

TUBA MASTERCLASS

ALL-STATE AUDITION ETUDES 2016-17

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Let's get one thing straight right away: I HATE Kopprasch. Really, I do. Not the German horn player Georg Kopprasch who wrote these etudes sometime before 1850—I'm sure he was a really nice guy and he gave the horn world a wonderful gift in writing such challenging etudes for the new chromatic instrument. My issue is more with the editions for tuba, specifically the edition by Robert King that we use for all-state auditions in Texas (although the German Hofmeister edition is almost identical and therefore is equally deserving of my scorn). Some of this is personal—I've never been particularly strong at many of the things the Kopprasch etudes address, so I don't like working on them. Since I don't like working on them, I don't get better at the things they address. See how that works? But there's the key—these etudes are still pretty difficult for me to play well, but I have had a reasonably successful career as a tuba player. I've just never really needed some of these skills in my professional playing and teaching. It has always seemed to me that the Kopprasch etudes as arranged for tuba put too much emphasis on middle and high register playing, technique passage work, various artificial articulation contrasts, and uninteresting musical passages. I prefer to work on interesting music that sits in the lower and middle registers, melodic passages that include articulation contrasts that add to their musical interest, and technique that serves a greater musical purpose. If I want to just play scales and arpeggios, I'll work on scales and arpeggios.

But Kopprasch etudes aren't going away. Not only do we use them for audition material (many other states do as well), the United States military bands will use an etude or two every once in a while for auditions. I also highly respect many teachers (including all of my main teachers) who regularly assign these etudes to their students. So maybe the problem is with me, and I'll use this recording and master class to try to make these etudes more interesting and relevant to what I think is important in tuba playing. At the same time, I encourage you to try to find the things that can make these etudes interesting and maybe even fun, and to practice them in a way that will help your long-term development as a tuba player and musician. Maybe you'll even record the etudes yourself and send them to me or share them online and I'll finally see the light and understand why everyone else seems to think these etudes are so great. So let's get to work.

ETUDE 1

The first etude is number 48, on page 41. It is marked "Presto", it is in G major, and you are to play it in its entirety with no repeats at a tempo of quarter note equals 96 to 120. As of press time, the only error

listed on the TMEA website was to adjust articulation in measure 32 so it matches the articulation in measure 33—in other words, just delete the slurs on beats three and four of measure 32.

First and foremost, get yourself in a practice room and start hammering your G major scale and G major arpeggio exercises. If you are not proficient in this key, you will find yourself really struggling with this etude. I especially encourage you to seek out exercises that focus on a mix of scales and arpeggios and that hit the D dominant seven arpeggio as well. Be especially aware of the sometimes awkward 1-2- to 2-3 fingering combinations that will be common in this etude if you are playing it on a B flat tuba. The tendency is to be a bit slow on both the up and down stroke of the third valve when executing this movement, so work on the movement without playing and listen for your valves going down right in time. If you really struggle with this, consider using the alternate third valve fingering for the G's in this piece, which will greatly ease the strain on your fingers. Be aware that using third valve for G can make it lower in pitch, which is usually OK since the 1-2 combination tends sharp. Check with a tuner to be sure that your G is not sitting too low in either of the octaves in the staff.

Right from the beginning of reading through this etude, pay close attention to the “sempre staccato espressivo” marking at the beginning. This means “always staccato and expressive”, which for many young players will seem a contradiction in terms. I encourage you to start with the expressive side—in other words, ignore the staccato marking at first and try to really play with beautiful phrasing and close attention to the dynamic scheme that Mr. Kopprasch has indicated. When you get a nice sense of flow and a more exciting sense of line going, start playing the notes with a bit more separation until you create enough contrast to hear a difference between the staccato notes and those marked with other articulations. It may even help to start working in measure 15 so you can establish a difference between Kopprasch's designated articulation patterns.

Here is one of those spots that I usually hate—I can't see any good musical reason for including these four different patterns of slurs and staccato that we see between measures 15 and 21. What I had to do was make a musical reason—I decided that the harmonic motion here tended toward a building of intensity through measures 19 to 23, even though there is no actual crescendo marked until measure 22. Listen to how I tried to connect these four measures into a single idea, with the change in articulation highlighting the gradual building of intensity and volume. Score one for Kopprasch—it seems the articulation change here was a good idea after all. I encourage you to come up with your own solution to this and other musically challenging sections that seem overly repetitive, arbitrarily marked, or just boring.

Another pet peeve of mine in the Kopprasch etudes is the range they focus on—it just isn't a very important or useful range for the young tuba player, and heavy high register playing without really strong tone production skills can lead to some really bad habits. I encourage you to practice this etude as written and also down the octave, at least the sections where you can get the notes to come out in the lower octave. This will help you get the pitches in your ear and will assure you are putting in some good time in an actually important tuba register—look at a full band or orchestra score to see what I mean. In your band, every instrument except the piccolo can play middle C, so it just isn't very important for a tuba player to have that note. Your low D, on the other hand, which you will have to

play a bunch in this etude if you take it down the octave, is only playable by the tuba, the contrabassoon, and a double bass with a C string or C extension. As an ensemble player, low register is always more important on tuba than high register, so make sure your practice reflects that. Another thing to keep in mind when playing in the middle and upper register is to focus on pitch and leading from the lips when playing the ascending and descending passages like you see in measures 9 and 10. Buzz these sections on the mouthpiece alone to be sure you are hearing the pitches clearly and then raise your awareness of what is happening in your torso, neck, throat, and mouth as you play. If you are assisting the embouchure with movement in any of these areas, you are working too hard and will develop some really damaging habits in your high register playing. You should only feel a slight tightening at the lips as you go higher, with very little jaw movement and tongue movement, and certainly no movement in the throat, neck, or chest. Lead with the lips and let the jaw and tongue follow while keeping the rest of your body relaxed and flexible.

I have recorded this etude twice, once at about quarter equals 96 and once at quarter equals 60. You may need to start even slower than quarter equals 60 in order to be able to play in control and cleanly—I certainly had to go through some sections slower than that when I started my practice. Never practice faster than you can play with 100% accuracy and enough physical and mental control to play with a good sound, effective phrasing, and expressive articulation.

ETUDE 2

The second etude is number 44 on page 37. It is in A flat major, and you are to play the entire etude at a tempo of eighth note equals 60 to 72. There are no errors listed on the TMEA website as of press time.

This etude has some lovely melodic sections and by far the most interesting expressive contrasts of the three assigned this year. In fact, I almost always find myself working on these more expressive etudes when choosing to practice Kopprasch, and I do assign some of them to my students. On the other hand, this etude is probably the greatest offender in working us through the middle and upper register almost exclusively. Don't be fooled by the two low E flats, which may take some extra practice on your part—this is definitely a high-tessitura etude with only a few passages that go below the staff. For my own practice, I played the entire etude down an octave, and I have recorded it down the octave on the slower of the two recordings included here. The low E flats taken down are pretty tough to hear, and you may need to shift embouchures for the low B flats, A's and A flats, but it is worth your time to work in the low register while also getting the pitches for this etude in your ear and establishing a stylistic and expressive approach. If you can't play the entire etude down the octave, at least play individual phrases down so that you are spending at least as much time playing below low B flat as you are playing above it in your practice.

Breathing can be a bit of an issue in this etude, particularly if you are playing at the slower end of the tempo spectrum and are trying to stick to Robert King's phrasing and breath marks. Note that all of the breaths marked (those are the "V" marks in your music) come AFTER a strong beat, which is a great way to keep breaths from interrupting your phrasing. Breaths between a weak beat and a strong beat are generally a bad idea in classical and romantic styles, hence the "never breathe on a barline" rule. As you work on this etude, you can start with the marked breaths but don't feel like you have to be held to

those throughout your preparation. You will notice that I am taking some breaths that aren't marked and that I'm not using some of the marked breaths. Also notice, however, that my breaths outline the general shape of my phrases, that they are different at the two tempos I have used, and that they do tend to come after strong beats. Wherever you breathe, make sure you can comfortably play each phrase without having to get to the very end of your breath, and that you are clarifying your phrasing and expressive decisions with the breath.

Perhaps your greatest challenge in this etude will be making sure you are hearing the pitches correctly. There are some tricky spots that contain a mix of chromatic and diatonic pitches, and there are some very large skips. Buzzing these sections on the mouthpiece alone will help you assure that you are buzzing the right pitches and not relying on the instrument to "correct" your missed notes. You can absolutely feel the difference between a right and wrong note when you buzz into the instrument, and you have been conditioned by your playing over the years to "slide" an incorrect pitch into place. If you never get away from the horn and buzz or sing the pitches, you may never even realize that you are buzzing incorrect or approximate pitches, either of which will result in a diminished sound and bad intonation.

Most importantly, enjoy the melodic playing and contrasted styles that are so prevalent in this etude but generally missing in the other two. Play the etude at a wide range of tempos and see how it changes your musical decisions—don't just assume that slower will mean more expressive. For example, you may find that some of the more technical sections, like measures 18 through 21, are actually easier and get a nice sense of flow at a faster tempo.

Whatever you choose to do in your practice, don't overlook this etude as the "easy" one because it is at a slower tempo. There are some very challenging sections, and you will miss important opportunities to improve your technique and musicianship if you don't put in a good amount of practice and preparation on this lovely little piece of music.

ETUDE 3

The third etude is number 36 on page 29. It is in D Major and you are to play the entire etude with no repeats at quarter note equals 84 to 108. There are no errors listed on the TMEA website as of press time.

This is what I think of when I think of why I hate Kopprasch—an etude that is built entirely on the repetition of a musically uninteresting but technically awkward passage. It's the worst of both worlds—nothing engaging musically and technique that is difficult but not terribly relatable to anything I do in my everyday life as a tuba player. But, I have to record this etude so let's see what we can do to make it more interesting and maybe more applicable.

You really can't get around the awkwardness of the technique, whether you are playing this on C tuba or B flat tuba. As with the first etude, you may want to experiment with using the alternate third valve fingering instead of the 1-2 combination on a B flat tuba to help ease some of the tangling of fingers in this key. For C tuba players, there is no such relief—you'll just need to get really smooth in the fingers on the 2-4 or 5-2-3 to 4 combination for all of those moves from C sharp to D below the staff. The more

you play in D major, especially on broken arpeggio exercises like those in the Arban book, the less awkward these passages will be.

Once you have the D major, G major, and A seven arpeggio sections down, start looking at the really difficult spots. Anywhere that you see accidentals you can expect some difficulty, since the accidentals indicate that the music is either very chromatic or is modulating to a different key. Unfortunately, these sections with accidentals are also the only sections that contrast musically and that have non-predictable harmonic motion. In other words, these sections are the important ones to making this etude more than just an exercise—they need to be exciting and extremely well-executed. For me, the toughest section of the piece to learn was measures 14 and 15, which are loaded with chromatic alterations of the arpeggios. Notice the dynamic scheme as outlined here, though, and you will see what I mean about this spot being musically important—Kopprasch is using the chromatic movement to slide us from F sharp minor to D minor over the four-bar section after the fermata in measure 11. He is also instructing us to begin softly and build as the harmony becomes more unstable until we hit Forte in the two most chromatic measures. I chose to actually continue this direction all the way to the downbeat of measure 16, with a slight crescendo continuing through 14 and 15. When you practice this section, divide it into manageable sub-cells (maybe just a beat at a time, which is what I did) and practice slowly enough that you can deliver a fumble-free, pitch-accurate, musically interesting and exciting product. Don't try to learn "just the notes" and then apply the music like a coat of paint later on—integrate your musical decisions into the learning process to give each note you play a musical purpose.

This etude is awkward for another reason (beyond the repetition and the fingerings) and that is the articulation that is marked. Playing slur-two, tongue-two is very common in wind music and it tends to be very easy to execute on scalar passages. In this case, however, we are playing broken arpeggios and the harmony changes between the slurred and tongued notes. For this reason, we really need to have musical direction through the second half of each beat. What this means is that you will need to be very conscious of your airflow and articulation so that you do not "clip" and accent the second note of the slur and play too heavy or short on the staccato notes that follow. Think of the last three notes of each set of sixteenth leading into the first sixteenth of the next set. When you first try to do this with the marked articulation, you will see what I mean about this being awkward. The only note that is slurred to the note that follows it is the only note that doesn't really need to lead anywhere, and the staccato notes all need to have a sense of direction. If you need to start your practice with these notes more connected, you may find that it helps not only the musical product but also the technique. As you gradually speed up the tempo, you can increase the amount of space between notes but keep the tongue light and the air constantly moving across the lips. Stopping the air for each staccato note will bring tension into your airflow and articulation and result in you hitting a "wall" in increasing your tempo, probably somewhere around quarter equals 72-76. You just won't be able to go any faster and it will have nothing to do with your fingers—it is the articulation and airflow that is slowing you down.

As with the first etude, also be aware of what is happening behind your lips and teeth; that is, in the mouth, through the throat and neck, and in the torso. Be especially aware of this on the upward slurs, as it is common for young players to "assist" the upward slur with a push from the upper chest or neck

and throat, or with a rapid and exaggerated movement of the jaw. Change pitches only at the lips and keep the airflow constant and consistent as you execute these technical passages.

Speaking of airflow, you will need to be very conscious of your breathing in the longer passages of this etude. The ending phrase, from measures 27 to 31, is particularly difficult to make with the one intermediate breath that is possible in measure 29. Choosing a faster tempo, playing more smoothly, and taking advantage of the marked dynamic scheme can all make this phrase a bit easier to execute. You should pay similar attention to any long phrase, and mark any "extra" breaths that you will need or that you may forget to take in the heat of battle.

I have again recorded this etude twice, once at quarter equals 84 and again at a slower tempo of around 54. Be prepared to start your practice even slower than this, and be aware of individual two- or four-note passages that are giving you problems at any tempo. Isolate those spots and use different practice strategies to make them easier and more fluid in your execution. With this etude maybe even more than the others, you do not want it to sound difficult or awkward, even though it absolutely is both of those things!

CONCLUSION

While I certainly cannot say with any level of honesty that I enjoyed preparing these three etudes for this recording, I think this is about the best product I have produced out of Kopprasch etudes. In the process, I learned some key ideas for making Kopprasch, Arban, or any other technical etude be more widely applicable and sound more musical:

1. Adapt the etude as necessary (including transposing octaves and changing tempo or style) to help it apply to the skills that you need most and to flatten the learning curve a bit. You can adapt it back to the original version later on and will probably play it better in the long run.
2. Things that are technically difficult are often musically important and exciting. That section that is giving you fits may be crucial to making the music you are playing interesting. In order to really pull it off, you'll need to master it technically, mentally, and musically so that you can play it in context.
3. Don't avoid challenges in your practice. Had I spent more time working on etudes like number 36, I would probably be better at executing chromatically-linked arpeggios. I improved at this skill a ton while working on that etude, but I still have a long way to go before my broken arpeggios sound as easy as my scales and regular arpeggios.

As always, I hope my sample recordings and this master class have helped in your preparation. Have fun, practice hard, and look for ways to improve every day!