

# Bringing Out the Inner Animal: How to Get the Most Out of Your Bass Trombonist

Dr. Steve Wilson

The bass trombone is an often misunderstood instrument that, in the hands of good player, can add a solid tonal and pitch foundation to the brass section of the band. Unfortunately, many players blast their way through the band, while others play passively and let great passages simply pass them by.

Here are three ideas to develop a great bass trombone sound and gain control in the lower register. They are intended for bands that have a “real” bass trombonist and for those that have tenor players covering the bass trombone parts. The exercises presented are idiomatic of the trombone in that they utilize the glissando. In my experience, they have helped many people—tenor and bass

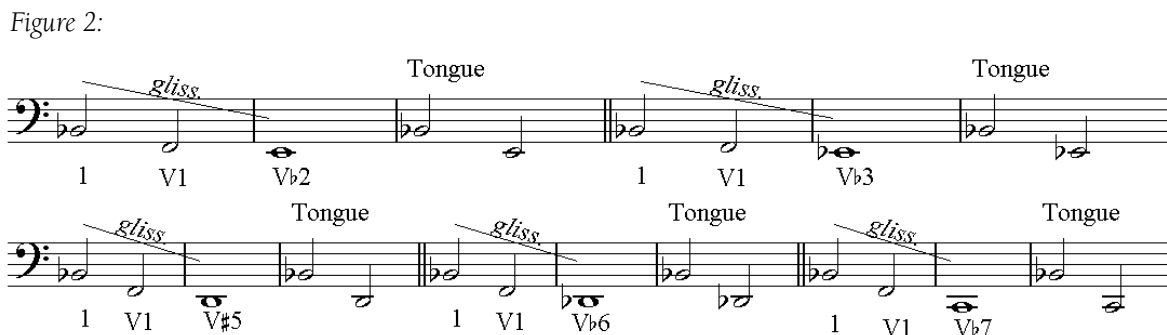
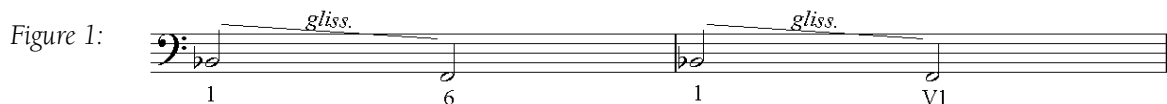
trombonists alike—develop a full, relaxed sound in the trigger range.

**1. Developing Tone:** A good way to develop a great sound in the low range is to combine the Remington long-tone exercises with the glissando, whereby players take their best sound on an easy note down to the lower range. The first step is getting the trigger notes to match the open notes. Have the student start on low B-flat and gliss down slowly to F in sixth position, *keeping the tone the same*. Then repeat, but play the F with the trigger. This step is the basis for the rest, so great care should be taken to make the sound stay the same. See Figure 1.

The goal should be big, full, steady sounds that stay constant

through the glissando. Once a consistent sound at a medium volume is achieved, players can work to expand their dynamic range by varying the dynamic while performing the exercise.

The exercise continues with glissandos followed by Remingtons, using the positions indicated. The key to success is taking the sound on B-flat into the trigger range, which is easier to do when glissing than tonguing. I would suggest having the whole trombone section work on these, just as you have your bass trombonist doing lip slurs into the upper range. This is great for tenor players because it helps them play the entire range of the horn making them better, well-rounded performers. See Figure 2.



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For the bass trombonist with F and D attachments, the same exercise can be modified to work both triggers and extend the low range even further. This exercise is critical for all those passages containing low Cs and Bs. By glissing down to the low notes first, students can focus on embouchure and the air needed to play low notes without having to deal with start-up issues. As an added benefit, this exercise also works breath control and pushes students to take in more air as they get lower each time. See Figure 3.

Figure 3:

1 V VV  
1 V VV VVb2  
1 V VV VVb4  
1 V VV VV#6  
1 V VV VV7

Figure 4:

V VV  
V2 VVb2  
Vb3 VVb4  
V#5 VV#6  
VVb4 V1

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**2. Clarifying Articulation:** For the developing bass trombonist, or that tenor player faced with a fast, low passage, starts of notes often prove to be one of the biggest challenges. One solution is to tongue between the teeth in the lower register as if spitting out a watermelon seed. See Figure 4. This will provide more clarity and a quicker response. Getting notes to speak clearly using this articulation begins with the glissando long-tones described previously. Students should progress to playing various rhythmic patterns on one note in a Remington pattern. An advanced exercise is “Two Noters,” in which arpeggios are played one octave up and two octaves down. This exercise, like the glissando long-tones described earlier, works on bringing the sound and articulation from the easier range, where it is likely to sound good, down into the lower range.

**3. Making Sound Choices:** Who should play the bass trombone parts? Obviously your bass trombonist should, if you have one. If this is the case, do not double the bass trombone with a tenor trombone. Doubling a bass and tenor on the same part is not a great idea, especially if the part gets into the low

range because of the differences in bell size, mouth-piece size and bore size. If your bass trombone player is not playing full enough to balance the section, work to bring out your bass trombonist’s “inner animal” by using these exercises.

If you do not have a “real” bass trombonist, but rather a tenor player or two playing the bass trombone parts, put your best player on first, the next best on fourth, the next on second, and the next on third. This type of seating ensures that you have strong players on the outside parts, which are often the most challenging. If you have a large band with parts doubled, this seating also ensures a leader on each part.

Whether your band has a dedicated bass trombonist or a tenor player(s) playing the bass trombone parts, the fundamental exercises described here are an excellent first step in developing the range and technique necessary to cover the often hazardous bass trombone parts found in advanced high school band literature. They will help your players develop a strong, confident sound and some agility in the trigger range. When used everyday as part of a fundamental routine, you too can bring out the “inner animal” in your bass trombone player.

**“Advanced  
Trombone  
Pedagogy”**

**presented by  
Dr. Steve Wilson**

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8:15 a.m.**

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