THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EUPHONIUM

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"In its heyday at the turn of the (twentieth) century, the euphonium was a featured solo instrument in park band concerts, a required double for most trombonists, and held an important role in virtually all wind band music. Today it is rapidly vanishing from our bands. For those of us who play this remarkable instrument, and for anyone who has heard a fine euphonium player, this is truly a tragedy. It is also puzzling, in that one of the most effective ways to improve the sound of a band is to build a good euphonium section"!

I wrote those words for an article in the Fall, 1995 issue of the *Idaho Music Notes*, and I think the euphonium is still in danger of disappearing. So, with some updating, here again is my case for having euphoniums in your bands.

Why is the euphonium so important to our band programs? First, it is usually the only stable, in-tune bass voice in young groups. The trombone requires two to three years to master the slide technique needed for good intonation. Low woodwinds are more reliable in pitch, but most young bands do not have a full complement of low saxophones, low clarinets and bassoons. Second, the euphonium adds a strong voice to the low brass section that usually suffers from small numbers. Third, the standard band literature - especially the classic British band works from the early twentieth century that form the heart of the modern band repertoire - has extensive and important euphonium parts (think of the two Holst Suites). That body of music, including such mature works as Walton's Crown Imperial, Holst's aforementioned Suites and Hammersmith, and Hunsberger's transcription of Shostakovich's Festive Overture have technically demanding euphonium parts. The high school band director must insure that experienced players enter the program in order to play these works.

How to Build a Euphonium Section

Where to start with an instrument barely known outside the band world (not to mention what to call it: see below concerning Baritone versus Euphonium)? I feel where we have gone wrong as band directors is our failure to advocate for the less popular wind instruments when we recruit for our bands. In order to have good euphonium players in your bands, you must regularly start euphonium players in the younger grades. In my experience once students enter high school they are very reluctant to switch to different instruments due to the financial investment in their own instruments or the reluctance to become "beginners" again.

Two methods for building your euphonium section are possible: to start them on that instrument, or to switch them from the trumpet in the second or third year of playing. I have had the most success with the second method, switching the second, third or fourth chair trumpet players. I would first convince them of the importance of the euphonium (an exciting demonstration by a euphonium player works wonders), move them directly to that instrument (using treble clef baritone parts, an easy switch in that the clef and fingerings remain the same), and give them a two-week trial period. It is important to transfer these treble clef players to the bass clef by the time they reach high school, as many band arrangements have only bass clef parts and most of the standard euphonium literature is written in bass clef. In fact, as of last year Alfred has eliminated all treble clef baritone parts from their secondary band music.

Obviously, after all the time and effort spent recruiting euphonium players the band director must make an effort to program music with important euphonium parts. Otherwise these players may decide to switch right back to the trumpet where all the "action" is!

Baritone versus Euphonium

The euphonium suffers from a confusing collection of names. The explosion in European wind instrument construction during the nineteenth century resulted in many different instruments sharing the baritone range of the brass family. Thus there is the euphonium, baritone, tenor horn, tenor tuba, baritone tuba, tenor and bass Wagner tuben, tenor helicon, alto horn and bass horn. Because our military (and thus our band) tradition is based upon the English model, we call our versions of these instruments baritones and euphoniums. They are not the same: the baritone belongs to the saxhorn family and has a narrow bore and small bell; the euphonium belongs to the tuba family and has a large bore and bell. Consequently the baritone has an almost trombone-like timbre compared to the euphonium's luxurious sound. A true baritone horn is a rarity in this country and is found primarily in brass bands. The instruments in most American public school bands (with the characteristic front-pointing bells) are actually small-bore euphoniums. The preferred instrument - and the one that should be in your bands - is a true euphonium, as found in most college and miliary bands. It will produce the rich, full tone that best serves the music of the modern band composer, and is preferred by most good euphonium players.

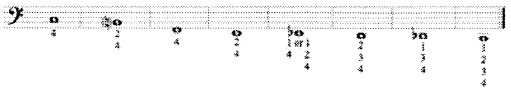
Proper Mouthpieces and Instruments

One of my classic statements from Brass Techniques class: the euphonium is not a trombone with valves. It needs a larger mouthpiece with a deep cup specifically designed to match the euphonium's larger bore and bell. For younger students (middle school and junior high) a Bach 5 will work; for high school and more advanced students the Schilke 51D is the model of choice.

As mentioned above, most public schools use bell-front "baritones," which are actually small-bore euphoniums. While these are cheaper than full-sized instruments, they do not produce the characteristic rich, full sound of a true euphonium. Fine instruments are available for approximately $2000 and include the Yamaha YEP 321, Besson BE1065 and UMI 2280. Matched with a Schilke 51D mouthpiece, any of these will produce a marked improvement in the sound of your band!

The Fourth Valve

A fourth valve may be added to either a baritone or a euphonium. It is used to correct the inherent sharpness of low C and B natural, and to extend the lower range. Why is this valve so important? Note that with the 1-3 fingering the second space C may be as much as 15-25 cents sharp; using the fourth valve will put this note in tune (see the fingering chart below).



In addition, the fourth valve adds the important notes below EE, which occur quite often in many of the classic band works of Holst and Vaughan Williams (see the musical example below).

In fact, the 4th valve is so important that I would recommend avoiding 3-valved instruments entirely; most 3-valved versions of my recommended euphoniums are only $200 or so less than the 4-valved versions.

Let's not forget the euphoniums! I will check back in sixteen years!

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. David Mathie is the Professor of Trombone, Euphonium and Instrumental Music at Boise State University, and Second Trombonist with the Boise Philharmonic. He holds degrees in Music Education and Performance from Ithaca College, the Juilliard School of Music, and the University of Georgia. He has taught in the public schools of New York and Connecticut, and has served on the faculty at the National Music Camp, Interlochen, and Southwestern College in Kansas. As a performer on both trombone and euphonium, Dr. Mathie has worked with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the Hartford Symphony, the Stamford Symphony, the Connecticut Symphony, the Sun Valley Summer Symphony, and the Hudson Valley Philharmonic. His euphonium majors at BSU have gone on to graduate work at the University of North Texas and the University of Dayton.