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Trombone Solo

Andante con moto



Teaching Legato

to Young Trombonists

Slowly



Teaching *legato* technique to young trombonists is often a difficult and confusing task for band directors. Many elementary-level methods introduce the slur, the foundation of *legato* technique, in the book's first lessons and the articulation style abounds in easy band compositions; yet, rarely do editors offer a complete explanation of the slur and *legato* playing. Although achieving a true *legato* takes years of practice, learning it is not as difficult as you may think.

The best time to teach *legato* slurs is when the student has a full sound, is comfortable with slide positions, and produces good intonation and consistent articulation. These qualities usually appear during the second year of playing for most students; using *legato* tonguing any sooner usually proves to be too difficult for them. The process of teaching *legato* falls into three stages: preparation, first lessons, and follow-up.

Preparation

Just as for any new playing technique, plan in advance to teach legato. The most obvious starting point (and the most frequently overlooked) is the student's trombone slide. Unless it is in good

working order and moves freely, legato slurs are impossible. A good method for testing the slide is to have the student place the trombone in front of him (straight up and down), unlock the slide lock, and lift the trombone with the left hand. The outer slide should remain on the floor. A slide that adheres to the instrument is either bent or in poor condition and will need to be repaired. After playing some student trombones, I am amazed that the young owners of these instruments can play anything at all. Fixing such a slide would improve the trombone section of almost any band.

Next, check the lubrication of the slide. Trombone creams such as Superslick or Conn Formula Three are best. Wipe the inner slides clean about twice a week; re-apply the cream in small amounts to the end of each inner slide. Trombone oils or liquid slide treatments are usually ineffective because, after applied, they disappear through the spit valve.

David Mathie has been the trombone instructor at the National Music Camp (Interlochen, Michigan) since 1978. He is the band director at the Bloomfield, Connecticut Junior High School.

Proper right-hand position is important in smooth playing. Have the student hold the slide between his right thumb and the first two fingers at the bottom of the slide brace (he should be able to look at his thumbnail). His other two fingers should loosely dangle below the slide. Tell the player to let his fingers grip the brace firmly, but with a relaxed feeling. Although there are many right-hand positions, this one works best for most students.

First Lessons

Professional players often describe the *legato* on trombone as a seamless connection of notes, performed as a vocalist would sing a ballad. However, the most seamless connection of notes on the trombone is the *glissando*, which makes the best and worst slurs possible. A good slur is a compromise between tonguing a passage and smearing it. Keeping this idea in mind, the student should produce a slur by ar-

ticulating with a "doo" syllable while moving the slide quickly from note to note to avoid a smear. At all times he should keep the air stream fast and steady.

Demonstrate these concepts ("doo" tongue, fast slide, steady air) to the student by playing the trombone yourself, or using any other instrument or your voice. To further help young players, suggest that they listen to good recordings that have excellent examples of the technique (some are listed at the end of this article), or recruit the assistance of high school or college trombonists to demonstrate how *legato* is done.

Next have the student play F to E \flat slowly, without tonguing the E \flat , to produce a *glissando*. Then have him do the same but tongue the two notes "ta-doo." Listen carefully to the articulation on the second note, making sure it is a soft "doo" sound, rather than the normal "ta." The student will acquire a much better *legato* style if you teach him to clean up the *glissando*, rather than soften up the tongue. Have the student play F to E \flat ("ta-doo") a number of times to become familiar with the new articulation. The notes at this point probably will be rather messy. Have the student move the slide (not the tempo) faster between the notes, emphasizing a soft tongue on the E \flat and a smooth, even slide motion. By now the slurs should be fairly clean, and the style should be more of a *glissando* rather than two separate tones. Have the student add fourth position D to the two notes, playing "ta-doo-doo." Stress that the player should work for smoothness; as he adds more notes to the slur, he should increase the amount of air for playing them.

Next ask the student to play simple songs by ear ("Mary Had a Little Lamb" on G, F, and E \flat) to try this new articulation. In this way, he can listen to the quality of slurs while not worrying about reading notes. If the slurs are not clear, ask the student to move the slide faster; if the slurs sound too hard, suggest that the player soften the "doo" tongue. Always stress the unbroken flow of air be-



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tween the notes. As an assignment, have the student go back to the beginning of the method book and slur all the exercises.

Follow-Up

At the next lesson, the student will probably be tonguing too hard, so begin by reinforcing the "doo-doo-doo" concept with two or three notes, just as in the first lesson. If the player has difficulty coordinating the slide and his tongue, suggest that he first play slurred quarter notes; then, while you clap the beats, have him move the slide to the correct position exactly on each pulse. Allow a few weeks' time for the *legato* tongue to develop, and be aware that a proper *legato* style goes hand in hand with good tone and intonation.

Trombonists are capable of producing lip slurs just like any other player on brass instruments, as well as natural slurs (slurring against the overtones without using the tongue) that are indigenous to the instrument. For young students, however, *legato* tonguing each note is the most effective method. As the student advances, suggest he discuss different articulation styles with a private teacher. I see that most junior high and high school trombonists over-articulate when slurring to produce a *tenuto* style rather than a true *legato*. Listening to recordings by Tommy Dorsey, Bill Watrous, or Henry Charles Smith will demonstrate how truly beautiful the trombone *legato* can be.

Study Materials

Second and Third Year Students

Concone-Miller: *Forty Legato Studies*

Bordner: *First Book of Practical Studies*

Remington: *Warm-Up Studies*

Advanced Students

Fink: *Studies in Legato*

Smith (ed.): *Solos for the Trombone Player*

Borgdoni-Rochut: *Melodious Etudes, Vol. 1*

(These methods are available from Robert King Music, 112A Main Street, North Easton, Massachusetts.

Recordings

Henry Charles Smith: *Trombone Recital*

Ralph Sauer: *Vox Gabrieli*

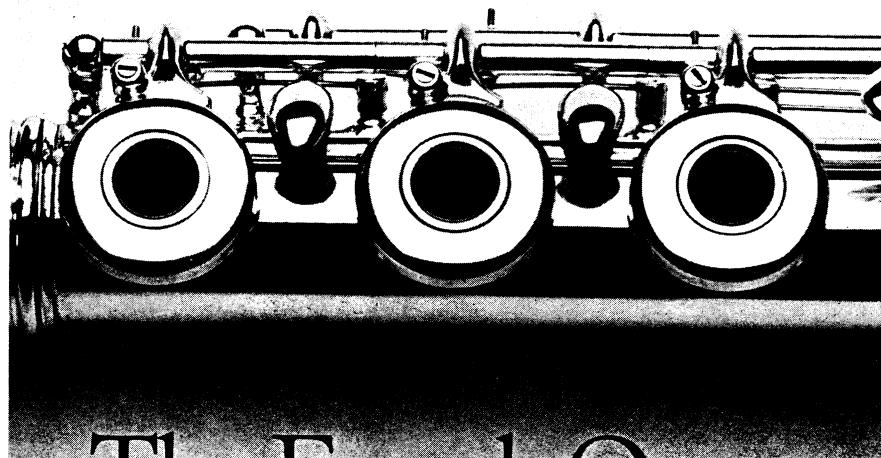
Ronald Barron: *Le Trombone Français*

Richard Cryder: *The Lyric Trombone*

Tommy Dorsey: any available recordings

Bill Watrous: any available recordings

(These recordings are available from Accura Music, Athens, Ohio.)



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