TROMBONE/BARITONE

Performance Notes for 2010-2011 All-State Band Auditions

by

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This is a good etude to show off a full tone. Play the slower notes with a big centered sound. As you listen to yourself play these slower notes (or even tape record yourself!), ask, "Are these notes evenly placed? Did I hit the center of each note? Do some notes stick out? Do some notes sound muffled?" For example, a common mistake by a young player might be to play the second note of the etude much softer than the first because it is lower. Another common mistake might be to play than second note uncentered because it is lower. Can you hold your low notes steady or does the pitch bend around? Be certain that the sixteenth notes have a clear sound. A common mistake is to choke off the air for shorter notes so the lips cannot really vibrate. Practice playing the sixteenth note rhythms on your trombone without changing pitches. Do you get softer on the shorter notes? Can you play them even louder than the longer notes? Pull out your mouthpiece and try buzzing the rhythm of the faster notes (don’t worry so much about hitting the exact notes). Listen carefully! Are your lips buzzing for the short notes? Try putting the back of your hand in front of the mouthpiece as you buzz. You should feel little bursts of air for every note, not just the long notes.

Note carefully the articulation marks. In each slur, all the notes (except the first) should be smooth and connected. Think the syllables, "Tah-Dah-Dah" and so on. You will need to move your slide more quickly under the slurs so you don’t get glissandi between the notes.

Imagine yourself playing this etude in a gigantic room such as a cathedral or a sports arena. Take a deep, relaxed breath and fill that room with a sound that is big but not forced. As the great teacher Arnold Jacobs once said, "Make every note worth fifty bucks!"


OK, I’ll admit right away that I have a pet peeve about this etude. What is it? RHYTHM!! Simply put, a sixteenth note is not the same as an eighth-note triplet. Of course you know that but, when you play, do you actually do it? Throughout this lively little march, you find plenty of dotted eighth – sixteenth rhythms. It is so easy to play them with a triplet feel and not realize it. If I were judging, I would listen carefully and try to really reward those rare players who can actually play the rhythms the way they are
written. Here’s a trick to help make this rhythm accurate: set up a string of steady eighth notes and play those dotted rhythms over the eighth notes. You can do this by setting a metronome to quarter note = 216 or you can have a friend play eighth notes along with you as play. If you are listening carefully to those eighth notes, it is pretty hard to play a triplet rhythm. Want a really tough challenge? Keep the metronome at 108 but think of the clicks as offbeats while you play. Believe me, this isn’t easy! If you can pull it off, you’ve got great rhythm. Here’s another trick that might improve your dotted rhythms. Think about that little fanfare people sing when they’ve just done a magic trick: “Ta-Daaah.” The “Ta” is always right before the “Daaah.”

OK, enough about rhythm. **Dynamics** are also really important. This march gives a chance to show off huge contrasts. In your practice, sometimes use dynamic extremes that are even wider than you will use in the audition. Also, make a difference between *forte* and *fortissimo*. When you play *fortissimo*, don’t play out of control with an ugly sound and bad attacks. That just shows the judges that you don’t know how to make good choices with your instrument. Learn to play loud with a good sound and never go out of control in a performance or an audition. Conversely, on the softest dynamics, make sure the notes speak. To his brass players, the famous conductor Georg Solti used the phrase “safe soft.” He understood that having no note is worse than having a note that is little too loud. Once again, use the practice room to test your softest playing and then, in the audition, know your limits and play it smart.

Want to show off a **great sound**? Here are two important tips. First, don’t play notes too short. Especially with the quarter notes – show off a good body in the tone. Even the staccato notes shouldn’t be pecky. Remember that staccato mean separated, not short. Second, make sure the tone of each note starts right away. Often when we attack notes, we get a tiny little splinter in the sound just as the note starts. As one of my teachers used to say, “Get right to the ‘AH’ of ‘TAH’.” Think of it this way: most of these notes aren’t very long. If they don’t start clean, you never get to show off a nice sound on them.

**Intonation** is always important. This etude has a few G-flats thrown in. That’s a note that many players stumble on. Make sure you know exactly where G-flat is on your horn. Another common out-of-tune note is the upper E-flat. This is the 6th partial on the overtone series and the 6th partial is usually sharp. Many young players play it sharp so frequently that the out-of-tune version starts to sound right to them. Be sure that you not only play this note in lowered third position but that you also hear the correct intonation in your head.

This march should be easy to play with a good sense of **musical style**. It should have an exciting quality. Sometimes when we practice something over and over, we lose our sense of musicality and make the mistake of turning the piece into an exercise. To keep it fresh, try playing it in a variety of styles. One time, play lighter and more playful. Another time, play it heavy and solemn, like a funeral march. Another trick to improve phrasing is to play the rhythms of the piece on a single note. Make it as exciting and interesting as possible while repeating just that one note. You’d be surprised how much this can help you musically when you go back to playing it with the written notes.

Be sure to check out my website: [www.bonezone.org](http://www.bonezone.org). In the coming months I plan to post some exercises to help you prepare this audition etude.
This etude isn’t overly technical but don’t be fooled: it offers plenty of opportunities to differentiate between stronger and weaker players. First and, hopefully, most important: tone quality. The adagio cantabile tempo and sustained notes give you a chance to show off a lovely singing sound. You can develop that sound by playing long tones with your best musical sound and by learning to buzz sections of this on your mouthpiece (I suggest you buzz without tonguing as you move from note to note). If you have a piano handy, play the melody as you buzz to lock in the correct pitches. Make sure you buzz with relaxed flowing air. Another trick for improving tone quality: try playing this with a practice mute. After blowing through the resistance of the mute, you will find that the sound is more open and relaxed once you take the mute back out.

Next, think carefully about phrasing. This is an expressive melody. Circle certain notes as “target notes” and lead in to them so the melody has a sense of direction. Think about your articulation as a part of phrasing. Notice carefully the subtle differences in the phrase markings. For example, in m. 11, the slur carries through the C-flat so don’t lift after the long D-flat. Don’t play everything in one legato style with no variety. However, when you tongue the non-legato notes, don’t punch them or play staccato. Keep these notes relatively long but with a lightly tongued beginning. Also, be sure to mark in your breaths. Sometimes the music doesn’t provide obvious places to breathe. Don’t shortchange the note right before the breath. Often we allow these “before-the-breath” notes to be thrown away because we are paying more attention to the upcoming breath than the quality of the note we are playing. As Yoda said, complaining about Luke Skywalker, “Never his mind on where he was. Hmm? What he was doing!”

Also, focus on intonation. Devote time to finding an accurate 5th position; make sure it is consistently in tune in each practice session. To improve the smoothness of legato, there are many opportunities for alternate positions, especially the B-flat in raised 5th and the F in 6th. Each position choice has advantages and disadvantages. Usually, one gains the ease of a close, neighbor position but runs the greater risk of playing out of tune. Go through the piece carefully and try each position choice both ways. Don’t decide right away but continue practicing both ways for a while, making each one sound as good as possible. Eventually, the better choice will become apparent. There are no automatic right and wrong answers.

Another important area where many players will needlessly give up points is rhythm. The biggest traps to avoid are the long notes. Having recorded this in my own practice sessions, I have discovered how easy it is to shortchange the long tied notes in m. 10 and to lose my sense of steady tempo in mm. 2, 5, 8, 11 and especially 14!

One little trick that may or may not work for you: my F-attachment valve is in good working condition so I like to play the little triplet turn (as in m.3, for example) using the trigger for the B-flat in the middle of the triplet. Don’t do this if your trigger is slow or noisy. Also, make sure you get a good-sounding A-flat before pushing the trigger. The triplet isn’t as fast as you might think.

I have written some practice exercises for this etude. They are available for free download from my website: www.bonezone.org. At this website you can also find my blog, tips to improve your playing and a daily routine to download and practice.