



**Texas Bandmasters Association
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Tuba - "It's a Different Animal"

**CLINICIAN:
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Demo Group: Select Tuba Students

TUBA: It's A Different Animal

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Tuba: It's a Different Animal

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This presentation is simply an outline of talking points. I've intentionally kept it brief and concise knowing that excessive verbiage leads to abandonment and moving on.

Introduction

The following ideas and information are largely information I received from the many wonderful teachers and mentors I've had over the past sixty years. I began playing trumpet when I was eight years old. My father had played trumpet professionally in Indiana and Illinois, "big band" mostly, but he also played at the Chicago Theater in the orchestra led by his younger brother, Paul Walker. My first private instructor was the late Tom Knoflicek. I was nine years old and in a private Catholic elementary school. In sixth grade, I had George Walters at Lamar Elementary in La Marque ISD (he would later be my high school director my junior and senior years) In seventh grade I switched to euphonium, which would remain my primary instrument.

Throughout my junior high and high school years, I was very fortunate to have Joyce (Young) Boelsche as my private instructor. In ninth grade and my senior year, Tom Bennett was my band director; and he is responsible for me deciding to study music education. He has been a wonderful mentor and amazing friend to this day. In addition to Tom Bennet, I had the most amazing good fortune to be Eddie Green's graduate assistant while completing my Masters in Conducting at the University of Houston 1984-1985. I have remained close friends with the two music icons and amazing friends ever since. After completing my master's degree, Eddie Green and I spoke on the phone four to six days each week for thirty-five years. Largely because I was the only person he knew would be awake before 5:00 AM. Our many conversations were consumed by wind band pedagogy, sharing teaching ideas, and sharing many stories with great levity and importance. I miss him dearly. These two mentors are largely responsible for my success as a band and orchestra director orchestra and private lesson teacher.

In 1973 I enrolled at the University of Houston as a music education major, and I studied privately with William H. ("Bill") Rose, (tuba and euphonium), Al Lube (trombone), and during my fifth and sixth years I also studied with Jim Austin (trumpet). I had euphonium, tuba and trombone lessons for six years, and I added trumpet lessons my last two years. All three of these gentlemen were Principal performers in the Houston Symphony. Most of my information about playing these instruments comes from these years of study. They were great motivators, and the wealth of information seemed endless.

I've been teaching private lessons for the past sixty years, and I worked as a band director for thirty-four years (and I was also head orchestra director the last twelve years).

There will likely be things I speak about that will raise an eyebrow or give you pause. I ask that you take these concepts which have made my many students quite successful into consideration; and if you don't think you can make them work for you, I would like to thank you in advance for attending today!

Body

I don't suppose I could "pick" an element that I consider to be the most important, but fundamental body orientation is essential to having success on every wind instrument.

Tension in the body is extremely detrimental to playing all musical instruments successfully. I have my students imagine they are sitting on the sofa "chilling," and then I do a "body check": Are your shoulders down and completely relaxed? Is your bottom jaw relaxed and dropped in the back? Is your tongue soft and flat in the bottom of your mouth? When you breathe, do you breathe deep in your body? THIS is how your body should feel when you play your instrument.

Breathing

Breathing to the bottom of the lungs and completely filling up with air must be practiced. It's the same breathing we use when resting or sleeping, but we're getting completely full. Breathing and moving your air from the upper body causes the air column to be constricted and creates a great deal of tension in the upper body having a very negative effect on the resonance of the sound. I think it is essential that this breathing process and body orientation be diligently monitored and developed before a wind instrument is placed in the students' hands.

Posture and Hand Position

Foremost, the upper body orientation previously discussed should be always maintained. For the younger, shorter and smaller tuba students, tuba stands are recommended. Ultimately, the tuba should come to the face with the body correctly situated. The student should never have to reach up or slump down to get to the mouthpiece, and the mouthpiece should lay completely flat against the teeth with even pressure on the top and bottom teeth. The left hand should rest on the top of the left side of the tuba with the hand on the first valve slide. The right hand should be relaxed with the end joints of the four fingers on the valves, and the thumb in the thumb ring. The instrument should be balanced and resting either on the legs or the chair between the legs. Having to "hold" the tuba will create unwanted upper body tension.

Embouchure and Tone Production

The mouthpiece should be placed in the center of the lips - 50% top and 50% bottom lips, and it should be centered side to side. I do this for all brass instruments. Optimally, the aperture should be aligned with the center of the mouthpiece for the least resistance and greatest resonance. I have found over the years that centering the mouthpiece has been more beneficial for resonance of sound, greater flexibility, cleaner articulation, and increased endurance. Every student's lips will be different, and adjustments should be made as necessary to keep the aperture aligned with the center of the mouthpiece. I NEVER "buzz" the mouthpiece without the instrument. That is never what happens when the instrument is played correctly. Note: I never have any of my brass students buzz the mouthpiece. I think not using the mouthpiece alone is essential for beginners. It causes undo tension in the facial musculature and the upper body, and it is extremely difficult to correct in later years.

With the lips touching (not pressed together top to bottom) in the mouthpiece, the student should breathe through the corners of the mouth (deep in the body and completely filling with air), and then "move" the air from the lower body fast, clam and steady. The lips remain flat against the teeth and the corners of the mouth anchored against the teeth. If everything is physically correct, the student will create a resonant and clear sound on their first attempt. This must be monitored closely to check body orientation, calmness of the body and correct embouchure.

" In low register: Side muscles loose, jaw dropped, aperture between teeth and lips as open as possible, and cheeks kept loose to puff out, allowing the lips to vibrate. Air column is straight into the mouthpiece."
From *"Studio Class Manual for Tuba and Euphonium"* – William H. Rose

With tuba, not only is it okay, but when you get to E-flat below the staff and lower, you must let go of the face to maintain resonance. React to how it sounds, not what it looks like. Please stop telling your beginner tubas to not puff their cheeks. I've been teaching this with excellent results for fifty years, and I've been re-teaching many students who have been told not to puff their cheeks. It requires incredible self-discipline to change something you've been doing differently for 2 or more years. Without this larger space inside the mouth, the low register will lose resonance and sound more like a giant kazoo.

Articulation

Again, I'm going to share what I've taught the past fifty years. The tongue is primarily muscle tissue, and you cannot control muscle tissue that is already flexed and rigid. The tongue must always remain soft. I never say, "tongue harder" or "tongue firmer." The tongue responds with the necessary resistance for the speed and amount of air being moved through the instrument. A rigid or hard tongue will cause extraneous noise, interference, explosive starts, and several other issues which ultimately negatively impact the resonance of the sound.

We've all had that brass student who cannot articulate four beats of sixteenth notes in duple time without getting their tongue all tied up. The problem they are having is typically two things: the tongue is not soft, and the air is not fast enough.

Tongue placement is also very important. The tongue should stay as flat and soft as possible in the bottom of the mouth. The tip of the tongue should touch that place where the roof of the mouth and the top teeth meet. I teach this for all wind instruments. Articulation is way more about the air than the tongue. Keeping the tongue flat and soft with the inside of the mouth as tall as possible will typically have wonderful results.

Vibrato

Yes, tuba is at times a vibrato instrument. Slow, melodic lines need vibrato. All-Region etudes and solos which are lyrical should be played as expressively as possible.

The following exercise was given to me by my college trombone professor, Albert Lube (Houston Symphony Orchestra). Vibrato is appropriate during slower, lyrical music; and it should be reserved for longer valued notes (note receiving more than a full beat).

Conclusion

These are the main areas of focus I have when working with my private students. It seems simple, because it is. We often overanalyze and make things more complicated than necessary. It is very important that you have a lesson design which is easy to understand and as direct as possible. Responding to what you hear is essential. Every note should have the same tonal resonance and clarity. When articulations and notes of a specific style are repeated, they should sound the same. I hope this has been helpful to you, and feel free to reach out to me if you would like to discuss any aspects of brass performance I have addressed.

VIBRATO EXERCISE



These exercises should be done with a metronome in the beginning. Start at a very slow tempo (quarter note equals 60), and progress to a slightly faster tempo (quarter note equals 92 for the triplets; and 80 for the sixteenths).

The initial exercises should be practiced in the middle register, and when evenness and control are mastered the range can be extended up and down. Evenness should be the primary concern at all times. **Do not allow the student to use changes in air speed to create vibrato.**

Any fundamental scale may be used (including the chromatic scale), and the breaths should always be taken before the initial quarter note so as to not interrupt the air flow as the vibrato syllable is added.