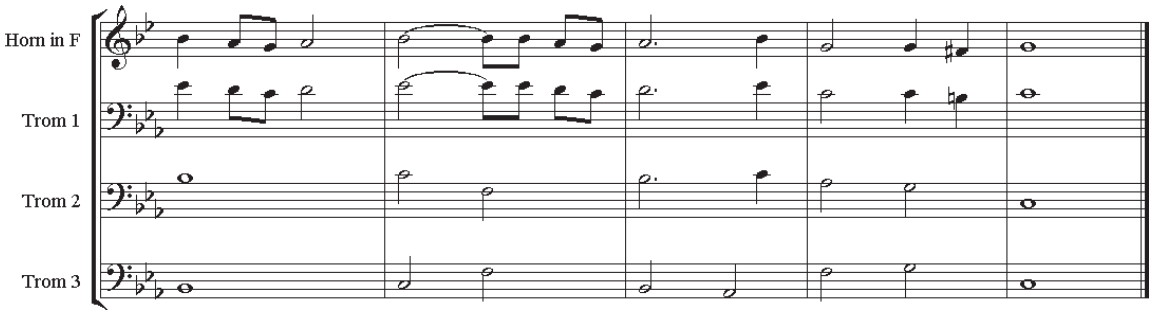
Maybe we have a weak section to hide, possibly we need to alter a musical idea either through augmentation or deletion, maybe the chordal structure is unbalanced, or maybe the composer wrote something impractical. In any case, the situation needs to be fixed if you're to be successful at contest.

To maximize the sound of your band keep the individual parts within their good sounding range. Try to avoid the extremes when dealing with the harmonic background. Give those notes to a relative family instrument. For example, give high trombone notes to the French Horns.

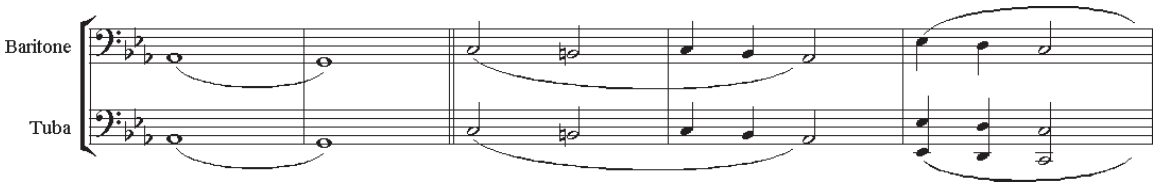
Do at least a partial chord analysis of each piece and be aware of bad intonation notes on each instrument.

Below is a list of situations I've noticed over the years. You may or may not need nor want to apply these concepts. It all depends on your beliefs as a band director and the strength of your instrumentation.

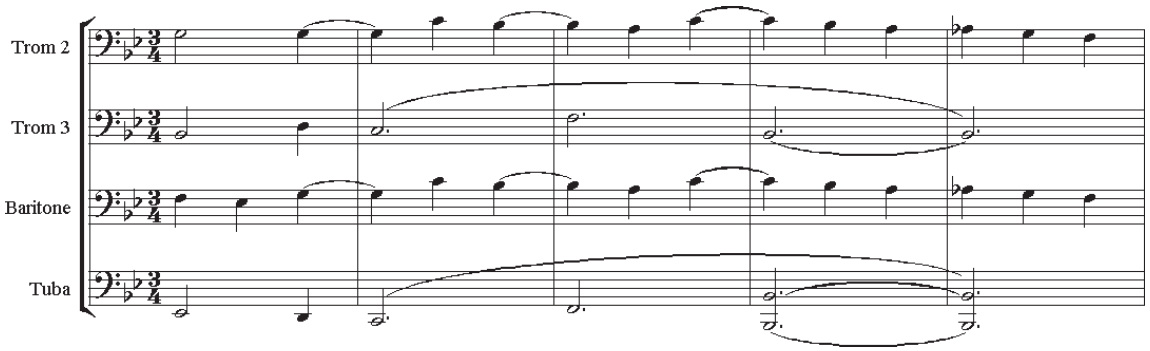
1. Why have your 1st Trombone doubled in the French Horn part. Some composers write this way to make their pieces more accessible. Remember they want to sell a lot of copies. You might opt to use just 2nd and 3rd Trombone. This will also help you get a deeper band sound.



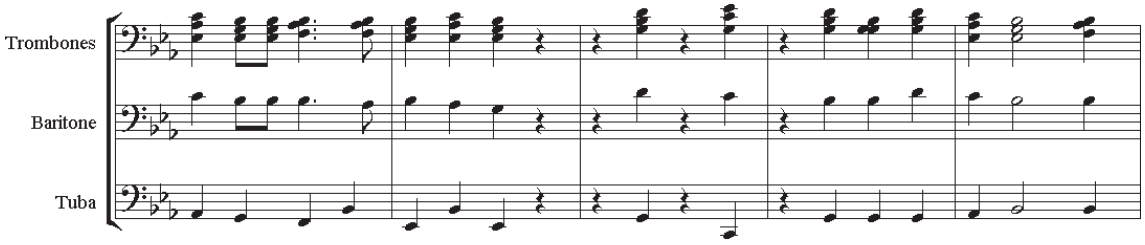
2. Make sure the Baritone or 3rd Trombone part is not too low. Why have them playing Tuba notes.



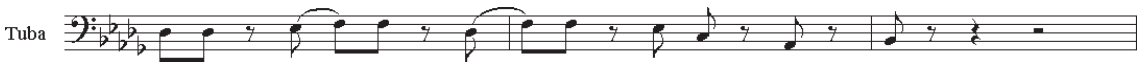
3. Two Trombone parts instead of three? 3rd Trombone might be scored too low to achieve a good sound, or possibly its doubled in the Baritone or Tuba.



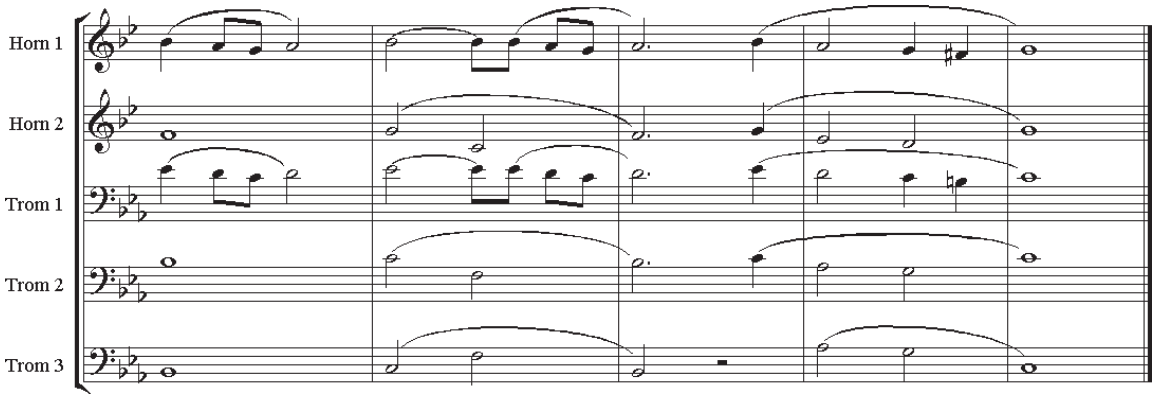
4. If your Baritone part is harmonic in nature, you might want to reinforce your 2nd or 3rd Trombone part since they tend to be weaker players.



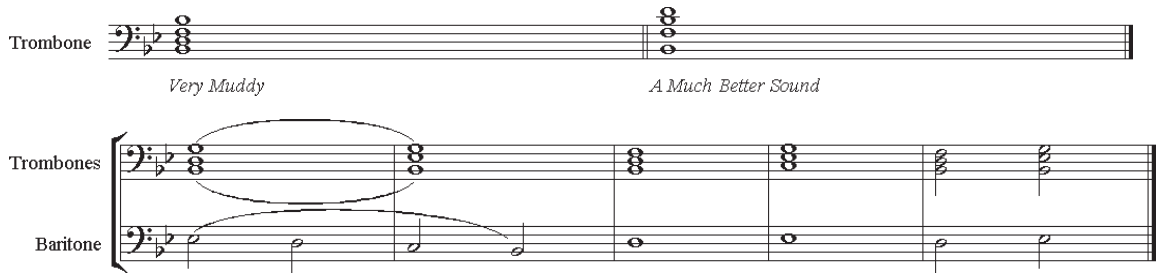
5. If the Tuba has high D, Eb, E, or F's, and their too high for your Tubas, have your Baritones play those pitches.



6. With regards to French Horn parts, are the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th parts the same as the Trombone parts? Eliminate some of them. Your 2nd, 3rd, and 4thplayers, who are weaker, will play more securely and in better tune with their own section.



7. Low Brass and Woodwind voicing: Closed voicing is when the notes are stacked in thirds, while open voicing occurs when the notes are in fifths or sixths. When stacked in closed voicing, bass clef instruments tend to sound muddy when the lowest note of the chord is C or lower. Elimination of the middle note will give your instruments a clearer and more enjoyable sound.



Well, this is all for now. I hope this has opened up some doors for you. Basically, score the instruments where they have a good sound, try to avoid bad tuning notes, and alter the scoring to enhance the sound of your band.q

John Kirsch has BA, BME, and MM degrees from the University of Nebraska, has written extensively for high school and middle school bands, and presently teaches at Rudder Middle School in San Antonio, Texas.