

# Texas Bandmasters Association Convention/Clinic

July 24, 2006

8:15 AM

## **Characteristics of Tuba Performance for Band Directors and Players**

Presented by  
Brian Dobbins, Clinician  
Professor of Tuba/Euphonium,  
University of Oklahoma  
Principal Tuba - Santa Fe Symphony

### **Contents**

Routine  
Solos  
Chamber Ensembles  
Preparing for College  
Instruments

# Characteristics of Tuba Performance for Band Directors and Players

“You mean that thing that wraps around the player?” “You can make a living playing a tuba?” and “Oompah, Oompah, Oompah!” All of these are common reactions when I tell people that I am a professional tuba performer and educator. These stereotypes stem from the way composers have been writing for the tuba since 1835, when Berlin instrument maker Johann Gottfried Moritz and bandmaster Wilhelm Wieprecht patented the first bass tuba. Over a century passed before the first concerto for the tuba was written by Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1954. That concerto created a huge gap between the tuba as an ensemble instrument and the tuba as a solo instrument. From time to time, I, as every other tuba player, must play the traditional ‘oompah oompah’ parts, but this is just a tiny fraction of the music the modern tuba player encounters on the average day. This presentation will take you through my daily routine, explaining the purpose of each exercise and its particular focus. I play through this routine every day before my first rehearsal or lesson. If a student can schedule time in the morning or afternoon to play through the same routine, they will find a drastic difference in all aspects of their own playing.

1. **Tone-** Tone is the most fundamental building block for any beginning, intermediate, or professional player. A performer who can play every note possible at unimaginable tempos might be considered an expert at his/her craft; however, if the tone is not beautiful and pleasant to the audience eventually they will stop listening. Tone receives 90% of my attention anytime I pick up an instrument.

2. **Air-** I believe in a three-stage breath. First, fill up the lower portions of the lungs, causing the stomach to expand. Second, fill up the back portion of your lungs, causing the lower back to expand. Finally, fill up the upper section of your lungs, causing the normal expansion of the upper chest. Throughout all stages of the inhalation and exhalation, focus on producing the warmest air possible.

3. **Musicality-** Whether I am playing solo or in a large ensemble, every time I play a note I focus on its purpose and how it relates to the note that follows it. I approach music as an actor approaches a script, and like that actor my goal is to draw as much emotion as possible from the piece. Imagination plays a huge part in my ability to convey a story in a performance. Playing the correct notes and rhythms should become secondary to eliciting emotion within a performance. The ability to play the correct notes and rhythms without emotion would be like an actor monotonously reciting every word from a script.

4. **Intonation-** Playing a note out of tune is just like playing a wrong note. A tuner should be used during the first few exercises of the routine and throughout the day when intonation issues occur. When using the tuner, the student should play the note without looking at the tuner, let it center, then look at the tuner to see where the note naturally lies. The student should not stare at the tuner while playing. Once the student has found where the tone sounds the best, then he/she can learn what adjustments are needed for perfect intonation. Valve slides should be used for these adjustments when possible, as a trumpet player would use their first and third slide. The addition of the fourth and fifth valves added numerous fingering variations for almost every single note.

5. **Relax-** Your eyebrows, shoulders, biceps, legs, and chest have nothing to do with playing a tuba. Having tension in just one of these areas will cause problems in many facets of a performance.

## DAILY PRACTICE/PERFORMANCE ROUTINE

The following information will be useful to instructors and students alike. I have addressed it directly to the students to facilitate transcription.

### I. Routine

#### A. Remington, long tone warm-up

1. Imagine the perfect tone played by your favorite tuba player.
2. Make sure you are sitting up tall with your feet relaxed on the floor.
3. Dark warm breath. (Darth Vader)
4. Connect the note by not breaking the airflow.
5. Keep your mind focused on maintaining your tone, regardless of register or interval.
6. Metronome should be at 60 bpm.

#### B. Open harmonic slurs

1. Imagine the perfect slur played by your favorite tuba player.
2. Perform the first chromatic series of slurs while bending each note as much as possible (trombone gliss). This will strengthen the muscles needed for good tone and flexibility.
3. Play each series twice. First, play very slowly, focusing on using your air to change notes. Second, play slightly faster, working on flexibility. Always maintain the AA or OO syllable. Never use an EE syllable to assist a slur.
4. If you find it difficult to slur in a lyrical manner sing the slurs. Many times you will be able to imitate the slur using your voice more easily than on the horn. After you feel what it is like to slur using your vocal chords transfer feeling that to the horn, but use your lips in place of the vocal chords.

#### C. Clarke-Gordon Technical Studies for Bass Clef First Study

1. Imagine the perfect chromatic passage played by your favorite tuba player.
2. Start slowly, working on cleaning each half step. As your lips and fingers become more familiar with the chromatic pattern you may increase the speed.
3. Spend extra time working on going from any open note to the next ascending half step (going across the break). This harmonic break will take the longest to clean. Make sure your air is supporting the passage and that you are not changing your embouchure.
4. The more the embouchure is relaxed the more the tone and clarity will improve. This exercise will help you achieve a single embouchure while moving from register to register.
5. Use this exercise to extend your range both in the extreme upper and extreme lower registers.

#### D. Arban, Complete Method for Tuba. Young/Jacobs. Pg 35-38 Ex. 19-27

1. Imagine the cleanest articulation played by your favorite tuba player.
2. Pick an articulation from extreme legato to extreme staccato and maintain the style throughout each exercise.
3. Start at 50 beats per minute and continue every day until each exercise is played without a mistake. Then you may increase the metronome by one beat per minute a day. Once you begin to make mistakes you should stop increasing the tempo.
4. Don't forget that you are playing music first, not mechanically producing notes. You will find it much more enjoyable if you insert basic and advanced musical techniques (cres, decres, rubato, slurs).
5. Don't ever puff your air! If you find that you are puffing your air then you should perform the etude slurred until you feel comfortable adding a legato attack.

E. Arban, Complete Method for Tuba. Young/Jacobs.  
Pg 127 Ex I

1. Imagine the perfect duet between two of your favorite tuba players with one playing the scale and the other playing the repeated note.
2. Connect each note to the next. Never play detached, as this will promote changing your embouchure for every note and breaking your airflow. Playing slurred is a great variation.
3. If you are connecting each note and using your air, your diaphragm will begin to burn. This is a great opportunity to focus on deep breathing. This burning sensation is the same as any other muscle that is used for an extended period. This is one of the only times that I can feel the diaphragm, and it allows me to really try to expand my air capacity and the efficiency of my airflow.

F. Rochut/Bordogni

1. Played in any register, these etudes are wonderful for developing a melodic style of playing. Prepare the first five etudes in the correct register. If you are playing out of the Rochut, they must be transposed down one octave. After the etudes can be performed at an acceptable level, then perform them down one more octave. This is where the Rochut/Bordogni etudes really test every player.
2. The amount of air needed to perform these etudes in that register will be noticeable to both you and your teacher. After you notice how much more air is being used, play the etude as written with the same air. The difference will be drastic.
3. Maintain the singing style regardless of the register. If you start to just play notes you use less air, and that defeats the primary purpose of this exercise.
4. Once you can perform those two octaves while maintaining the tone and musical aspects, then you can begin to work on transposing up one octave from the original (Rochut played as written).

## II. Solos

A. Level I

1. Haddad, Don. Suite for Tuba
2. Marcello, Benedetto. Sonata in F transcribed by Little/Nelson

B. Level II

1. Barrat, J.E. Introduction and Dance
2. Williams, Vaughan. Six Studies in English Folk Song,

C. Level III

1. Hindemith, Paul. Tuba Sonata
2. Brahms, Johannes. Sixteen Lieder transcribed by Eric Carlson (CD)

D. Level IV

1. Mahler, Gustav. Songs of a Wayfarer transcribed by Eric Carlson (CD)
2. Gregson, Edward. Tuba Concerto

## III. Tuba Euphonium Ensembles

A. Level I

1. Arcadelt. Ave Maria Transcribed by Jim Self
2. Traditional. Songs of the British Isle Transcribed by James Werden

B. Level II

1. Steven, John. Music 4 Tubas
2. Bach. Fugue in G minor Transcribed by Skip Gray

## **IV. Preparing for College**

### **A. Picking the college**

1. There is one constant throughout the four or five years spent becoming a professional educator or performer, and that is your applied instructor. This relationship is extremely important for your success, and I highly recommend having a lesson or two before the audition to make sure that a friendly professional relationship is established.

### **B. Paperwork**

1. Application for the university
2. Application for the school of music
3. FAFSA
4. Writing sample

### **C. Picking the music**

1. Many students pick things that they wish they could play versus what they can play. I am more impressed with a student who plays a beautiful melody than one who chooses a hard piece and has issues throughout the performance. Show me who you are, not who you want to be.
2. Use etudes that you have played many times, so you are comfortable as you begin to play.
3. Play as many mock auditions as possible. Find band directors, friends, family, pets, and stuffed animals if needed.

### **D. Audition Day**

1. Dress as if this were a very important job interview, because it is.
2. Shake hands and make eye contact.
3. Be confident. Confidence comes from preparation.
4. Take as many practice breaths as needed until you are in control of your air.
5. Sing to yourself the first line of every piece before you begin.

## **V. Instruments**

### **A. Owned by school**

1. These are expensive instruments! It is not always smart to look for the bargain tuba. Many times they are much more difficult to play, and if I cannot play them at a professional level then how could you ask a student.
2. Ask local professional tuba players for recommendations on instruments.

### **B. Owned by students**

1. You must be taking lessons if you are going to purchase a tuba.
2. If you will be a music major in college then you should buy a CC tuba and not a BBb tuba.
3. Buy a tuba that will last you through college.

### **C. Care and maintenance**

1. The first and third valve tuning slides should be easily movable, similar to a trombone slide.
2. Immediately, fix any dent that is more than 25% of the diameter of the tube.
3. Annual maintenance should include chemically cleaning the instruments and replacement of all pads, corks, and valve guides.