the low brass player's guide to DOUBLING

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The Low Brass Player's Guide to Doubling
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Foreword

This much needed book fills a gap for low brass players in what has become a necessity for teachers and performers alike. At one time, doubling on brass instruments was a rarity, but in today's world it is common to be passed over if one doesn't play at least one double, and usually more than one. Micah Everett and company tackle this issue in an organized, comprehensive, and systematic manner. Each section gives the would-be doubler a great head start over the traditional trial and error techniques of the past, and the challenges presented by each instrument are thoroughly explained. From motivation for doubling, to types and quality of instruments, to suggested materials and practice techniques, this book is a winner.

Les Benedict

Low Brass Artist

Acknowledgements

A project of this magnitude is never a solo endeavor, so I must express appreciation to the many individuals who made this book possible, including David Vining of Mountain Peak Music, who contacted me after reading some of my blog posts on doubling and asked if I would like to expand those ideas into a book-length project. One of my main reasons for blogging was to develop my "writing chops" and hopefully one day produce something longer, more substantial, and in print. I am grateful for the opportunity to do just that, and on a topic that has very much defined my career as a low brass player.

I owe much to Dr. Edward R. Bahr, Professor of Low Brass (retired) at Delta State University. Not only was his teaching formative for my low brass playing, but his many connections in our professional community were vital in the early stages of my career. Most importantly for the present subject, "Doc" was singularly responsible for encouraging (actually, more like *demanding*) that I take up euphonium doubling in a serious way after hearing my unpracticed dabbling on the instrument (of the kind that I warn against in this book). That decision truly set the course for the remainder of my career, and I am thankful for Dr. Bahr's encouragement and friendship, then and now.

My two applied teachers in graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) further developed my abilities not only in brass playing and teaching generally, but particularly as a doubler. Dr. Randy Kohlenberg supervised my initial performing work as an alto trombonist and encouraged me to take up bass trombone. He was reluctantly supportive of my euphonium doubling, realizing its importance for my career but also lamenting the negative effects it sometimes had on my trombone playing. He helped me recognize and negotiate certain key differences in approach between the cylindrical and conical low brasses, concepts which now permeate my playing and teaching and which appear throughout this book. Dr. Dennis AsKew was willing to take me on as a euphonium student even though that was not my primary instrument at the graduate level. His teaching helped me to further understand and master differences between the trombone and euphonium, particularly with regard to articulation, while an independent study he supervised on euphonium and tuba pedagogy and literature prepared me for life and work teaching all of the low brass instruments. The instruction and support provided by all three of these men have been invaluable, and although they were not directly consulted during the preparation of this book,

their teaching can be found throughout its pages.

My colleagues at the University of Mississippi have kindly offered encouragement, and I am particularly grateful to our late department chair, Dr. Charles R. Gates, who from our very first meeting both encouraged and admonished me to do big things. I certainly hope this project qualifies. To my students both current and former—at Ole Miss, the University of Louisiana at Monroe, the University of Northern Iowa, Elon University, and at UNCG—you have provided the primary forum in which I have developed the ideas presented here. I often feel I have learned as much from you as you have from me.

Although the majority of this text is my own, six coauthors contributed individual chapters. Jeff Cortazzo, Dr. Marc Dickman, Brian French, Dr. Frank Gazda, Dr. Alexander Lapins, and Dr. J. Mark Thompson are all experienced players, teachers, and doublers, and each has expertise in areas where I am lacking. This is a better book because of their contributions, and I appreciate their willingness to participate in its creation.

Finally, to my wife Jennifer and my son Brody, who have patiently endured my absence (even when working at home!) while I worked so long on this and other writing and performing endeavors, I am always thankful for your love, encouragement, patience, and prayers. I am a better man because you are in my life. Even though I sometimes find it difficult to wear all the different hats of musician, teacher, husband, father, and churchman (not necessarily in that—or always the same—order), I thank God for the opportunity to even try to do it all.

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Introduction

Before taking up a secondary instrument, strive to cultivate solid fundamental brass playing on your primary instrument. This basic proficiency on your primary instrument is a prerequisite for successful doubling. Once that foundation is established, you might decide to branch out into playing one or more secondary instruments. Here are a number of good reasons to play multiple low brass instruments, beginning with the higher objectives related to personal enrichment and proceeding to those which appeal to our baser motives (such as making more money).

Personal Enjoyment

Personal enjoyment is a foundational motivation for making music and should be a primary factor in choosing to double. While doubling provides opportunities for developing musicianship, the initial learning process will no doubt include some drudgery as you cultivate fundamental playing skills on the new instrument. If you can learn to enjoy the process, learning to double will be more pleasant. More importantly, maintaining a sense of joy throughout your career is vital to your long-term happiness in the music business, regardless of the number of instruments you play.

Broader Musicianship

To some, the idea of specializing on a single instrument sounds like a life with limited musical horizons. Each low brass instrument has interesting players, teachers, and literature to its credit, and the breadth of musical ideas possible on each instrument increases with each passing day. Multiply that breadth by two, three, four or more instruments, and the performers, pedagogical ideas, repertoire, and skills that enter your orbit increases dramatically. By performing well on several instruments, doublers become more complete musicians, regardless of the instrument being played at any given moment.

Exposure to New Literature

A key benefit of doubling for low brass players is exposure to new literature, both for instruction and performance. Low brass instruments naturally have a large body of shared repertoire, but each instrument also has solo, chamber works, and study materials which might be unfamiliar to players of the other instruments. Taking up a secondary instrument will introduce you to new composers,

repertoire, and ideas that will enhance your musicianship.

One of the most obvious literature-related benefits of doubling comes in the programming of solo and chamber performances. When you learn a secondary instrument well enough to perform on that instrument as a recitalist, the number of quality works available to you doubles! Instead of returning repeatedly to old standbys, the skilled doubler can give performances of interesting and challenging solo literature and go for years without repeating a piece. Likewise, while the brass quintet is a versatile ensemble, its available repertoire is increased when the trombonist can double on euphonium, or the player on the bottom part can play both tuba and bass trombone, or even cimbasso. Smaller groups such as brass trios benefit greatly when players can choose between multiple instruments; the usual trumpet/horn/tenor trombone group can quickly adopt a darker and warmer sound by changing to a flugelhorn/horn/bass trombone instrumentation. Even like-instrument ensembles such as trombone quartets and tuba quartets can add variety by using doubling instruments. Each of these instrumentation changes brings new choices of timbres and literature.

Additional Performance Opportunities

Doubling makes new performing opportunities available to you in two ways: by enabling you to work in different types of ensembles, and by allowing you to assume different roles in settings with which you are already familiar. Perhaps the most common example of doubling in different types of ensembles is the tuba or euphonium player who takes up trombone to perform in jazz and popular groups. Trombone players should consider that pit orchestras, studio work, and sometimes even big bands require a single player to double on bass trombone and tuba or tenor and bass trombones, and sometimes more than two instruments. Playing more instruments makes different types of chamber ensembles available to you, and as mentioned previously, can even allow players to vary the instrumentation of existing groups for interesting tonal effects and greater marketability.

Sometimes taking up a secondary instrument allows you to occupy different or modified roles in familiar settings. For example, suppose a tenor trombonist moves to a new city in which there are more competent tenor trombonists than available work, but a relatively small number of working bass trombonists. Adding a bass trombone double might lead to more gigs more quickly than continuing to play tenor trombone only. Doubling on alto trombone is a necessity for those wanting to play first trombone in symphony orchestras, and the cimbasso is an increasingly expected double for tubists. In concert bands and brass bands, the trombones and conical low brasses occupy very

different places in the ensemble's tonal palette. Being able to play several instruments well enables you to experience all of these.

Improved Teaching Opportunities

The professional musician that works exclusively as a performer is exceedingly rare. Usually, the working musician must assemble a living from multiple income streams that will almost certainly include teaching. Musicians who develop competency on a secondary instrument are more competitive as they enter the job market. For example, a low brass player seeking employment as a school band director will be more likely to be hired and to succeed as a program's "brass person" if she is proficient on at least one instrument from the trombone and tuba families. Proficient performers might be employed as applied teachers at smaller colleges and universities on an adjunct basis, and a player who doubles on two or more low brass instruments will be a stronger candidate for such a position. A band or orchestra director with aspirations of conducting a collegiate ensemble will find that entry-level college positions often include applied teaching as part of the course load; a conductor who is an able and experienced performer will be a much stronger candidate for such positions and a doubler's application will be further enhanced. Given the fierce competition for academic jobs, the more hats one can wear, the better.

Cultivating multiple areas of teaching competency is vital even for those who pursue careers as college and university professors. With full-time, tenure-track positions becoming increasingly rare, many music departments will hire a professor of low brass rather than specialists on both trombone and tuba, much less euphonium. Players with demonstrated ability and experience on two or more low brass instruments will be stronger candidates for such positions.

For the full-time performer who teaches private lessons, the importance of doubling is more obvious and more directly remunerative. If you can play multiple instruments you can accept students on all of those instruments. Some schools hire private teachers to teach on site, even during the school day, and a competent teacher of several instruments might be preferred to a specialist on only one.

Improved Teaching Abilities

Doubling requires that you have a secure understanding of the fundamental aspects of playing, including the air, embouchure formation, articulation, etc. Successful performing on multiple

instruments requires a more thoughtful approach to these basic elements, making you better able to recognize, diagnose, and correct weaknesses in your students' playing. Similarly, doubling gives you a more informed understanding of the problems experienced by young students. Taking up a secondary instrument allows you to experience some of these challenges again with the ears and experience of a more seasoned musician. The process of working out problems and developing proficiency on a doubling instrument provides excellent preparation for helping students solve similar problems.

As a doubler, you will be influenced by a larger variety of great performers and teachers, drawing from a broader pool of ideas to diagnose and correct problems in your own and your students' playing. The exposure to additional literature allows you to assign study materials and performance repertoire that will best address each student's needs. Doubling will also cause you to take a more thoughtful approach to both playing and teaching. The doubler must be aware at all times of the particular traps that might be encountered with the instrument being played at a given moment. Thus, doubling necessitates more thoughtful playing and leads to more thoughtful teaching, as you become more consciously aware of the peculiarities of each instrument and even begin to anticipate students' difficulties. Your resulting instruction becomes more effective on every instrument you teach.

More Money

Playing more instruments will increase your earning potential. I list this reason for doubling last not because it is unimportant or unworthy, but because the potential for greater income through doubling is usually the last objective to be realized. This benefit usually comes only after a period of individual practice, perhaps private study on the new instrument, and often, performances in amateur or student performing groups to "work the bugs out." Still, the earning potential is there, and given conditions in the present job market there often is no other choice but to double if a sufficient income is to be earned as a musician. Choose a secondary instrument that you like and that is in demand where you live, purchase the best instrument you can afford, devote time and effort to study and practice, and then enjoy the increased number of performing and teaching opportunities. In this book we will explore ways to help you do just that.

Chapter 1: General Considerations

In this chapter, we will consider ideas for crafting an overall approach to playing which will apply to all of your instruments, and develop a practice regimen that promotes optimum skill development on each instrument without exceeding your available time. Throughout this discussion I will favor broad concepts which can be tailored to meet your particular needs and objectives over details that will be covered in future chapters.

Organizing Principle: Designate One Primary Instrument

Playing multiple low brass instruments can be fun, exciting, and lucrative, but there are dangers lurking which can present themselves if you allow the diverse requirements of several instruments to bring about a loss of focus in your playing. When conceiving and structuring your practicing and playing, identify one instrument as your primary instrument with secondary instruments treated as departures from that one. All the low brass instruments share certain similarities, and doubling is easiest and most efficiently practiced when these similarities are identified. By using this approach, your primary instrument will receive the most comprehensive attention, with secondary instrument practice focused upon those areas where the instruments differ from one another. As you become more proficient at playing multiple instruments, resist the temptation to depart from this structure. Once you feel equally comfortable on two or more instruments, it can be tempting to abandon the concept of a primary instrument and consider *all* of your instruments are in some way primary. Players yielding to this enticement establish a rotation in which different instruments occupy the primary place on different days, or perhaps one in which every instrument is placed on equal footing, placing the daily fundamentals routine in flux. The stability promoted by the distinction between primary and secondary instruments is thus abandoned in favor of a routine and concept which is unstable. Having attempted a number of years ago to practice in this way, I found it to be completely unsatisfactory: the attempt to have five primary instruments yielded a result that was more like having five secondary instruments and *no* primary instrument. While I was able to eliminate a small amount of daily practice time spent on playing fundamentals, this advantage was offset by additional time spent addressing fundamental issues which presented themselves in other practice and performance materials—problems which did not normally arise with my former approach. I had become, in effect, a “jack of all trades and master of none."