

EUPHONIUM MASTERCLASS

ALL-STATE AUDITION ETUDES 2016-17

DR. KEVIN WASS

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

KEVIN.WASS@TTU.EDU

It's that time again—we're all back in school and you are starting your preparation for all-region, area, and state auditions on euphonium. And once again, I'm here with one of my Texas Tech euphonium majors, in this case Ryan Moos from Pleasanton, Texas, to help you with that preparation. Ryan is the performer you will hear on these recordings, and mine is the voice you will hear in this master class.

In this master class, I'm going to assume for the most part that you know how to prepare the technical aspects of these etudes, which are not particularly challenging from that standpoint. I'll assume, for example, that you know how to break down a piece of music into smaller sections, that you know how to use a metronome to work individual sections slow to fast, and that you can self-assess your performance—in other words, you know whether you are playing the right notes. If you are new to this type of solo preparation, that is exactly how you should start, though—find the most difficult sections of each etude and begin working on them with a metronome as slowly as necessary in order to get 100% accuracy, good sound, and a feeling of being “in control” mentally and physically every time you play. As you get more proficient, speed the metronome up a little bit. If you aren't sure if you are playing something right, use Ryan's recording as a guide. You can also use scales and arpeggios in the key of each etude to help you master some of these technical challenges.

For those who have mastered the technique necessary for basic performance of these etudes, our focus in this master class is going to be on making the music interesting and exciting through contrast. There is a great deal of contrast already written into the etudes in style, dynamic, articulation, and tempo, but we're going to highlight that and maybe even add to it a bit in order to produce a performance of the entire set of three etudes that is compelling and interesting to both you and your audience (which may be an audition committee). Ready? Here we go!

ETUDE 1

The first etude is The A flat major *Allegro marziale* by Gatti on page 14 and 15 of both the bass clef and treble clef editions of the Voxman Selected Studies for Baritone. You are to play the entire etude and the suggested tempo is quarter note equals 108 to 120. There are some errors indicated on the TMEA website for both the bass clef and treble clef versions of this etude so make sure you check there for the latest information before you begin your practice.

There are two types of contrast that we will focus on in this etude, the first of which is rhythmic contrast. Contrasting rhythm patterns are important to the music that we play and listen to every day, sometimes to the point that we don't even notice that the patterns have changed. This etude, for example, will feel very stylistically familiar to anyone who has played a traditional military march in 6-8 time. There's only one problem—this isn't in 6-8 and the uneven subdivision of the beat at the beginning calls for dotted eighth-sixteenth instead of a quarter and an eighth in 6-8. These two rhythms are similar but NOT the same, and you will need to be careful to make sure you make a clear difference in your performance between the sixteenth subdivision of the beginning and the triplet subdivision that first appears in measure 4. Use a metronome and sing the rhythm slowly at the beginning—this will be even more effective if your metronome can give you sixteenth subdivision or even just the first and fourth sixteenths of each beat. Either way, you can make your subdivision even clearer if you physically feel it by tapping your hand on a flat surface or your chest as you sing. Once you can sing right in time with your tapping, try buzzing the rhythm on pitch on the mouthpiece and then add the instrument. Watch out for the tendency to exaggerate the rhythm and move toward double-dotting and playing a 32nd note, especially at slower tempos. You can hear Ryan sliding toward this tendency in his practice tempo recording, where he is playing the 16ths pretty late. While in some styles this would be an interpretive decision, I would caution you against messing with the rhythm too much in a Texas all-region audition. Now, set your metronome to triplet subdivision, feel the subdivision physically again by tapping, and sing the rhythm in measure 4. This should be easier for you, and the flowing triplets will feel very melodic and maybe a bit smoother. Now, move your metronome back to just downbeats and sing the entire first line, tapping sixteenths as you sing for measures 1 through 3 and changing to triplets in measure 4. If you really want to test yourself, you can even try to play while tapping or listening to the “wrong subdivision”—that is, play measure 1 while your metronome is subdividing triplets. While this entire exercise will only take a few minutes, it is crucial to being able to execute this etude effectively so you should go back and repeat it at least once or twice a week. Otherwise, your dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythms can start to get a bit lazy and drift toward triplet subdivision.

The second type of contrast I would like to address in this etude is style. Look carefully at your markings in the opening four bars and notice that they seem a bit counterintuitive. The march-like and fanfare-like opening three bars have no accents or staccato markings, but the more melodic triplets in bar four are marked staccato. Play the first three bars in a sort of “medium long” articulation, then, without accents. This may be difficult for you, particularly as you try to emphasize the clear subdivision of the beat in the dotted-eighth sixteenth rhythm. Make sure you are clean and clear without an accent on the sixteenth. The triplets, then, will need to contrast by being very light but still having a sense of shape as indicated by the dynamic hairpins beneath them. If you need to practice the two styles separately and then work to combine them, that is an excellent way to incorporate clarity of contrast into your playing. You can also go to a part of the music where this same contrast is heightened with dynamics or other factors. Measures 8 through 10 are a great example: the fortissimo dotted-eighth sixteenth should be long and resonant, with a bit of direction into the accented downbeat of measure 9, while the triplets should be separated but still have direction and should drop to pianissimo.

As you continue to work on the etude, always know which of the two rhythms and which of the two styles you are playing. This will keep you from getting too clipped and separated in measures 33 to 35, for example, and from getting too connected in the soft staccatos in measures 42 through 44. Also remember to incorporate the other contrasts of dynamic and articulation as indicated, and use them to bring greater interest and excitement to your interpretation.

Ryan has recorded this etude twice, once at performance tempo, and once about half as fast for you to use as a practice tempo. You may need to start working on the most difficult sections of the piece at an even slower tempo than his practice tempo, though, so be prepared to go as slowly as you need to in order to play accurately, in rhythm, and musically. Also don't be afraid to sing or buzz sections that you have difficulty playing with the appropriate style—just being able to play the right notes doesn't mean that you can pull off the musical and dramatic performance that is possible with this very fun little etude.

ETUDE 2

The second etude is the *Larghetto cantabile* in F Major on page 10 of the bass clef book and page 12 of the treble clef book. You are to play the entire etude at a tempo of eighth note equals 60 to 66. Again, there are errors indicated on the TMEA website for both bass and treble clef books so be sure to check the latest listings before you begin your preparation.

Musical contrast in this etude is a totally different experience, since most of your contrast will be very subtle. Begin by examining the dynamic scheme of the etude—you have piano marked at the beginning, in measure 9, and in measure 19 but with many crescendo and diminuendo marks through this opening 20 bars or so. Bar 33 is marked forte with no new dynamic marking until the piano in measure 55. You have one more forte in measure 66 and a return to piano in measure 74. From my perspective, I would probably approach the first 22 bars as being almost entirely in the piano and mezzo piano range, with subtle changes as indicated by the phrasing and by the hairpin markings. Measures 23 through 33 should have a general shape of crescendo which will increase pretty dramatically as indicated in measures 31 and 32. Pretty straight forward, right—all we have to do is step back a bit and look at the bigger picture instead of just following the markings as we go. Here's where things get tricky, though—where and how do you get from forte back to piano between measures 33 and 55? There are no intermediate dynamics indicated and only three isolated diminuendos without corresponding crescendos (in measures 34, 45, and 52). Here is where your own sense of dramatic interpretation will need to come into play since there isn't really a "right" way to play this section. Ryan chose to move back to the piano and mezzo piano color in measure 35 and keep this section in a lighter dynamic. You could also make the decrescendo in measure 34 less dramatic and play most of this section in a mezzo forte to forte color and probably be just as effective. Or, you can make this section more dynamically dramatic with big changes on the crescendo and diminuendo markings. Whatever you do, don't get caught up in following the individual markings as you play. Step back, look at the big picture, and come up with a large-scale interpretation that makes sense.

This etude should also be dramatically different than the other two in style, dynamic and mood. If necessary, play the opening few bars of the first and third etudes and then the opening few bars of this

one to make sure each etude has its own character. This is your chance to show your beautiful, fluid legato, your ability to play in a single dynamic color and still have shape to your phrases, and maybe even a chance to demonstrate your tasteful use of vibrato and rubato. How connected and smooth can your legato be? How soft can you play the opening 22 bars and still show shape to the phrases. How well can you pace the crescendo in measures 23 through 33 so that the forte marking sounds like a true arrival point? These are all musical challenges that you should accept as readily as you do the technical challenges of playing faster, higher, and louder.

Ryan has once again recorded this etude twice, with two slightly different interpretations and at the slowest and fastest indicated tempos, which in this case are 60 and 66 to the eighth note. I think this is very valuable, since it shows how some sections work a little better at the faster tempo and some are more effective at the slower. Use a variety of tempos in your own practice to find a place where your phrasing and other interpretive decisions are clearly produced and where you are physically and mentally in control. Be especially careful of playing this etude too slow—slow does not necessarily mean more expressive! Also allow yourself to move the tempo a bit in places and relax in others if you feel it adds to the musical effect.

ETUDE 3

The third etude is the *Allegretto grazioso* in A Minor on page 21 in the bass clef book and page 22 in the treble clef book. You are to play the entire etude without repeats at a tempo of quarter note equals 88 to 116. One more reminder—check the TMEA website for an official listing of errors for your particular edition before you begin practicing this etude.

This etude has elements of the other two in its stylistic content. Like the first etude, it has stark contrasts in articulation indicated and it is at a faster tempo. Like the second etude, it requires you to play long sections at a very light, piano or pianissimo dynamic. We'll address each of these areas separately.

The articulation contrast in this selection will require a bit of understanding and subtlety to pull off appropriately. Notice that almost all of the notes marked with accents come on the first beat of the measure, which we often think of being naturally accented as a strong beat. If you listen to Ryan's recording, you'll hear how he sets up these accents with a subtle crescendo in the notes that lead into them, which is actually indicated in measures 1 and 5. I think this is absolutely appropriate, as the accent should not be an interruption of the phrase, but just a slight "spiciness" added to the note that is in fact the top of the phrase. I certainly would not advocate playing these accented downbeats significantly louder than the notes that surround them—the person who plays the loudest accent doesn't usually win the audition, after all. Instead, keep them within the piano and mezzo piano color and emphasize the importance of the beat but in a *grazioso* (graceful) way. Showing this type of dynamic discipline in the opening will pay off, since you will be playing this same rhythmic and articulation pattern at a dynamic of forte in measures 43 to 49. Think about it—if you are playing the accent in measure 2 at forte just to show everyone that you know it is there, how are you going to create the same level of contrast when you are actually playing forte? Will you make the accent in

measure 44 triple forte? I certainly hope not, and if you do let me personally request that you never play an instrument as beautiful as the euphonium again!

The accents in measures 38 through 41, though, are a different story. They come on the upbeat of two, a beat which is generally not accented or emphasized in 2-4 time. These should be played in a way that draws attention to their unexpected, playful nature. Again, there's no need to play as loud as you can or get ugly on these—just create enough contrast so that the momentary loss of elegance and predictability is enough to bring a smile to your listener's face.

The other articulations you will need to focus on are in measures 22 through 36, where you will need to have a clear difference between your very smooth legato, your very light and graceful staccato, and your elegant and logical accents on beat one. The more effectively you can create this contrast within the indicated pianissimo color, the more dramatic the following crescendo and forte section (with those unexpected accents) will be.

Similarly, you will need to be very disciplined in staying in your piano color in the opening of the piece so that the sudden move to forte in measure 9 is effective and surprising. Like the strange accents later in the piece, this suddenly loud scalar passage should sound a bit out of place and like an interruption of the graceful and elegant style you have so effectively set up in your first eight bars. Make sure you understand this—the effectiveness of the dynamic change in measure 9 does NOT rely on the dynamic change itself, but on your ability to create a consistently soft and elegant opening eight bars. Again, be more than just an instrument operator who follows the directions on the page—step back, look at the bigger picture and see WHY the dynamic and articulation markings are there. It will make all the difference between a correct but boring interpretation and a truly memorable one.

Once again, Ryan has recorded this etude at both a slower practice tempo and a faster performance tempo. Listen to both recordings, sing along, buzz along, or play along. React to Ryan's musical decisions by trying to imitate the things you like and doing the opposite of what he does on the things you don't like. Whatever you do, don't just listen blindly and without thinking. Follow along in the music, keep your mind and body active, and use the recording as a starting point for building your own effective interpretation and polished performance.

CONCLUSION

I hope Ryan and I have been able to help you get started with your preparation for this year's round of auditions for the Texas All-State bands. You can always come back to his performances and this master class if you need a refresher or if you are stuck in a rut on your performance. Remember to be patient as you progress, and to never play faster, slower, higher, lower, louder, or softer than you can play with accuracy and control. Start slow and easy, don't be afraid to sing or buzz, and always know what you are trying to accomplish musically. Do these things well and I'll see you in San Antonio in February!

Best of luck and happy practicing!