

Hi, I'm Jim Decker, Trombone Professor at Texas Tech University.

On this CD, I will give you practice tips and specific strategies on how to prepare the three All State Etudes so that you may perform them to the best of your ability. All pieces on this CD are played at performance tempo, with practice tempo renditions included for the faster etudes.

This year's T.M.E.A All State Band and Orchestra Tenor Trombone try-out music has been chosen from Melodious Etudes for Trombone, Book 1 by Bordogni, edited by Rochut and published by Carl Fischer Music.

Before we explore aspects of these etudes, let me share with you some basic approaches to music making and practicing.

Study music as though you were learning a language. When studying a language, we learn most effectively by imitating native speakers of that language. With music, we need to study great trombonists, brass players, vocalists and other fine artists. Go to live concerts, collect and study recordings, study with teachers who are fine players, and play music with peers that you admire. By consistently doing all these things, you will develop a solid musical concept, which will elevate your potential as a trombonist and musician.

I strongly recommend that you adopt the "sing/buzz/play" method of practice for all etudes. Sing the music, buzz the music on the mouthpiece and then, play the music. You will find that your tone will become more resonant and your confidence will increase.

In practicing and performing, consciously direct your musical thoughts, not your muscles. The mind needs to actively sing the music that is on the page or being conceived. As the brain commands musical excellence through song, the body will, with consistent and persistent training, respond to these demands in the most efficient way possible. We don't need to control individual muscle groups; when you actively 'sing' mentally while you play, the bio computer activity of the brain will stimulate the proper muscles to the degree necessary to do the task.

One way to develop musical concepts is through the study of sight singing. This is the art of interpreting music through the use of specific syllables, each syllable assigned to either a scale degree or the actual pitch on the music staff. Singing in this fashion will elevate your musical ability and comprehension.

Mouthpiece buzzing is the next level of 'singing' in which brass players engage. Lip vibration is physically similar to the vibration of the vocal cords. The pitches produced by the vibrating lips make the music that is sung mentally in the brain audible to the player and listener. When the lips are vibrating freely and the length of tubing is appropriate for the pitch of the vibrating lips, you will create your optimal sound!

There are many specifics on mouthpiece buzzing that I wish to share. First of all, realize that the “instrument” (your mouthpiece) is only 3 - 4 inches long and has a naturally higher pitch center than the fully assembled trombone. It is not appropriate to make the mouthpiece have the dark, deep trombone sound, which resonates a much lower pitch. Instead, go for the most vibrant, balanced, characteristic sound of the mouthpiece; let the instrument naturally amplify the vibration. Second, always have specific pitches in mind when you mouthpiece buzz, even when you are doing “sirens”. Specific demands lead to consistent results. Third, buzz both detached, articulate music and lyrical music. Make sure all notes begin clearly and the connection between notes is uninterrupted. And finally, allow some glissando between pitches when buzzing legato, or connected, melodies or music. This will result in smoother, more lyrical playing on the instrument.

Concept alone is not enough; a steady, consistent practice routine is a must! Practice daily long tones, slurs, articulation, scales, arpeggios, etudes, solos and ensemble music, making the goal to sound like the finest artists to whom you have listened. Write down your practice agenda in advance and the amount of time you want to spend on each item.

By creating a practice agenda, the time you spend practicing will be energized and full of purpose!

Electronic aids that can assist you in your planning and executing of effective practice sessions include the “Music Journal” app and a Practice Excel Spreadsheet. The app is available for iPhone, iPad and Android Smartphones. Upon request, I will gladly send you my Practice Excel Spreadsheet.

It is not necessary nor is it recommended that you do all of your practice in one large block of time. For example, instead of 2 hours of straight practice, break up the practice into two hour long sessions or even 2/45 minute and 1/30 minute session. You will be fresher both physically and mentally.

Set your standards high, make practice fun and enjoyable, and let yourself openly discover new ways to improve.

Proper slide movement is essential in optimal performance of all music on the trombone.

Make slide movement more fluid and uninterrupted for faster technical passages and more precise and distinct, both visually and kinesthetically, for slower, more sustained passages. Slide movement should be as easy and relaxed as possible, with the control of the slide given primarily by the thumb and the index finger. With this ease of execution and minimal tension, the music will feel and sound the best.

Develop alternate positions on the trombone and apply them according to musical context. Start by comparing the two differently positioned notes, such as 1st and #5th position Bb, matching both pitch and tone to the best of your ability. Then, match the sound of musical motives, scales and phrases containing that note, using both positions. With steady training, you will create viable, interchangeable position options.

Three guiding principles for slide position planning are to minimize changes in slide direction, choose slide positions to provide natural slurs, or changes across the partials and plan slide positions so that half steps occur on the same partial. Fewer changes of slide direction and result in less slide arm tension. Natural slurs on the trombone sound beautiful; keep working to perfect your slurs and use them in these etudes, where appropriate. When half steps are played on the same partial, the sound is more musically appealing to the average listener.

When using the F Attachment, remember that all positions are slightly different than what you are accustomed. There are only 6 positions when using the F Attachment and each of those positions are further apart than the standard, Bb positions. To get an awareness of these position locations, compare notes using the trigger to the open notes, starting with fourth line F. You will be playing the exact same pitches, making your goal to match the pitches of the unison notes while letting the slide move to the naturally correct position. This approach will help make it easier to play the optional lower notes in the etudes.

Thoroughly practice the scales and arpeggios of the keys in which the pieces are centered. For example Etude Number 1 is in F Major; Etude Number 2 is in F minor and Etude Number 3 is in A Major. Practice of these scales and associated arpeggios will make performance of the etudes become much easier.

One other element that will help make your performances special are your comprehension of foreign musical terms. Some meanings are cited in this written master class; however, if words appear that you are not 100% sure of their meaning, look up the translation of those terms and write them in pencil in your music. A good source on the web is www.wordreference.com.

With these processes established, we now should look at the special characteristics of each individual work that you are preparing. Keep in mind that many topics discussed in a given etude may apply well to either or both of the other etudes.

Etude Number 1 in F Major is marked *allegretto*, or somewhat happy in spirit. , I will address an overall approach to all these etudes, subdivisions for rhythmic accuracy, and the importance of developing natural slur flexibility.

The basic style of this and all of this year's All-State Etudes is lyrical, or songlike. All notes must be played in a more sustained manner while distinguishing the different printed articulations that appear within the lyrical style. When there is a pure slur, use the lightest consonant possible. For me, that consonant is an l, thinking la, lo or lu. The first note of each slur needs to have a more pronounced articulation that what you would use for legato articulations. I use a T consonant for these first notes.

Before distinguishing between articulations, I recommend initial practice of these etudes with either a uniform legato tongued approach or without using tongue at all. The benefit

of the latter is that you will need to engage your breath support and move your slide quickly, relaxed and efficiently. You will notice glissandos that occur within partials and naturally make the technical slide adjustments to eliminate these glissandos. Record yourself and listen to the playbacks at half speed for further evaluation.

To gain rhythmic solidity, slow practice, set your metronome to click at the speed of the eighth note. Choice of the tempo is subjective; I have chosen 120 to the eighth note to be the practice tempo on the recording. Thinking of this subdivided beat increases overall precision and instructs your slide to move with precision. After feeling comfortable at your starting tempo, advance the metronome 20 clicks higher and work to achieve the rhythmic and technical stability of the previous tempo. I chose 20 clicks because the smallest rhythmic subdivision is 2 notes/beat, in this case, 2 16ths/8th note beat. The only tricky aspect of this practice is realizing the subdivided beat during eighth note triplet passages. However, the majority of the etude will gain assuredness by this mode of practice.

Constantly thinking of the subdivided beat will be extremely helpful for gauging the precise length of long notes and accurate negotiation of passagework after these tied long notes. Examples of critical passages in this etude include measure 30 and 31, measures 37 and 38, measure 62 and measures 74 – 76.

Practice of natural slurs and increasing the speed of the slurs will help you negotiate the intervals better, as well as the faster 16th and 16 note triplet figures of this etude. Practice natural slurs between adjacent partials, or pitch levels, without moving the slide. Play these slurs slowly, at first, with the goals of evenness, smoothness and fullness being a priority. Resist the temptation of tonguing the notes of ascending slurs. Increase the tempi of your slurs until you get at or, ideally, beyond the tempo requirements of the passagework of the etudes.

Here are a few suggestions to help make the etude more musical. Let rhythm and pitch level be your guides. Many times, it is helpful to increase the dynamic slightly and lead to the downbeats of measures, such as in the opening theme in measure 2. Other times, the syncopations, such as those in measures 10, 14, 31 and 32, can be accented with the breath and played stronger. In addition, when syncopations keep repeating, like in measures 49 – 51, increase the dynamic. As far as pitch goes, unless the marked dynamics contradict this, crescendo slightly when the pitch rises, diminuendo when the pitch falls.

Etude Number 2 in F minor is different from the first etude in terms of tempo, mood and style. The tempo marking is *Andante Cantabile* meaning proceed steadily or continue in a singing manner. Intonation, dynamics and breathing will be discussed in relation to this etude.

Practice with the subdivided metronome beat is especially critical for this etude. The items to be especially critical of are that the basic click will be for the eighth note and not the quarter note and the subdivided click will mark the 16th note. This subdivided beat

will help you to realize the 64th notes in measure 4 more accurately as well as the various dotted rhythms.

I strongly recommend practicing the F minor scale and associated arpeggios. Getting acquainted with the unique sound and temperament of the minor tonality is critical to the realization of this etude.

Each position on the trombone requires minute adjustments within that position in order to play in tune. For example, the Eb in measure one and the F in measure 5 will most likely be slightly sharp and need to have their respective positions extended.. A method to check the tuning within a given position is by listening to drones and comparing notes played on the trombone to the drones. In the case of the aforementioned Eb, sound a sustained Ab drone through speakers or headphones and play a long tone Ab, matching your pitch to the recording. Then, play the Eb as a long tone and compare the pitch to the Ab recording. Adjust the position to make the tone less ‘bumpy’ and more resonant.

Another critical 3rd position note is the Gb in measure 13. This pitch tends to be flat and that 3rd position needs to be raised. Tune the Gb to a Gb drone for pitch accuracy.

Dynamic changes and proper pacing of these changes present challenges with this etude. Sometimes, changes from piano to forte take place over one beat, such as in measure 4. The opposite change occurs in measure 14. Sometimes, crescendos and diminuendos occur over the course of two complete measures; other times, dynamic changes occur instantly, such as in measures 48 – 51. I recommend long tone practice that simulates these changes and make the changes more extreme in your practice. Practice dynamics that are louder and softer than you intend to use when performing this etude so that you will play within your comfort zone and in control.

Make sure all breaths are planned and written into your music. Rehearse these breaths and change them when necessary. Follow Bordogni’s phrase marks and never breathe during those phrase arcs. Typically, phrase lengths are either 2 or 4 measures in this etude. Another breathing consideration is supplying the quantity of breath needed in order to properly fuel the musical intensity of the piece. For instance, in measures 37 and 38, there is a crescendo and the music ascends to the higher register. The quantity of air needed for this passage will most likely be greater than usual. Create breathing exercises that increase the quantity of air you inhale and suck that increased quantity of air in more quickly. Use a metronome for proper pacing.

Etude Number 3, ‘Allegretto Grazioso’ or ‘moderately fast and pretty or delicate’, has challenges of tonality, very few dynamic changes, grace notes and upper register breath support in passagework.

Practice the A Major Scale separately from the study of this etude. Work on the scale in two octaves and compare it to the Ab scale for pitch and tonal guidance. .

Subdivided metronome practice is also critical with this etude. I have recorded this etude at a metronome marking of 70 to the eighth note. With the subdivided setting, the clicks will sound at a speed of 140, which is the speed of the 16th note. When playing the dotted 16th/32nd note figures with the metronome click, be sure that the 32nd note is played half way between metronome clicks.

Execution of grace notes needs to be before the beat and executed as a natural slur. The grace notes are played just before the main rhythms take place. Plan your slide positions so that the grace notes occur across levels, or partials. When doing this, the instrument makes the articulation without your having to actually tongue the second main note. For example, play the D grace note in measure 1 in 4th position and naturally slur to the C# in second position. Look for other grace notes in this etude and plan accordingly.

The numerous ascents into the upper register are a technical issue in this etude. Phrases such as those in measure 5 – 8, 51 – 54 and 62 to the end pose great challenges. When playing ascending intervals, start a crescendo or increase the energy of the air while playing the lower note and let this air fuel your ascent to the upper notes. I also recommend glissando buzzing the intervals or phrases for additional assuredness, striving for continuous vibration for the entirety of the intervals.

I would be glad to answer questions that you may have about these etudes, this spoken master-class or trombone pedagogy. Please feel free to e-mail me at james.decker@ttu.edu or phone me at 806-834-8865.

If you are considering a career in music, I encourage you to consider Texas Tech as the university where you will continue your studies. I can provide more information about the music school, the ensembles and the trombone studio. . Should you be traveling through Lubbock at anytime in the future, I would be happy to personally show you around campus and/or meet you for a lesson. Just let me know in advance and I will make time for you!

Feel free to visit our web page, www.texastechtrombones.com, and our Facebook Page.

I would like to invite you to the Big12 Trombone Conference at Texas Tech in January. Our Feature Guest Artist is Joseph Alessi, Principal Trombonist of the New York Philharmonic. The dates of the conference are January 20-22, 2017. I will be sending more information out to your band directors soon. The conference web site is www.big12tromboneconference.com.

I would also like to invite you to come to our Texas Tech Band and Orchestra Camp, which will be held from July 9 - 15, 2017. Contact Rebecca Webb, the Special Music Activities and Summer Camps Coordinator of the Texas Tech School of Music, at 806-742-2225.

In addition, I am available to perform clinics and concerts in various areas of the state. Ask your band director or get in contact with me for further details.

I wish you success in working on these all-state pieces and lots of fun and happiness in your music making.