

LONG TONE *duets*

Style and Articulation

for Tenor and Bass Trombones

Michael Becker

***Foreword by the low brass section of the
Chicago Symphony Orchestra:***

**Jay Friedman, Michael Mulcahy, and Charles Vernon,
trombones**

Gene Pokorny, tuba

Long Tone Duets for Tenor and Bass Trombones: Style and Articulation
Michael Becker
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Foreword

Long tones have always been the universal exercise used by brass players in the development and maintenance of fundamentals. From the beginning student to the top players in the world, it is the most fundamental process we go through on a daily basis to maintain a strong foundation. These duets, presented here by Michael Becker, go beyond the basics of the traditional long tone routine by challenging the player to execute style and articulation. Clarity of articulation and style has always been the hallmark of the Chicago Symphony Brass and an important part of my teaching. I think this book will be a great resource for anyone looking to improve these skills. - **Jay Friedman, Principal Trombone, Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

It is a well-worn cliché that long tones are vital for the establishment of stable technique and a refined sound. This comprehensive volume by Michael Becker sharpens the focus on our approach to such practice to ensure a healthy, productive outcome. An invaluable dimension of the Chicago Symphony legacy that goes back at least seventy years is the energy of the attack and the vibrancy of sound. I am happy to see such emphases embodied in this work. - **Michael Mulcahy, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Faculty, Northwestern University**

From the first day we picked up our instrument, we have always played long tones to improve our strength, tone, and breath control, but being a great musician requires more. We must have a unique musical sound and sense of style that sets a very high standard of music making on the instrument. Great sound production starts with a concept of the best sound possible, then continues with singing this sound through your buzzing lips on top of a steady stream of air—instant tone!

In this book by Michael Becker, you will get a great model of sound and articulation to emulate. Make this book part of your daily practice and I am confident you will benefit greatly from it. - **Charles Vernon, Bass Trombone, Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

Mike Becker's *Long Tone Duets* offers a young player a sparring partner only a click away. Matching the recorded sound in start, release, volume, pitch and especially articulation is the ultimate skill in being a valued team player in any ensemble. Mr. Becker's book provides a very good start. - **Gene Pokorny, Tuba, Chicago Symphony Orchestra**

Preface

The key to any world-class brass section is great tone production and matching style. In my experience, getting style and articulation to become audible and effective to the listener often requires an exaggeration in the execution of the markings. I created these *Long Tone Duets* to be more than the traditional strength builders for the embouchure and breath control exercises. In each of these duets, you will encounter many of the most common style and articulation markings found in the orchestral repertoire. If you are seeking a career as an orchestral trombonist, it is critical to execute these markings with clarity and precision, which turns notes on the page into great music.

For maximum benefit from this book, you should always aim to make every style notation pronounced and, most importantly, match my articulations in the recording while playing along.

The book is divided into three sections: #1-12 tenor trombone, #13-17 tenor or bass trombone, and #18-30 bass trombone. However, I highly recommend that both bass and tenor trombonists perform all thirty duets. For the tenor trombonist, it will be a good low register builder and for the bass trombonist, a good high register builder. And of course, everyone plays in the middle register! It is my hope that this book is a useful tool to improve your skills, and will be fun to use as well.

It is my pleasure to present this version of *Long Tone Duets* for Trombone. Happy practicing!

Michael Becker

For more information about the **Becker Low Brass Boot Camp**, please visit www.beckerlowbrassbootcamp.com

Introduction

Great sound starts with immediate and free-flowing air. Great style comes in part from effective articulation. Great articulation can only be achieved with free air. Connecting these elements will set you on the right path. When you have a clear concept of how you want the articulation to sound, you can commit to the start of each note with confidence. This allows you to produce a vibrant and lively sound, and provides you with the ability to communicate musically.

Since the first four duets are familiar, you can use them to focus on relaxation and releasing the air without inhibition to minimize tension. By cultivating immediate and free air with the first four duets, they can serve as your model when encountering the more difficult duets that follow.

Here are guidelines to explain the goal of each duet. Of course, in addition to these specifics, the overall goal should always be immediate and free air to create a vibrant and lively sound, and the most important goal of all is to *make music*.

- 1. *Tenuto* Remington:** *Tenuto* means sustained note lengths, but you should still strive for clarity at the beginning of the note.
- 2. *forte-piano* Remington:** *Forte-piano* is an immediate drop-off in volume; think of starting the note like a hammer striking a bell.
- 3. *forte-diminuendo* Remington:** This articulation is the same as #2 above, but the sound decays less quickly.
- 4. *sfz* Remington:** The *sfz* articulation is made with immediate air, but there is heaviness to the air and sound that shapes the note—imagine what a half inflated rubber ball hitting the ground would look like.
- 5. *Simon Says*:** An accented note is not necessarily louder; it just has clarity like a bell tone and some decay, just like the symbol indicates. As you transition to *tenuto*, maintain the clarity of articulation you established with the accented notes.
- 6. *Quasi-Brahms*:** This study imitates the chorale from the fourth movement of Brahms' *Symphony #4*. The notes are connected but there is some decay and stickiness between them. The slurs with dots suggest a half tongued, half slurred style.
- 7. *Waltz*:** This duet has many changes to the articulation throughout. Carefully execute the style as marked so it syncs well with the accompaniment. The hat-shaped accents (^) indicate heaviness to the beginnings of the notes.
- 8. *The Wave*:** Strive to keep the sound quality consistent and never strident at the loudest point in the hairpins.

9. Ping!: In each phrase, the first two measures are *tenuto* and the third bar has an accented note. Strive to make that difference audible every time, and each time you reach the accented note, you should create a “PING!” attack.

10. No Bumps or Bulges: This duet highlights the quintessential art of orchestral section playing. Often, you are confronted with soft chord passages that stretch across challenging partials in the middle register. Adding a *diminuendo* to the line makes it even more of a challenge. Mastering this technique is highly rewarding and affords you a beautiful section sound that is sensitive to the expression of the music. Leading the direction of the phrase with airflow will allow your slide movement to remain smooth and eliminate unwanted bumps or bulges in the sound.

11. Mantra: You are in for the long haul on this one! A mantra is a repeated phrase or chant used in Buddhism/Hinduism to put you into a meditative state or quiet the mind. The repetitive nature of this exercise aims to focus the mind on the musical line starting in the comfort zone and maintaining a relaxed state as the register builds higher and higher. Let the ease of each phrase be the teacher for the next phrase as you move up the register. Remember: always make music out of each phrase with the style markings. Minimizing tension into the high register and sustained passages of this nature will allow you to build strength and endurance. **If you become fatigued during this duet, pause the recording and rest. It does more harm than good to continue if you are too tired to maintain correct form!**

12. A Little Russian: This duet was inspired by the second trombone solo in Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Russian Easter Overture*. Play it like you’re singing a great aria on stage.

13. Circle of Fourths: Always maintain your best quality of sound through the hairpins and let the sustained airflow in the *tenuto* notes be a guide to the legato phrase.

14. Articulation Transitions: The *forte-piano* articulation forces you to start with immediate and present airflow. Let the clarity of that articulation be your model as you transition through different styles.

15. Fifths to Thirds: Make sure to achieve the heaviness of the *sfz* articulation at the top of the hairpin and keep the sound connected throughout. The triplets with slurs and accents also have a weighted quality.

16. Echo: Keep this duet smooth and connected, and strive to eliminate bumps in the air as you hand off the end of your phrase to the beginning of the next phrase in the bottom part.

17. Quasi Saint-Saëns: This one is simple: keep it smooth. Let the flow of air guide you through the direction of each phrase. Conceptually, the airflow goes before the slide, as if you are blowing the slide to each note. This duet is good practice for the solo Saint-Saëns’ *Organ Symphony*.

18. Octaves: Make each note your best sound. Switch octaves as you please but maintain clarity of the attack.

19. Pedal to the Metal: In this register, clarity of articulation and a centered sound are the goals. Maintain your best sound at this dynamic. Play softer if it sounds wild and out of control, then build back up. Always start where you have your best sound and minimal tension, then build from there. Sometimes, a “NA” or “NO” articulation helps in this register.

20. Expanding Intervals: Maintain the accented notes throughout all registers.

21. Quasi Brahms (bass version): See #6 above.

22. Quasi Pines: This duet was inspired by Respighi’s *Pines of Rome*. Maintain a thick airstream in these legato phrases and allow the airstream to dictate the shape and direction of the phrase. It may help to think of an open vowel sound like “NAW”. Be sure to put a mini bell-tone on the accented note within the context of the dynamic.

23. Cherry Picking: Make each style marking audible and match what you hear. It is better to exaggerate the markings than not hear them (think of it like stage make-up!) Any notes can be played in alternate octaves; however, don’t shy away from the high register notes. These are also in the bass trombone register.

24. I-V7-I: This duet requires an articulation transition from *forte-piano* to *tenuto*. Let the immediacy and freedom of air from the *forte-piano* be your model of clarity throughout the exercise.

25. Chorale: Emulate a hymn, like a Bach chorale. Listen for tuning and bring out the accented moving notes in each passage within the context of the dynamic.

26. Dies Irae: Play this duet in the style of the “dies irae” from Berlioz’s *Symphony Fantastique*. The hat-shaped accents on each note indicate a heavy front, and the quarter notes in the bottom part will accentuate this style. It should never sound punchy.

27. The Dragon: Keep the intensity and direction of the phrase moving forward. The heavy style of the *sfz* will guide the direction of each phrase. Keep the notes as sustained as possible.

28. Roller Coaster: Keep the quality of sound consistent through the octave leaps and strive to play the phrase smooth and rounded. Jumping two octaves in some registers is a challenge. The slur markings are your end goal. Try to achieve as much connectedness as possible and enjoy the ride!

29. Quasi Rheingold: This duet is inspired by Wagner’s *Das Rheingold* and has two main objectives: consistency of sound quality through register shifts; and being mindful

of the space or lift after the staccato quarter note. The note with the hat-shaped accent should have heaviness to it within the context of the dynamic.

30. Scales in Changing Styles: Make the style differences in this duet obvious and match the bottom player. Always keep sound quality consistent throughout registers and stylistic changes.

NOTE: The reader always plays the TOP line.

♩ = 88

4 clicks up front

simile

1. *Tenuto* Remington

mf

simile

♩ = 88

4 clicks up front

simile

2. *fp* Remington

fp > *fp* > *fp* >

simile