

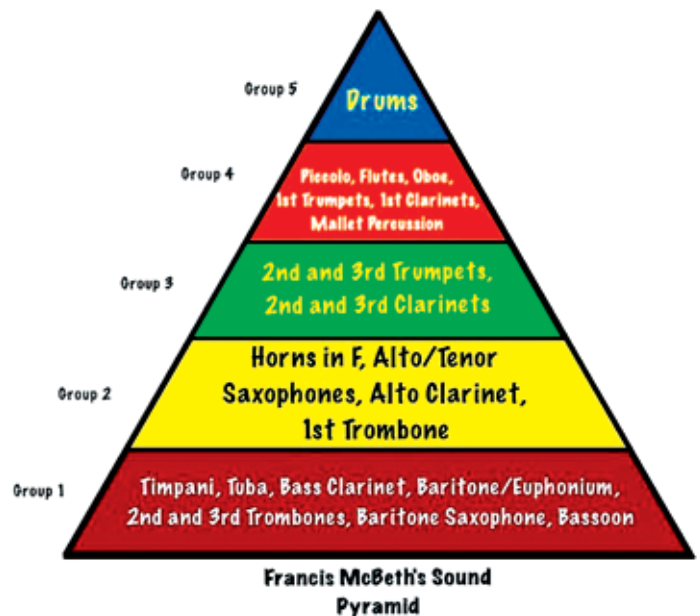
# Low Woodwind, Brass and String Bass Sectionals

Chuck Currie and Christin Reardon MacLellan

Modern writing for wind ensemble uses such a diverse combination of timbres and textures for its instrumentation that it can be difficult to come up with standard sectional rehearsal structures that suit every score.

Most ensembles stick with broadly categorized Woodwind, Brass and Percussion sectionals, or smaller sectionals based on individual instrument groups such as Clarinets, Trumpets, etc. Individual instrument sectionals are a great starting point and can help develop the section leaders into real musical leaders. These could be followed with full woodwind, full brass and full percussion sectionals. The final caper would be sectionals based on the various groups of Francis McBeth's Sound Pyramid.

Many modern compositions are transparent and do not work in simple groupings of like instruments, so a rote application of McBeth's pyramid won't always be suitable. We have to follow the melodic and textural line and balance of the piece amongst all the instrument groups. Often, each of the groups in McBeth's pyramid can function as its own mini-ensemble — listening to their individual and collective place in the score, moment by moment.



*Since **Group 1** is the foundation of the entire ensemble sound, let's examine the individual sound character and combinations of timbre of each of the low instruments and describe the texture of them separately and jointly. Students should be aware of the distinctive colours of these instruments separately and in combination. The following descriptive pyramid of **Group 1** is intended to inform their ears and their imaginations.*

## Group 1

Sonorous, warm, penetrating, plaintive, delicate, full, round, sensitive

**Bassoons** are the focussed reedy forward edge of the entire low end. They mask the metallic brass which results in more delicate contours in middle registers of tutti passages.

**Bass Clarinet** provides chocolate-covered caramel mellowness, but also full body and power when necessary. The dark woody centre of the section.

**Baritone saxophone** provides *weight* to the low reed section of this group, but also the lyricism of a cello in featured passages.

**Euphoniums** enhance the vocal singing quality of the trombones.

Brassy, brilliant, powerful, solid, dramatic, full, soft, buttery, homogenous  
**Tenor Trombones** reinforce tutti passages, adding a compact focus. The overall impact is expansive and mellow when not driving powerful accented marcato passages. In combination with the Tuba and Bass Trombone, subdues the brilliance of the trumpet section.

Brassy, powerful, solid, tense, penetrating, dramatic, full, sinister **Bass Trombone** provides the forward edge of these three low instruments but is also enveloped by them

Round, smooth, calm, velvety, hearty, robust, unobtrusive, ponderous, sustaining **Tubas** blend with the string bass.

Broad, dark, weighty, earthy, resonant, mellow, sustaining **String Bass** supports the entire band. Reinforces the timbre of the tuba. Blends well with bass clarinet. The fundamental bass instrument.

# LOW WOODWIND, BRASS AND STRING BASS SECTIONALS

## Sectional and Rehearsal Notes for Group 1 from Classic and Modern Band Literature

### Percy Grainger ed. Rogers — *Children's March*, mm. 387-403

Low instruments play a crucial and diverse role, both melodically and as accompaniment throughout the piece. The familiar melody at m. 21 is first heard in the bassoon and baritone saxophone, accompanied by the rhythmic second beats of each measure in piano and double bass. Skipping to the end of the piece, m. 387 brings back a variation of this melody that draws the piece to a close. Bassoon and baritone saxophone once again supply the melodic material, but with trombone, euphonium, tuba, piano, and later double bass providing the rhythmic reinforcement on second beats of each bar. French horns also join for a short time just before m. 403.

It is important here to consider the role of the low woodwinds (melody) compared to the low brass and bass (accompaniment), as well as how the accompaniment is portrayed by low brass compared to piano and bass earlier on in the piece. As performers, we tend to “listen back” in an ensemble, fitting our tone and articulation into what the low brass are providing. In this case, “listening forward” might be considered a way for low brass, bass, and piano to support the need for precise rhythmic placement and articulation that the bassoon and baritone saxophone will need to provide.

The low brass at m. 387 need to offer a somewhat percussive accompaniment, but it is also chordal, with the second beat of each measure being either a major or minor triad. Another detail to note is the difference in note value on beat two: trombones having eighth notes while euphonium, tuba, and piano having quarter notes. The challenge is finding just the right amount of lift and space following the tied note in the bassoon and baritone saxophone melody while bringing out both the rhythmic significance and resonance of the accompaniment notes. As far as the melody goes, the baritone saxophone should blend with the bassoon with a dry light tone adding weight like a pizzicato string bass.

*Children's March* has many great moments for low brass and woodwinds. Euphonium carries melodic material quite often, frequently scored with upper woodwinds, and we get to enjoy the opportunity to include bass oboe (can be substituted with English horn) and bass saxophone.

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## Cait Nishimura — *Chasing Sunlight*, mm. 25-36

Musical score for measures 25-36 of *Chasing Sunlight*. The score includes parts for Flute 1 & 2, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet in B-flat 1 & 2, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone 1 & 2, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trumpet 1 & 2, Horn 1 & 2, Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba, Timpani, Chimes, Xylophone, and Percussion. The score shows a complex texture with many sixteenth notes and slurs.

Musical score for measures 37-48 of *Chasing Sunlight*. The score includes parts for Flute 1 & 2, Oboe, Bassoon, Clarinet in B-flat 1 & 2, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone 1 & 2, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trumpet 1 & 2, Horn 1 & 2, Trombone, Euphonium, Tuba, Timpani, Chimes, Xylophone, and Percussion. The score shows a complex texture with many sixteenth notes and slurs.

This colourful work by Canadian composer Cait Nishimura presents interesting opportunities to shape texture through low instruments. In m. 25, all low woodwind and low brass instruments are joined together on a call and response passage with trumpets, horns, and second clarinets. The lower parts are scored in fifths (concert B-flat and concert F) with alto saxophones playing a concert D to complete a B-flat major triad. This is followed by a similar treatment of E-flat major and G major in subsequent measures.

When rehearsing this passage, we will want to focus on balancing and tuning the three chord tones while grounding to the root. A resonant, warm sound is necessary here. It is also important to consider what colour we want to establish. A good option is to let the tuba lead the sound, with the bass clarinet emerging a bit more than the remaining low instruments. Presence and depth from the timpani are nice here as well. Take the time to experiment with bringing different instruments to the forefront until you achieve the desired sound.

Articulation is another important consideration for the eighth notes, as well as the dotted-half notes that enter on beat two of each measure. The goal should be to completely unify the articulation and release each note without it sounding harsh or accented. Note how the chime part fits in. Finally, the repetitive eighth notes throughout this piece in the xylophone (supported in various other parts) provide a metronome, so everything happening in the low accompaniment parts must align with perfect rhythmic precision with the repetitive eighth notes.

## John Barnes Chance — *Variations on a Korean Folk Song*, mm. 68-75

Low voices are given an interesting role towards the end of the first variation in this monumental piece. The sixteenth note figures starting at m. 68 feature low brass and low woodwinds in a technical, melodic call and response passage. Note that prior to m. 68, low woodwinds have already experienced these melodic sixteenth notes serving as the supportive lower voice beneath the upper woodwinds and brass.

However, at m. 68, the roles shift with the addition of low brass. Low woodwinds now become the higher and lighter voice in this grouping, which is then answered by trumpets and horns on the next beat, and upper woodwinds on the next. The challenge of playing these sixteenth notes with clarity of technique and articulation is certainly more present for low brass than for everyone else in the ensemble.

Practice strategies could include tonguing the passage slowly before returning to slurs as marked, rehearsing different combinations of low instruments to line up the technique (i.e., hear bass clarinet and trombones play it together, then bassoon and euphonium, etc.). This will allow players the opportunity to hear what others are doing so they can work towards a unified goal.

When adding the low instruments to the rest of the ensemble, sixteenth note passages whether on beats one, two, or three should sound similar, with seamless releases and passing-off to

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the next group. Finally, note that the entire ensemble has one final tutti group of sixteenth notes in m. 75. For the low voices, this means the addition of timpani to the group. This is another spot to focus on perfect rhythmic and technical placement of the sixteenth notes.

## Christiaan Venter — *Rocky Mountain Lullaby*, rehearsal C to rehearsal E

Christiaan Venter-Rocky Mountain Lullaby-Transposed Score

Rehearsal C to Rehearsal E

This score page shows the musical notation for rehearsal C through rehearsal E. It includes parts for Flute 1 and 2, Oboe 1, Bassoon 1, Clarinet 1 and 2, Saxophone 1 and 2, Trumpet 1, 2, and 3, Trombone 1, 2, and 3, and String Bass. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as *mf* and *ff*. Rehearsal marks B, C, and D are indicated at the top of the page.

Christiaan Venter-Rocky Mountain Lullaby-Transposed Score

Rehearsal D

This score page shows the musical notation for rehearsal D. It includes parts for Flute 1 and 2, Oboe 1, Bassoon 1, Clarinet 1 and 2, Saxophone 1 and 2, Trumpet 1, 2, and 3, Trombone 1, 2, and 3, and String Bass. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as *mf* and *ff*. Rehearsal mark D is indicated at the top of the page.

Christiaan Venter-Rocky Mountain Lullaby-Transposed Score

Rehearsal E

This score page shows the musical notation for rehearsal E. It includes parts for Flute 1 and 2, Oboe 1, Bassoon 1, Clarinet 1 and 2, Saxophone 1 and 2, Trumpet 1, 2, and 3, Trombone 1, 2, and 3, and String Bass. The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings such as *mf* and *ff*. Rehearsal marks B and E are indicated at the top of the page.

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This is a lovely programmatic work that paints a picture of the peace and quiet of the Canadian Rockies. At rehearsal C, low woodwinds and low brass provide the second statement of the lullaby melody first played by the upper woodwinds at rehearsal A. The melody is rich, resonant, and expressive, lasting sixteen measures. All players must be committed to a sixteen-measure phrase, stagger breathing as needed, in order to portray the peaks and valleys of the melody with intent.

The climax of the melody is five measures after rehearsal D, supported by the rolls in timpani and suspended cymbal. Choices will need to be made about how to blend and balance low instruments throughout this passage. Are there one or two instruments we may want to hear a bit more than the others? What type of blend is desired between low woodwinds and low brass? The role for the remainder of the ensemble is to support the low voices, to add colour and effect, and to help commit to a long, sweeping phrase.

## John Zdechlik — *Chorale and Shaker Dance*, rehearsal S to rehearsal T

## LOW WOODWIND, BRASS AND STRING BASS SECTIONALS

*Chorale and Shaker Dance* is an active, physical piece for all players, with extra stamina and focus required from the low voices. Low instruments play multiple roles at different parts of the piece: melody, rhythmic accompaniment, and chordal accompaniment. Rehearsal S is an example of a very important chordal passage. It is a big moment, thickly scored, and loud.

Taking the time in rehearsal to balance and tune each chord here is so important to achieve a powerful, symphonic sound. Note that cornets are scored along with the low brass and woodwinds for these chords. Helping players hear roots of chords and understanding how their note functions in the chord will be helpful.

Where there are colourful notes present (i.e., sevenths and ninths of chords), point these out to the ensemble so balance and tuning can be achieved. Other important considerations here for low voices are entrances and releases of each chord, breathing (which must not disrupt the phrase), and awareness of the melodic parts in the rest of the ensemble and how these fit into the harmonic structure.

Directors and bands that invest the time for sectionals based on McBeth's groupings (depending on the structure of the pieces in question) will find the knowledge and ears of their ensemble, as well as their audiences, richly rewarded.



### CHRISTIN REARDON MACLELLAN

is the director of the University of British Columbia Concert Winds. She is also Director of Education & Community Programs for the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, where she develops, implements, and oversees a wide variety of educational programming for individuals of all ages, including the Vancouver Symphony Orchestral Institute at Whistler. She also maintains an active schedule as an

in-demand clinician, guest conductor, adjudicator, and guest speaker. As President of the Coalition for Music Education in BC, she works closely with teachers, community members, and arts organizations to protect, promote, and advance music education in BC schools.

Christin has taught band, choir, and general music in the public schools of Manitoba. She earned her masters degree in music education from Indiana University, where she taught undergraduate courses in music education and was a university supervisor for student teachers. Christin's research is published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* and *Music Educators' Journal*.



### CHUCK CURRIE

performs with the Vancouver Island Symphony, the Pacific Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Sax Noir, Pacific Blackwood, the BC Clarinet Choir, and the Vancouver Saxophone Ensemble. Chuck is a Backun, Vandoren and Conn Selmer artist-clinician.

He has performed at Canadian Music Educators' Association conventions, World Association of Bands and Ensembles conferences, North American Saxophone Alliance conferences and at International Clarinet Association Clarinetfests.

Students have auditioned successfully for the Vancouver Philharmonic Orchestra, the British Columbia Honour Orchestra, the UBC School of Music, the National Youth Band of Canada, and the International Honors Wind Symphony at Lincoln Center, New York.

Chuck's articles on equipment and pedagogy have been published by the *BC Band Journal*, the *BC Music Educators Association*, *Canadian Winds*, and *Clarinet & Saxophone Magazine*.



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