

COMPOSING FOR THE TROMBONE – (SONIC BOOM 2021)

Jeremy Berkman, Trombonist

Member: Turning Point Ensemble, Touch of Brass Quintet, Jill Townsend Big Band, Vancouver Opera Orchestra, Peggy Lee Band....Awarded Mayor's Award (Music) for City of Vancouver Graduate of Juilliard School, and Oberlin College (Economics) and Conservatory of Music – studies with Tim Atherton, Thomas Cramer, and Per Brevig. Recent exploration of the music of the 16th and 17th centuries playing sackbut as a member of Cappella Borealis.

Appears on over 40 cds with among others Peggy Lee Band, Tanya Tagaq, Turning Point Ensemble, Bozzini String Quartet, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Michael Bubl , Matthew Good, Jill Townsend Big Band, Hard Rubber Orchestra. Sessional Instructor at UBC.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

1) **SOUND** The Trombone is member of the Low Brass family and so the instrument's most comfortable range is consistent with the vocal range of most adult men (i.e. from alto to bass). Historically, the trombone was the instrument that kept the altos, tenors, and basses in line – so it had to be very vocal. The sort of clumsy nature of its plumbing was outmatched by the virtuosity of the violin in the 1600s and the sax and trumpet in the 1900s! But we persevere...and are important members of blues horn sections, orchestral brass sections, brass bands, big bands, mixed brass chamber ensembles and...on rare and beautiful occasions...as a clinician and featured soloist :).

Comfortable range for most intermediate players: Tenor Trombone with F attachment – Bb Pedal two octaves+ below the piano's middle C to the C one octave above the piano's middle C. Advanced players can often extend that range in either direction by a perfect fourth. The range for the Alto trombone is smaller, basically from the C below middle C up to the same heights, with the first position harmonic series Eb rather than the tenor trombone's Bb.

2) Generally, trombonists read notes in bass clef though the classically trained players as they become more advanced learn to read in tenor and alto clefs – saving all those ledger lines! Trombonists in the brass band tradition read treble clef Bb parts to align their tunings to the physics of the instrument and with their greater family of brass instruments such as the cornet, Bb Euphonium, Bb baritone, and Bb Tuba. In the jazz tradition, trombonists solely play bass clef.

3) Because trombonists have slides they can glissando (“gliss”) between notes that other instruments are unable due to having keys or valves. In general, the glissando can only happen within the same partials of notes, i.e.....

From Tenor Trombone's First Position

Low Bb (Ninth below piano's middle C) down to or up from Low E
Middle F (Fifth below piano's middle C) down to or up from Low B natural
Middle Bb (Major second below middle C) down to or up from Middle E
D (Major second above middle C) down to or up from Middle Ab
F (next partial up) to or up from Middle B natural
Ab (sort of*) above Bb down to D
High Bb down to or up from High E
Etc.

*doesn't really exist on the horn as its place on the harmonic series is very flat to equal temperament

The "valves" can turn a Bb Trombone into an F, and so the partials need to be thought of accordingly, where first position is the harmonic series associated with the length of tubing the valve allows.

There is a beautiful thing called a "natural slur" for a trombonist, which occurs when moving in legato between notes of different partials. In this case, there is a natural legato where the air is not interrupted but the movement of notes are clearly articulated rather than slurred in a glissando..transitions to.....

4) **ARTICULATION:** Because we can articulate incrementally from a gliss to notes separated by considerable space – Articulation markings are important instructions for trombonists - as they tell us if and with what kind of separation between notes you would like. Options range from staccato, to staccato with a tenuto, to solely tenuto, to legato and then slurred. Likewise, what kind of accent? Note that there is some variance in how certain accents are understood both in jazz and classical, and in older European and North American notation. However, one can over-notate, and as important as is the notated articulation is the CHARACTER: trombonists can be sweet/playful/royal/gruff – it helps the performer buy in to your imagination by designating what kind of character you want us to present.

5) **BREATHING** - We can generally play about 8-15 seconds at most before we must breathe – so please give us time for that (and for any changes of mutes – which I'll explain). Higher and softer notes can be held for longer duration than lower and louder notes.

6) **ENDURANCE**–We do all our heavy lifting with our mouth muscles; we can't play all the time (like pianists!) – so we need breaks, both from playing high notes (low notes are great breaks!) – and from playing period (give us a lot of rests! We're lazy!)

7) WHERE TROMBONISTS FIND JOY:

We rarely are asked to show our lyrical side – we are often used in larger ensembles as the punctuation mark (often the exclamation mark!), the clown, or the bass pad. I encourage you to listen to Jack Teagarden, Tommy Dorsey, and BC's own Ian McDougall to hear the best of lyrical playing! It is our story that Frank Sinatra copied his phrasing from his first "boss", Tommy Dorsey and we're sticking to it!

8) MUTES:

Top Three Mutes:

Straight Mute – Nasal (works well with muted brass and winds)

Cup Mute – sweet (works well with strings)

Plunger Mute – wa-wa – a bit like speech.

I'm also increasingly asked to play with the harmon mute, and sometimes a bucket (very covered sound).....

Mutes in general greatly soften the volume, so especially if used with the organ, there should be space given for a softer volume...and plenty of time to insert or remove the mute.

9) EXTENDED TECHNIQUE

There is a lot that trombones can do that extend beyond traditional technique. I don't discourage your composing for us to utilize some of these techniques, but before you do I encourage you to explore the traditional strengths of the instrument so that any "extension" is truly something you can thoughtfully develop rather than a means of sonic surprise, which often I think becomes boring rather quickly.

Some extended techniques that now are part of compositional tradition include:

Singing while playing

Rumbles and Rips

Non-traditional sounds utilizing parts of the instrument

10) Any questions? Please e-mail me, Jeremy Berkman, at

augwin@hotmail.com

Happy Composing!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

APPENDIX:

SOME ESSENTIAL PROPONENTS OF THE TROMBONE --- LISTENING (Find on Youtube!):

Jazz:

Kid Ory

Jack Teagarden

Carol Jarvis

Tricky Sam Nanton

JJ Johnson

Ian McDougall

Locally : *Rod Murray*

Classical:

Vinko Globokar

Benny Sluchin

Christian Lindberg

Jeremy Berkman (just kidding!)

Turning Point Ensemble (seriously!)

Important Classical Masterworks featuring Extraordinary composing for the modern trombone:
Mahler Symphony #3, Mozart's Requiem, Hindemith Sonata, Berio Sequenza, Underhill Trombone Quintet.

Locally: *i tromboni*, Ellen Marple, *The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra section*)

Pop Music:

Chicago (e.g. 25 or 6 to 4)

Earth Wind and Fire

The National

Tower of Power

Matthew Good (*Lights of Endangered Species* – my favourite singer/songwriter's tune on which I recorded, with Rod Murray – great tune for trombones!)