

Where are the Euphoniums?

By Dr. David Mathie

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In its heyday at the turn of the 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!

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 necessary 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). This body of music, and such mature band works as Walton's *Crown Imperial*, Holst's *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.

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 British 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 junior high and high school bands—is a true euphonium, as found in most college and military 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.

How to Build a Euphonium Section

If only MTV would air some videos featuring the euphonium (or trombone, or bassoon or cornet)! Reality intrudes, so band directors have the duty to become advocates for the less popular wind instruments when they recruit for their bands. In order to have good euphonium players in your high school band, you (or the elementary band director) 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 instrument 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

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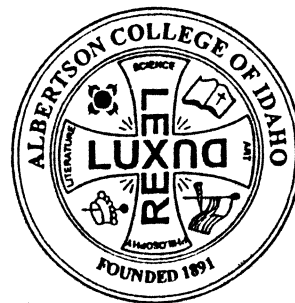
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have had the most success with the second method, switching the second, third or fourth chair trumpet players. I would first convince them of the importance of the euphonium, move them directly to that instrument (using treble clef baritone parts) and give them a two-week trial period. This was an easy switch in that no new clef or fingerings are required. However, I feel it is important to eventually 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.

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!

Proper Mouthpieces and Instruments

It is important to remember that the euphonium is not a trombone with valves. It needs a larger mouthpiece specifically designed to match the euphonium's larger bore and bell. For younger students (middle school and junior high) a Bach 6' A will work; for high school and more advanced students the Schilke 51D is the model of choice.

Most public schools use bell-front "baritones," which are actually small-bore euphoniums. While these are cheaper than full-sized euphoniums, as I mentioned above they do not produce the characteristic rich, full sound of a true euphonium. Good instruments are available for approximately \$1500, and include the Yamaha YEP 321, Besson 765 and Willson 2704. Matched with a Schilke 51D mouthpiece, any of these will produce a marked improvement in

the sound of your band! For college-bound music majors, professional instruments such as the Willson 2900, Besson 967 or Yamaha 641 are recommended. Note that these instruments usually cost \$4000 or more, and obviously are not your best choice for public schools.

The Fourth Valve

A fourth valve may be added to either a baritone or a euphonium. It is primarily used to correct the inherent sharpness of low C and B. 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. Consequently the C is fingered 4 and the B 2-4. 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. In fact, the 4th valve is so important that I would recommend avoiding 3-valved instruments entirely.

So, where are the euphoniums? Obviously, they need to be in the back row of your bands (and you didn't think I'd catch that punch line)! ✓

David Mathie is Associate Professor of Trombone and Low Brass at Boise State University, and Second Trombonist with the Boise Philharmonic. He is a Yamaha Artist, and plays the model 641 euphonium. Dr. Mathie holds a Bachelor of Music Education degree from Ithaca College, a Master of Music degree in trombone performance from the Juilliard School of Music, and a Doctor of Music Arts degree in trombone performance and music education from 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, Dr. Mathie has performed with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra (on trombone and euphonium), the Hartford Symphony, the Stamford Symphony, the Connecticut Symphony, the Sun Valley Summer Symphony, and the Hudson Valley Philharmonic.