

## 2014 All-State Etudes TUBA

### INTRO

Hello! I am Kevin Wass, professor of Tuba and Euphonium at Texas Tech University. I would like to share some ideas that I think will help in your preparation of this year's All-State etudes.

First of all, it is important to keep some basic ideas in mind when preparing for any audition:

- Always play with your best sound, regardless of the musical demands. For example, pianissimo does not mean as soft as you can play, it means as soft as you can play with a good sound.
- Play with good rhythm. Even if someone has the greatest technique in the world, he or she can never be a good ensemble player without a good sense of time.
- Be creative and expressive. These etudes will probably constitute the bulk of your practice time for the next few months. To keep your practice from getting tedious and to help yourself stand out in the actual audition, try to incorporate a sense of individuality into your playing. Of course, you need to follow the markings provided for you in the music, but these etudes allow for a great deal of flexibility in interpretation.

### ETUDE 1

This year's etudes are selected from the Blazhevich 70 Studies for Double B Flat Tuba, Volume I, in the edition published by Robert King/Alphonse Leduc.

The first etude is number 18 on page 17. It is in B flat Major and the suggested tempo is quarter note equals 88-108. One thing that will probably immediately catch your attention in this piece is the time signature of 5-4, since it is not a meter that we see very often. In this case, however, it is not particularly difficult and you probably do not even need to worry whether it is a 2+3 or 3+2 subdivision of the bar, since most of the rhythms flow pretty easily. In fact, this is a good introduction to learning to play rhythms by duration instead of assigning them a place within the meter, which is a very useful skill for those who wish to someday be working professional musicians. Be especially careful in bars 20 through 25, where you have differing lengths of note at the end of the bar. Count each note carefully, hold full value, and come off of the tie accurately instead of trying to "feel" the meter or the pulse.

The "energico" style called for at the beginning of the etude is a bit vague, but I take it to mean that the music should be upbeat, exciting, and have a strong sense of motion. The sixteenth notes that appear throughout the etude will be crucial to portraying this mood, so be very careful not to play them too soft or clipped. They should be very present in sound and full length, with a strong sense of direction toward the notes that follow each set. The tongued sixteenths should only be as short as is necessary for the listener to differentiate them from the slurred sixteenths. If you wish to create more separation to

give the piece a more bouncy feel, separate the eighth notes a bit but keep the sixteenths long to keep from crushing them rhythmically or losing projection on them.

There are only two dynamic markings in the piece, both of them forte. It is obvious to me that the music needs more dynamic contrast than that, and I have marked in many dynamics that I hope come across clearly on the recording. You may wish to work with my dynamic scheme or create your own, but it is important to have a plan and execute that plan well. Start with obvious places to change dynamic, which would be any place where new musical material appears (measure 4 is my first dynamic change since it is new music). Then start to connect sections by finding places to crescendo (perhaps on notes that move upward, as in measure 8 and 9) or decrescendo. And one other hint—return of the music that appears at the beginning, as in measures 13 and 27, should probably be preceded by a crescendo. Use pencil to lightly mark in your dynamics or make several photocopies of the music to give yourself the opportunity to change your dynamic scheme as you practice the piece, but don't skip this opportunity to develop and demonstrate your musicianship!

I have recorded this etude twice, at a performance tempo and a slower practice tempo. You may actually need to start playing slower than my practice tempo when you first start working on the etude, or you may not be able to play all the way through the etude at any consistent tempo. In that case, use my practice tempo recording as an intermediate goal and my performance recording as a longer-term goal. At any rate, know your own limitations and be patient and persistent, only speeding the metronome up as you gain consistent accuracy and ease at a given tempo.

## **ETUDE 2**

The Second Etude is number 34 on pages 36 and 37. It is in A major and the suggested tempo is quarter or dotted quarter equals 60 to 69. You are to play only to the end of the second beat of measure 29.

Again, this etude will probably first grab your attention with the time signature, which is 9-8, 3-4. Sometimes this indicates that bars will alternate between the two indicated time signatures. In this case it is just saying that the entire piece is in three beats per bar, some of them subdivided into three pulses per beat and some in two pulses per beat. It is definitely worth your time to look through the etude before you start playing it and see which bars are which, as the duration of a dotted quarter note will differ depending on which subdivision is prevailing in the bar. The dotted quarter note in measure 1, for example, gets one beat since the subdivision in that bar is triple—it is a 9-8 bar. The dotted quarter note in measure 18, on the other hand, gets one and a half beats since the subdivision in that bar is duple—it is a 3-4 bar. Look at measure 1 and measure 18 and see if you can find the clues I used to determine which time signature to use. Also look at measures 7 and 8 and look for similar clues. Which time signature do you use for those two bars? If you said 3-4 you are correct—note that the group of three beamed notes in each bar is now marked as a triplet, indicating that two beamed notes will be a duple subdivision. While this can all be a bit confusing, taking the time to understand the different subdivisions before you begin practicing will help—you may want to also mark

in the meter changes between 9-8 and 3-4 to help yourself remember which sense of pulse to feel. And don't forget to feel quadruple subdivision clearly on all of the dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythms.

This selection is far different from the first one in tempo, style, and overall mood. While there are significant technical challenges that need to be addressed here, the most difficult challenge to overcome for many young musicians will be familiarity with the style. Blazhevich has written an ode to European Romanticism here, and that is not a style of music that most high school euphonium students spend much time listening to. My first recommendation, then, is to incorporate some listening into your practice. Start with Blazhevich's contemporaries, especially Rachmaninov, and then branch out into the music that Blazhevich would have encountered in his daily work at the Bolshoi: Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky being most prominent. Even a few minutes a day on Spotify or YouTube will give you a greater understanding of this musical language and will help you develop the vocabulary to play expressively and stylistically in this etude.

Flexibility is crucial here. Wide skips like the ones in measure 9 must be absolutely secure and very smooth. This spot is just one of the extremes of the flexibility demands in this work—even the upward lip slur from E to C sharp in the first bar will be difficult for some people to pull off smoothly and with confidence. Work on very smooth slow, slurred, controlled scales and other simple patterns to train the embouchure. In other words, use smooth sounds as your primary goal in order to develop a relaxed and flexible embouchure—trying to create smooth sound through “correct” placement or use of the embouchure will result in tension and frustration. If necessary, move to buzzing on the mouthpiece alone and listen for absolutely seamless transitions between notes.

I have not recorded this etude at a slower practice tempo since velocity is not one of the primary challenges of the piece. You may need to work on it more slowly, however, to master some of the technical or musical challenges. You should also divide the piece into logical sections and focus on one section at a time while learning and polishing this piece. Most importantly, don't neglect practice of this etude because it is “easy” from a velocity standpoint. You will be neglecting some very important aspects of your musical and technical development.

### **ETUDE 3**

The third etude is number 40 on pages 48 and 49. It begins in A flat Major and the suggested tempo is quarter note equals 72-88. You are to play to the downbeat of measure 46.

As with the first etude, this is one that has no specific articulation marking, and I fear the tendency of many young players will be to go to a very marked, clipped staccato. I think it sounds much more graceful and melodic with some length to the sixteenth notes, so again begin with a very long approach as you learn the etude. Only separate as much as is necessary for your listener to distinguish between the tongued and slurred notes. If you wish to play shorter for stylistic purposes, think of gradually slicing little bits off the end of each note. In no case should you try to play shorter by tonguing harder, as inaccuracy,

distorted sound, and poor pitch will find their way into your now overtensed embouchure and articulation mechanism. Overarticulation is the number one tone production fault of young tuba players in my estimation—give yourself a leg up on the competition by not falling into that trap.

Like many etudes, this selection focuses on a few particular musical and technical problems. The first and most obvious is the ability to maintain a steady tempo with much of the movement occurring off of the beat. The rhythm of the first measure is repeated many times throughout the piece, with sixteenth notes tied from the last pulse of beat one over to the first pulse of beat two. My first recommendation for practicing this skill is to ignore the ties and re-articulate the notes that occur on beat two. This will help you learn to “play” this note and feel its pulse despite the fact that in the final product you will actually be sustaining through it. You should certainly practice this rhythm with a metronome, but be careful that you do not come to rely on the metronome for pulse and begin to feel the second sixteenth pulse of beat two as a reaction to the metronome’s click. This will lead to inaccurate placement of the second sixteenth and a tendency to crush the notes that follow it. Instead, think of the sixteenths off of the beat anticipating the next downbeat. In other words, hear “ee-and-ah-1” or “ti-te-ta-1” instead of “TWO-ee-and-ah”. This will help you place the notes within the beat accurately and confidently and with a sense of purpose. It also lends itself to steady airflow, which will help your clarity of articulation.

Anyone who will be successful in performance of this etude will need to be familiar with the A flat major, G major, and C minor scales and will need to be very well-prepared on the measures that transition between these two keys. Look at the page and find the measures with the most accidentals occurring in them—this is one of the key signs that music is changing tonality. The transition from G major to C minor that occurs in bars 29 through 35 is especially difficult, as it includes diminished seventh arpeggios which are unfamiliar to many young musicians. Spend extra time working on these spots and do some work in the diminished arpeggio section of the Arban book to help you master these important measures. And remember our musical rule from the first etude—repeat of the opening material is often preceded by a crescendo. If you can deliver measures 11 through 13 and 29 through 35 confidently and in control enough to give even a slight crescendo to the line, you will definitely set yourself apart from the pack.

Once again, I have recorded the etude twice at contrasting tempos. Choose your own starting tempo based on your technical skill level and never practice faster than you can play accurately and in control.

### **Conclusion**

I hope the comments and playing examples on this recording have helped in your preparation of the All-State etudes. Remember to practice patiently, starting slowly and allowing yourself plenty of time to learn the music correctly. This will develop the habit of playing consistently with accuracy and control. Remember to always play with your best sound and to have fun and be expressive.

If you have questions about these etudes, I can be reached via email at [kevin.wass@ttu.edu](mailto:kevin.wass@ttu.edu).

Best of luck and happy practicing!!