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THE BIG BAND TRUMPET SECTION— DEFINING ROLES FOR YOUNGER PLAYERS

BY MARTIN SAUNDERS

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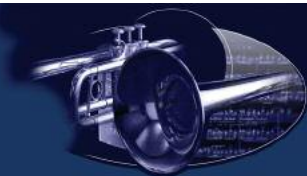
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THE BIG BAND TRUMPET SECTION— DEFINING ROLES FOR YOUNGER PLAYERS

BY MARTIN SAUNDERS

The trumpet sections of middle school and high school big bands face many challenges. There are several factors that must be addressed: sound concept, pitch, style, time, articulations, range, and perhaps improvisation. While the job of interpreting musical style usually belongs to the band director at this stage, the roles of each trumpet part within the section should be defined. Knowing your role in the section includes figuring out who to listen to, how to accomplish proper balance, and how to achieve a collective, unified section sound.

The Lead Player (1st part)—An effective lead player in the trumpet section is not only a leader, but also a good follower! The lead player is responsible for *leading* the trumpet section, and also for leading the whole band. A lead player's sound needs to sit on top of the band and help guide the time, style, articulations, and cut-offs for the band. This person must have good time, which is why I also said that he or she *must* also be a good follower! The ability to follow the time being set by the rhythm section and adjust according to the style is imperative. Another crucial trait of a good lead player is consistency. A lead player is charged to be the most consistent player in the band, playing the part the same (once mastered) every time the band plays. Obviously, the responsibility of playing in the upper register is also expected, so the lead player should have a strong sound and have the ability to play in the upper register. This person *does not* have to have the most outstanding range ever on the trumpet. Good lead players know both their strengths and their limitations. Constant straining and pushing will not result in endurance and longevity, but playing with the best sound within a player's practical range will yield good results.

The Ride Player (2nd part)—The second trumpeter's job is quite diverse. This person should have close to the same range as the lead player, but also has to possess other skills. Often if there is an improvised trumpet solo, it will be written in the second part. The ability to improvise is no easy task. Being able to play a solo in the style intended and at the right tempo is quite a job. This person should be creative, bold, and be willing to take chances. The second trumpeter has to play with good intonation because if the second player plays out of tune, it can make the lead player's job much harder. The second trumpet part should support the lead part in every way, never being louder than the lead voice. It should not be weak either, but instead match everything at slightly less volume than the

lead. The second trumpet part will often have a melodic or harmonic solo or shared line. Again, this person must be versatile enough to be less prominent during shared moments, and more creative when carrying the solo line.

Third—The third trumpeter should be a consistent and confident player. The part often contains many harmonic challenges, so players must be able to hear where their part fits in the structure of the music. Third trumpeters should also be familiar enough with their trumpet to have great intonation and know the tendencies of certain notes: an "F" on top of the staff usually is sharp in pitch, for instance, and depending on whether that note is the root, third, or fifth of the chord, it can greatly affect the outcome of tuning up the entire chord within the band. Like the second part, the third part should support the lead part, especially since this person usually sits to the left of the lead player.

Fourth (and Fifth, when applicable)—This person needs to have the best ears in the section. Since this part is usually sitting the furthest away from the lead player, he or she must listen critically for the lead voice and for the rhythm section. The fourth part is often doubling something, either the lead part down the octave, a trombone part voicing, or even a saxophone part. So, the lower part must be able to multi-task by listening in different directions for time, intonation, and balance. Because the voicing of this part is often lower, it needs to be brought out to be heard and to balance the section. You still need to be careful not to play louder than the upper voices, but often the lower part gets lost in the shuffle of the tune, so playing strong will help to achieve proper section and ensemble balance. There are times when a solo is written in the lower part, so be ready to tackle that challenge if it comes your way.

With the knowledge of the roles of each player defined, the trumpet section should have an easier time making the proper preparations and adjustments for a successful musical product. That cohesive sound can further be enhanced by proper articulations, cut-offs, and choice of mutes. The section as a whole needs to play music to the best of their ability, have a unified concept of style, and play together.

About the author: Martin Saunders teaches trumpet and jazz studies at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. Prior to his position at Marshall, he spent seven years in the Air Force Band stationed at Offutt AFB in Omaha, Nebraska. 