



The United States Army Band

Pershing's Own

Trombone-Euphonium Doubling: Techniques for Making it Work!

by Master Sergeant John Mueller

Trombone and euphonium doubling is quite common. It may be necessary in order to fill out a section in a school's jazz band or concert band; as a means for an aspiring musician to increase employment and performance opportunities; or as a way to secure a doubling fee from an orchestra! After all, both instruments share several features including general mouthpiece size, pitch registers, and clef. But after these initial similarities come differences that make these two instruments the unique musical tools that they are.

Much of the doubling that one typically finds is of a noticeably limited nature. You may recognize a novice doubler as a "C & E" trombone player (a euphonium player whose primary interests and/or ability limits him/her to playing only on Christmas and Easter gigs) or a "Mars & Bydlo" euphoniumist (a trombonist whose technique is limited to that of the most common tenor tuba parts in the symphony orchestra).

The purpose of this article is to offer techniques that will allow the potential trombone-euphonium doubler to develop beyond the rudimentary level of knowing the slide positions or fingerings, to understand what the underlying difficulties really are, and to offer some practical day-to-day solutions.

Getting off to a good start

The trombone and euphonium require many of the same basic skills. These would include embouchure formation (the setting of the lips and facial muscles), proper breathing, posture, tonguing, and pitch recognition. If one or more of these areas have a serious deficiency, address it before complicating the task by adding a second instrument.

A strong embouchure and good breath support are important in developing the characteristic sound on either instrument (see below). Sufficient ear training skill is necessary to recognize intonation problems. Though the corrective technique is somewhat different on each instrument, one cannot switch instruments hoping to cure bad pitch recognition. In short, get a firm handle on the fundamentals of your primary instrument, before starting to double.

Sound Concept

An important step towards successful euphonium-trombone doubling is producing the characteristic sound of that instrument. This characteristic sound is closely linked to the construction and design of each instrument. The trombone's basic shape is mostly cylindrical, which gives it its brilliant and brassy quality. The euphonium, on the other hand, has a more mellow and warm sound due in large part to its conical design and larger bore size. While both instruments' colors do overlap somewhat, their complete range is

distinctive.

"You sound like a Trombone Player on Euphonium."

A typically incorrect sound made by a trombone player on euphonium is characterized by a forced, hard, and brittle sound. The adjustments that a trombone player must make involve adjusting to the weaker resistance to the air going into the euphonium (vs. trombone) and letting the instrument resonate to its fullest. Reducing the speed of the air through the lips and enlarging the area inside the mouth (say "OH" instead of "AH") will accomplish this. Depending on the individual, other adjustments may be called for including changing to a mouthpiece that is slightly larger and has more of a funnel shape (opposed to a cupped bottom). Be sure to blow through legato passages without tonguing. Let the valves create the legato effect. Listening to examples of good euphonium tone via recordings and live performances will greatly aid in developing the proper sound concept.

"You sound like a Euphonium Player on Trombone."

The increased air resistance that one faces when going from euphonium to trombone will often result in one or more problems. The tone will often be "fat" but at the same time airy or unfocused; many times the pitch will often be flat, in spite of pushing in the tuning slide; detached articulations are often split, especially at louder dynamics. The main culprits in these scenarios are slow air and soft embouchure.

Keep the lower lip and corners of the mouth firm, and the chin flat (use a mirror). A flaw in the embouchure will sometimes not show itself until the extra resistance of the trombone brings it out. Concentrate on speeding up the air stream (more "AH" less "OH") through the firmed-up embouchure. Mouthpiece buzzing and lip slurs are especially effective in working on these problems. If you are playing on a large mouthpiece designed for the euphonium, consider changing to a slightly smaller mouthpiece and /or one that has more of a cup shaped (rather than a funnel) contour.

Be judicious with your use of vibrato on trombone. Generally speaking, accepted trombone vibrato is not as wide as on euphonium, especially in orchestral music. Once again, listen to good trombone players to develop an idea of the sound you want to achieve.

Developing Valve & Slide Technique

Consistent with both good slide and valve technique are good posture, instrument position, and relaxed arm, hand, and finger motion. On euphonium, be sure that the mouthpiece comes up to the face, not the face to the mouthpiece. This is true of both the standing and sitting positions. If you have a long torso, you may need to prop the instrument up to raise it to the correct height. Do not slouch down to the instrument.

Valve Technique

Place the pads of your fingers (the part that gets finger printed) on the valve buttons while maintaining the natural arch of your hand. Do not flatten the fingers, arch them like a claw, or grasp the valves in any way with the right hand (the left hand does all the balancing and supporting). The right elbow needs to be at a comfortable angle from the body that also allows good access to the valves. Be aware that different brands and models of euphoniums will present different valve angles. The valves should be depressed in a crisp manner, without excessive pressure and tension.

Slide Technique

On trombone, the same rules of posture apply: Keep the head upright and bring the instrument up to the lips without bending the head forward or to the side. The shape of the jaw and teeth will dictate the natural angle of the instrument. While uniformity of appearance is often the goal in trombone sections (i.e. marching band), unnatural posture will cause problems with sound and slide technique as increased tension is introduced to the body. Practice in front of a mirror to check your appearance. Hold the slide with the thumb and fingertips. Use as many fingers as you find comfortable, but keep the slide on the fingertips (do not apply the death grip!). The palm will generally be facing the chest. Your elbow needs to be comfortably away from the body, allowing the slide to track in front of the chest, not swinging to the side. Keep the fingers, wrist, elbow, and shoulder loose for a fluid track. The slide movement should be decisive and accurate without being jerky. Observe the slide motion of good trombonists and compare it with your own.

Making Doubling Work on a Daily Basis

For the suggestions above to be effective, they must be attended to in a daily, systematic method. The best way to accomplish this is by using an already successful warm-up or daily exercise routine with the new instrument. Your body will be dealing with new sensations and motor skills on the new instrument. Minimize the confusion by working on the same basic drills you are already using. These would be long tone, lip-slur, tonguing, and simple scale patterns with which your ear is already familiar. This will make it easier to concentrate on the particular issues of that secondary instrument: tone quality, intonation, posture, slide/valve technique, etc.

When playing scales and technical drills on trombone, do not be afraid to work out slide movement without any tonguing (i.e. glissando style). The resulting smeared effect will let you focus on good airflow and consistent tone, which often suffers when concentrating on the coordination of slide and tongue. When the slide movement and sound are comfortable and consistent, add the tonguing to the equation.

It is important to be patient when first working on valve or slide technique, especially if you have acquired advanced skills on your primary instrument. Avoid the tension that is brought on by frustration with your progress. Tension will adversely effect not only your technique, but will usually travel from the hand or arm to affect your overall posture, breathing, and tone as well.

Complimentary Aspects of Trombone-Euphonium Doubling

Effective doubling on trombone and euphonium can have very positive residual effects on your performance on both instruments. Vibrato developed from euphonium playing can make lyric passages on trombone more effective. The clarity, variety, and precision required of trombone articulations can give your euphonium playing more expressive dimensions. The ability of a euphonium to blend with other brasses in non-vibrato passages is made easier with some trombone background.

By playing trombone, a euphonium player can gain exposure to music and musicians in orchestras, brass quintets, and jazz ensembles that they might not have access to on euphonium. On euphonium, a trombonist can develop a better sense of melodic and soloistic presentation by playing outside the trombone section of band. Doubling will

provide a wider variety of tone colors when playing either instrument.

Cross-Training Materials for Doubling

Listed below are examples of readily available music that are effective on both trombone and euphonium. Once again, use familiar material to help develop your doubling ability.

Beginning Methods

Method for Trombone Bks. 1 & 2, W. Beeler; Warner Bros.

Method for Baritone Bks. 1 & 2, W. Beeler; Warner Bros.

Intermediate Method for Trombone & Baritone B.C., R. Skornica; Rubank

Selected Duets, Vol. 1, H. Voxman; Rubank

Intermediate Methods

Studies in Legato, R. Fink; Accura

Advanced Method for Trombone & Baritone B.C., R. Skornica; Rubank

Scales, G. Pares; Carl Fischer

Selected Duets Vol. II, H. Voxman; Rubank

From Treble to Bass Clef, R. Fink; Accura

Advanced Methods

Melodious Etudes, Vol. 1, Bordogni/Rochut; Carl Fischer

Warm-up Studies, E. Remington/Hunsberger; Accura

Basic Routines, R. Marsteller; Southern Music

40 Progressive Studies, H. Tyrell; Boosey & Hawkes

Studies in Clefs, V. Blazhevich/Hunsberger; Hal Leonard

Complete Method (for Trombone), T. Arban/Randall-Mantia; Carl Fischer

Recommended Cross-Training Solo Repertoire

Andante & Allegro, E. Barat; Carl Fischer

Scene de Concert, M. Denmark; Ludiwg

Six Sonatas, J. E. Galliard/Fussel-Brown; International

Morceau Symphonique, A. Guilmant; International

Andante & Allegro, T. Ropartz/Shapiro; Carl Fischer

Six Studies in English Folksong; R. Vaughan Williams; Galaxy

Sonata # 6, A. Vivaldi/Ostrander; International

About the author... MSG John Mueller joined The US Army Band, Pershing's Own, in 1980, and has been the Euphonium Section Leader since 1990. He is active as a soloist, clinician, and adjudicator on both trombone and euphonium. He has performed extensively at colleges, universities, and music camps across the U.S., as well as Europe, Japan, and Australia. MSG Mueller holds B.S. in Music education from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, and an M. M. and D.M.A. in Trombone Performance from The Catholic University of America. His principal teachers include Daniel Peratoni, Robert Gray, Milton Stevens, and Brian Bowman.

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