

# A Daily Warm-Up Routine

I believe so strongly in the many benefits of the daily warm-up routine printed on the opposite page that I often spend an entire rehearsal with a band and work on nothing else. In fact, I've had worried-looking all-state chairpeople with an eye on the clock come over and whisper, "Are you aware that your first rehearsal is almost over and you haven't worked on any music yet?" I just smile, of course, realizing that they are equating "music" with "tunes" and not with "musicianship."

I do not give the warm-up music to the players, but simply first ask them to choose the concert F in the medium range of their instrument, take a full breath, and be prepared to do whatever I show them.

Using just the unison F (and later the B $\flat$  chord) as a base, I can explore coloration, dynamics, articulation, attack, release, phrasing, balance, blend – in short, every element of musical expression they will encounter in most band music. Because there is no printed music to come between us, they learn to respond to my conducting gestures and we are able to make music together from the very beginning of our relationship, which grows throughout the time we spend together.

When guest conducting, I use the warm-up to begin every rehearsal as well as after each break, and it becomes a rallying point. Everything the players learn during the warm-up saves future rehearsal time, because it's not necessary to always be reinventing tone quality and balance, for example, every time you go into a new portion of a piece.

The key to using the warm-up successfully is *imagination* – making sure something interesting is happening all the time. Whenever a conductor allows any warm-up to become a predictable routine, it ceases to have meaning and the players stop paying attention to it.

JOHN P. PAYNTER is chairman of the department of conducting and performing organizations at Northwestern University. His guest-conducting invitations have taken him to nearly every one of the United States and many foreign countries.

## THE UNISON F

I use concert F because it is a good middle-register note for all instruments, except the horns. Their written C5 is a little high to use as a warm-up note, especially with young players, so I sometimes have them play an octave lower. The concert F is a "bad" note for many instruments such as the clarinet (throat G) and alto saxophone (D5). For the brass, it is an overtone that is inclined to be out of tune. My theory is if the players can get the *worst* note in tune the other notes should be easier to adjust.

I don't mention attack at all, just asking them to "Play what you see." I show them a variety of attack and dynamics, and gradually establish the ground rules:

1. Always play with full breath support and try to produce the best possible tone.
2. Take a breath whenever you want to, in fact more often than you think you need it; even drop out if you feel the least bit of fatigue.
3. Leave and re-enter as graciously as you can.
4. Listen to the sounds in your section.
5. Listen to the sounds all around you in other sections.
6. Watch the conductor all the time.

We just deal with sound, and after a little bit of warm-up the pitch begins to improve, because the tones are more centered and the players are listening and making adjustments on their own.

Often what we call "bad tone quality" is really "bad attack and/or release." The sound in between may be just fine. Also, many students who play too soft or too loud make their tone sound bad, so you look for an optimum volume level to begin the exercise.

I don't want the players to damage their embouchures by playing for longer periods without rest than they are really ready for, so I encourage them to drop out whenever they need to, and I often wave out whole sections. The procedure demonstrates the dramatic changes in color that are possible through addition and deletion of instruments. It also begins to make them think about the *cooperative* aspects of playing in a band: they are not there to make their individual presence known everytime they enter or leave the main body of sound.

I ask the players to listen to others in their section and to compare their sound with that of their colleagues, reaching out a little more each day until when they play the unison F, the first chair trumpet may be listening to the last chair clarinet.

# A Daily Warm-Up Routine

John P. Paynter, Northwestern University

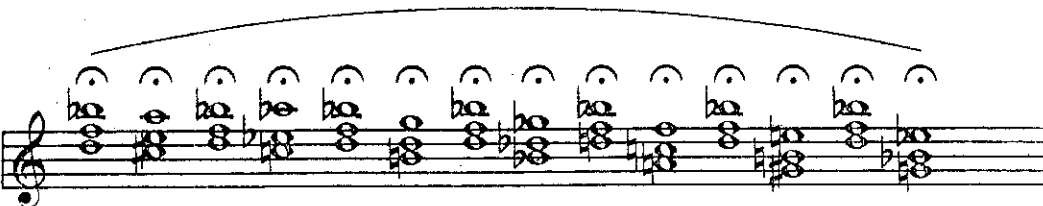
## Unison F

and chromatics in four octaves



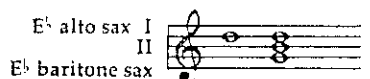
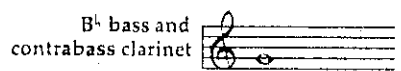
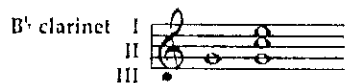
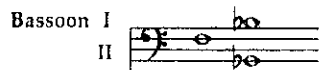
## B $\flat$ Chord

and chromatics in three octaves

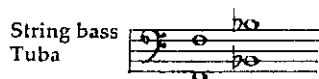
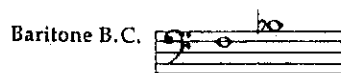
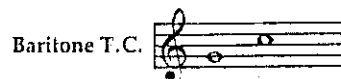
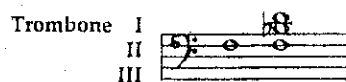
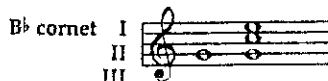


## Voicing of Instruments (transposed)

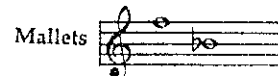
### Woodwinds



### Brass



### Percussion



Begin tuning  
with Tuba 1  
playing the F

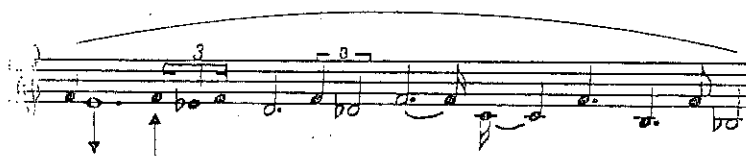
Without being tied to printed music, it is possible to monitor the sounds, and begin to improve them. You don't have to stop and say, "Cornets, that's blatant!" You can do it with your face and they get the message. It doesn't have to be a mean scowl; you simply imitate with your facial expression the sound you hear now, and the sound you would prefer they produce. I often stretch the corners of my mouth to show tension and stiffness in a tone, as compared to a rounded mouth to indicate fullness and resonance.

Once you have the exercise established – eyes and ears open, heads up, breath flowing – you can manipulate balance. That's one of the reasons I'm fussy about how I seat the band. I want to be able to put my hand in a certain area and be sure it says, "All the flutes do something...or don't do something."

I like to go back and forth between a crescendo and diminuendo, slowly at first but gradually increasing the speed until they are literally doing a vibrato. It's an exciting manipulation of color. Also, the unison F can be used to isolate and drill a particularly difficult rhythm.

#### UNISON F, PLUS CHROMATICS

So far, everything has been done on a unison F, but now I call F "home plate" and say, "We're going to move away and come back." It's all done with hand signals – tipping the fingers down and back up – with an almost-purposeful *absence* of tempo



and *never the same way twice*. We may do it very slowly, or quickly on just one breath. The pattern came from an old Arban's exercise; I just added the two missing half steps.

Sometimes I have them sing the exercise, after the F is established and after they've grown to trust me. I sing all the time for them with my horrible voice and they learn to sing back. (Of course, your players must all know the chromatic scale, and you may have to teach it to them.)

Throughout this whole process the conductor is communicating with the players, non-verbally establishing a *modus operandi* for everything that happens thereafter.

By the time you've worked with this exercise long enough to have worn out its value, the players are really salivating over the printed music they are now so anxious to play. They've heard the beautiful coloration and other effects that are available on just a unison F.

#### TUNING

Ultimately, you just have to stop and tune; but sometimes I don't even get to that the first day. Usually if you can get the air flowing, have them

listening to each other, producing the right kind of attack, and not overblowing, you will have improved the intonation by 50% even if no one has touched a tuning slide. Of course you're taking care of little things all the time – getting rid of the honk in the bari sax by talking about the mouthpiece and reed combination, helping the oboe a little with suggestions about the position of the reed in the mouth, getting the right hand down on clarinet throat tones. Eventually, however, you may simply have to stop and find the center of pitch.

I always start with the first tuba playing the F. I have that person prepared to play frequently, even steadily, maybe alternating with the second tuba. Because I don't know the names of all the players, I go by numbers so I can talk to "trumpet 9," or "horn 8." That way "clarinet 33" knows I associate that number with her face or his sound. Then I can begin to tune.

I will have tuba 1 and tuba 2 play and we'll match up. Then I'll say, "OK, now tuba 1 and tuba 3; now tuba 2 and 3; 2 and 4; 3 and 5; 3 and 4; 4 and 6" and so on. Then we'll start on the outside edges – 1 and 6, 2 and 5, 3 and 4. When that sounds right, we'll start to tune baritone 1 to tuba 1.

After this much warm-up and so much attention given to a subject that normally gets so little attention, the players have a tremendous respect for the whole process, and there is no problem having people restless or inattentive while this is going on. I make it very clear at the outset that *everyone* is responsible for the tuning, and that I ought to feel free to ask anyone at any time if player 1 is in tune with player 2, or what they think should be done about it. Often they don't know at first. It's very interesting how many band players are never taught the difference between flat and sharp; conductors are consistently telling them what to do – "pull your slide; push in" – and the players are not asked to make this decision. Lots of times their ears are much better than they are given credit for.

I always build all of the low brass and all of the low reeds first. I'll go clear through the tubas, euphoniums, baritone saxophone, bass clarinets, contra clarinets, bassoons, perhaps trombones – although I usually let them wait, because they do not present nearly as big a pitch or tone problem as the low brass valved instruments. I spend the most time with the first tuba, but less with every player I add to the ensemble, until sometimes the last flute is hardly noticed.

Once I've tuned those low instruments, we don't talk very much about tuning; but we continue to talk a lot about listening and breath support.

#### THE B<sup>b</sup> CHORD

I'll just recite the notes I want them to play: "Piccolo, play F on the top line; first flute play D above the staff, 2nd flute B<sup>b</sup>, oboe F, and so on.

I go very quickly straight down through the woodwinds, and immediately have them play the chord. They're always *amazed* that in such a short

time they've figured out the right notes and they're playing the B $\flat$  chord! Then we do the same thing with the brass, play the chord, and it's always right...except sometimes a few people don't listen. Having this to do is another good reason for them to listen, of course, and I don't baby them. It's very quick. Then I say, "brass and woodwinds together." The B $\flat$  chord is correctly positioned (you've been able to voice it ideally) and the players have had a little warm-up on the F so they feel like they're in tune as well as flexible enough to make the small adjustments. That B $\flat$  chord is absolutely gorgeous!

Now, all I say to them is, "Treat *this chord* as home plate and play successive half steps down from it." After just the slightest kind of adjustment, you have these beautiful parallel chords - B $\flat$  to A major then back to B $\flat$ ; then to A $\flat$  and back to B $\flat$  and then to G and so on. You can now do everything you've done on the unison F - stop on any chord, invent exercises in crescendo and diminuendo, pull out some people and add others, whatever you want.


#### MANY BENEFITS

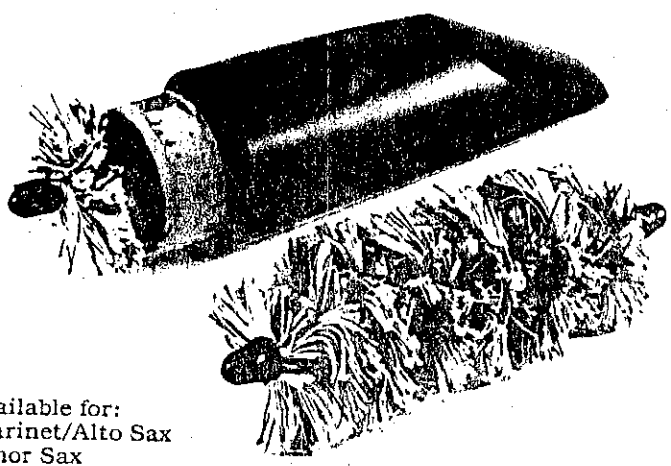
I can't remember ever having any problem using this warm-up - not of understanding, of cooperation, or boredom. I do not use it with the top Northwestern University ensembles or with the Northshore

Concert Band because the players in those organizations have already learned to listen, to watch, and to respond. However, I wouldn't hesitate to use it with any group - including those - if I thought they could benefit from it.

In addition to all the other merits, the warm-up is also a wonderful place for the conductor to practice gestures, because you know immediately whether they are understood. Everyone is looking.

The whole routine must be completely out of tempo, unstructured, and unpredictable. That way, everything is dependent on players looking at the conductor, and the players enjoy it for that reason. They seem to love the fact that they are being manipulated, that their sounds are being shaped and controlled by a conductor's hands and imagination.

The warm-up is also a time when you say "Hello" to your band. As you conduct, you're looking around and saying with your eyes and face, "Susie, it's good to see you; I hope your Dad is feeling better." "Charlie, I see you decided not to quit band." It gives you a chance for the little smile, a wink, some sort of acknowledgement to everybody in the room. There are so few opportunities in a rehearsal where you can say, "Thanks for coming again. I'm glad you're here." 



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