A Brief Euphonium and Tuba Source Review

By Jeff Barbee

There are many resources available for today’s euphonium students. Some being in the form of hard print that have stood the test of time, to others being born of professionals beginning their own websites in hopes to build a reputation not only as a performer, but as an educator. The goal of this paper will be to evaluate several of hard print, and on-line resources and determine if their attempt to connect with younger students is successful.

*Practical Hints on playing the Baritone (Euphonium)* by Brian Bowman in collaboration with James D. Ployhar is an excellent resource to start with. Dr. Bowman is a leading performer and educator in the country on the instrument. His students hold positions in college and service bands across the country. This book is an excellent example of what would be considered successful by reaching young students.

The book is divided into 14 chapters. The first address the important topic of choosing an instrument. Dr. Bowman talks about the difference between an American and European baritone horn. The book describes what to look for in an instrument, such as the purpose of the fourth valve, as well as bore size and price.

From chapter 3 through the conclusion of the book uses photographs of Dr. Bowman demonstrating what is being written about. The posture positions offer great examples of what students should model when they are playing. These exhibits included the general positions of sitting and standing to how the fingers should lie on the valves.

Chapter 4 covers the embouchure. This topic could cause an issue with students by “paralysis by analysis.” Dr. Bowman includes useful pictures to help students have an idea of how to set an embouchure. He also includes pictures of how not to form an embouchure.

Chapters 5,6 and 7 involve breathing, tonguing, and the warm-up. These chapters are written in a simple manner that most students will be able to understand and not “over-think.” The exercises for the warm-up are written in treble clef. This would be excellent for students who perhaps started on trumpet but have switched instruments. The exercises may be too advanced for beginning students due to range and flexibility issues.

The biggest issue I have with this book is that tone quality is not covered until chapter 10. It also leaves much to be desired in terms of details. Descriptions are often vague and unclear, but do recommend students to seek out teachers and quality recordings.

Chapters involving intonation, range and the fourth valve are discussed in a manner that most high school students would understand. The conclusion of the book discusses practicing, and gives lists of supplementary material, such as mutes and recordings. The book also includes flexibility exercises in both clefs, as well printing all major and minor scales for the student to practice.

The Art of Tuba and Euphonium by Harvey Philips and William Winkle is a great resource for the advanced high school student. Harvey Philips is a legend with his teaching and tenure at Indiana University. This book would be a great successor to the Practical Tips book. Overall, this book does not offer photos to demonstrate what is being discussed, but does offer a number of diagrams. The text is descriptive, but could overwhelm younger students with details that are beyond a student’s understanding.

The opening of the book gives a detailed history of our instruments. Younger students would not understand much of the content, or would bore many others. However, students who are intensely interested in the instrument will enjoy this section.

Chapter two of the book discusses the selection of the horn, and the player. Some of the used language could be considered “old school,” with such as stating that the student should be fit and not have lip deformities. In today’s society, this could cause sensitivity issues with some. It also asks the question of the selected horn, “is it good quality?” The odds of a high student knowing this is slim.

One of the strengths of this book is chapter three. It combines tone production, embouchure, and articulation in one place. The chapter stresses the importance of air during the tone production stage. There is included a diagram of the diaphragm during the breathing process. A student who reads the text and follows the instructions carefully, will learn to breathe successfully.

The mouthpiece placement section is simpler compared to the previous book. It uses simple diagram of where the mouthpiece should be placed. The following picture, could be complicated for students who take the directions to the extreme, especially the “Chin remains flat (pointed down and slightly forward)” sentence. The book also describes articulation, and vowels that can be used in great detail. Once again, great for an advance student or a student with a teacher, but could be overwhelming for a younger student.

Chapter four is useful for the serious student. It explains how to approach a practice session, beginning with making sure the student is focused, to discussing the warm-up, to talking about specific drills that should be addressed. Some of the flexibility exercises used could cause students to form bad habits by beginning to practice these drills too fast before they are ready. The following chapter dealing with intonation uses a chart with pitches from pedal B-flat through a double high B-flat and lists the intonation tendencies with the main and some popular alternate valve combinations.

The final chapter deals with professions in the music field. This would serve any high school student well to read this and begin thinking about what career path they would like to explore. Appendix A has several valuable lists that include etude books listed at an appropriate level as well as a list of tuba and euphonium players to model.

In this book each chapter concluded with a section that is dedicated to review the material and offers a “check-list” of what to look for. These sections may be a better route for some younger players because the details found in these sections will not over-whelm the student. Instead gives the basic information and allows the student to take off. This book is an excellent resource and one I wish I had when I was younger.

*The Breathing Book* for euphonium by David Vining is a resource that focuses on the most important aspect of the instrument: Air. This book is presented in 13 chapters, most being just a few pages that focus on a certain aspect of playing. Even though the title says euphonium, it would work great for any brass instrument.

The first nine chapters discuss balance, the mechanics going on inside the human body as we breathe, such as what the diaphragm does, how the ribs move, etc. There are pictures to show what is being explained in the text. The wording is simple, and does not use complicated medical terminology that would confuse most people. The playing drills incorporate breathing drills to help reinforce what is being covered while combining it with playing on the instrument.

Chapter 10 may be the most important chapter of the book in my opinion. It deals with the importance of air while articulating. The drills alternate between articulating with only air, and playing the pitches. Vining writes the air only version using the pitches that will be played in the next segment. This will help the student visualize, and even hear the pitches before they play. This chapter is also successful because the articulation drills use a single pitch. Students can focus on doing the correct habits without having the added stress of changing notes.

Chapter 11 builds off chapter 10 dealing with articulations. Divided into two sections, 11a addressed slurring, and 11b address fast articulations with multiple pitches. 11a emphasizes the importance of blowing through different pitches and staying relaxed. The drills used in this section begin by using pitches that are intervallicly close together, but become progressively wider. This will force the student to focus and apply the material covered in the section. 11b begins by using pitches that are conjunct as well, but writes in tempo markings to give a student an idea of how slowly to begin practicing, as well as a goal to work toward. The exercise progressively become more difficult but expanding the scalar runs, and intervallic leaps. This exercise can be played as a whole etude, or used to focus on one aspect of playing. During written rests, there are inserted notes to remind students to focus on the skills learned in previous lessons.

One of the final chapters deals with monitoring the remaining air. This chapter offers great advice of how to focus on using air, and being sure to always have plenty while performing. This book would have been more successful had this chapter started the book. In my opinion, it is most important to help students begin to move air, to understand the importance of it to performance. After this point of emphasis had been made, the rest would follow with more success.

A standard brass book in the literature is *The Art of Brass Playing* by Philip Farkas. Known for his legendary career as a horn player and teacher, even spent time teaching at the Kansas City Conservatory (Now part of UMKC). Even though Farkas is known for these horn skills, this book is dedicated to brass playing in general.

The book is presented in nine chapters, beginning with a chapter on the embouchure, then progressing to mouthpiece placement, articulation and breath control. One of the biggest positives of this book is the photos of great brass players modeling mouthpiece placement and a photo of the embouchure using a mouthpiece visualizer. The chapters are written in great detail and proves why this book is valuable to the profession even after so many years. However, because of all of the details written, it may overwhelm a younger student. A student preparing for college study would benefit greatly from owning this book.

One thing I would like to see different in this book is its emphasis on the importance of air. Breathing is not covered until the penultimate chapter, and titled “breath control.” Farkas writes in great detail about how to breathe, such as inhaling and exhaling. However few times it emphasized that air is what makes a desirable tone.

An older book that I found in my collection that could be stored away in a band director’s file is *Studio Class Manual for Tuba and Euphonium* by William H. Rose. Mr. Rose was born in Kentucky, studied at Juilliard, and eventually would become the principal tubist of the Houston Symphony and Professor of Tuba at the University of Houston. A student may struggle at first to look favorably to this book because of its old appearance. Published in 1980, the text seems to come straight from Grandpa’s typewriter.

The book address the history and technique of tuba and euphonium playing. Early in the writings, Mr. Rose admits that this book is about these items, and does not focus on musicianship. He does recommend students to read Philip Farkas’ *Art of Musicianship.* Rose begins by giving historical backgrounds on both the tuba and euphonium. The history is well documented, and included photographs of predecessors to the modern day instruments. It is likely that only heavily invested students would be interested in this section. The third part of this book addresses the actually aspects of playing. Rose begins by posture, then explains the breathing process in clear, easily understood manner. He address the embouchure in the same fashion, and has a line that may be the best of any of the sources: “Place the mouthpiece in a comfortable position for blowing” (pg. 23). Rose continues to go through aspects of warming-up and articulations. His writing almost seems personable to the reader, which could really help students understand what he is trying to get across. The conclusion of the book offers a diversity of options for the aspirational musician. Rose discusses performing opportunities, as well as careers in music that do not require performing. Overall, this is an excellent resource that would be easy for any student to understand and gain valuable knowledge from.

In today’s age of technology, the previous sources may not be the first available resources for students to look into for help. The internet is a gateway for unlimited knowledge, and should be a focus of educators going forward.

The International Tuba-Euphonium website, [www.iteaonline.org](http://www.iteaonline.org), would ideally be a first website that students would find when looking for instruction. Overall the website is not successful in helping high school students. The home page has links to resources, but unless the student is a member of ITEA, it will send the student to a log-in page. Most of the homepage material deals with previews of articles in the latest ITEA Journal, or has a list of information that high school students will not understand. The one positive is the link to the conference competitions. Students are able to find out information about participating. However, a private teacher is most likely needed to help educate a student of what is truly needed to make a quality recording.

One of the website links on iteaonline.org was to the site iplayeuphonium.com. The site is ran by Brian C. Wilson, an active clinician on the west coast. This is an excellent site for high school students to hear examples of great euphonium players. The home page has a link to a pictured list of professional euphonium players to choose from. A student can click on a picture and is taken to another page that features this player. The goal of this website is for these professional players to record a required All-State etude as a model for students. There is a link where students can click on the state they are auditioning in, and appropriate videos become listed. Names from Adam Frey, Mark Jenkins, Pat Stuckemeyer and other comprise this list.

Wilson’s role in this site is more involved. His link includes sound recordings of more involved pieces, such as the Carnival of Venice, Harlequin, and others. He also has recorded video from live performances.

There is also a link that is to help students find solos for them to play. This would be a great idea for a student, and even a non-euphonium private instructor to find ideas. However, this link contain competition music lists, and advertised solos that were for college players. Overall this site is a great success. It has the most valuable resources for high school students, models to listen and emulate in their playing.

Simulating the mind-set of a high school tuba player, looking for tips on how to play the tuba, with google on my smart phone, I googled “Tuba Tips.” The result that caught my eye was a website by Norlan Bewley. The website was copyrighted in 2008, and some of the text seems dated. Mr. Bewley writes a brief, simple two step plan of how to form an embouchure. The steps are simple, but his description would be confusing for many students. Such descriptions such as “Your lips convert the vocal breath into an air stream so that when you put them in the mouthpiece they vibrate. Your embouchure must MATCH the speed and volume of breath from your throat (vocal breath)” (Bewley, 2008). This sentence makes sense for a seasoned player, but would cause a high school student to ask too many questions about air stream. The focus here should be to encourage the student to use lots of air, not the same amount for a vocal conversation.

After his two steps to embouchure form, Bewley uses three styles of mouthpiece placement; high, low, and center. I find this problematic because it may encourage students to unnecessarily change mouthpiece placement in hopes of finding an answer for an issue such as range. Mouthpiece placement should be simple, place the mouthpiece where it feels comfortable, and then focus on air.

A major positive of Mr. Bewley’s site is that he is focused as a low brass teacher. There are links to euphonium, and trombone resources as well. This would serve a student who resides in an area with limited resources, (universities, teachers, concerts, etc.) that happens to be doubling on these instruments for their high school music program. Easily accessible are mp3’s that allow a student to play along if they have purchased the pieces that are listed. The recording is from a finale word file, so it is not a great example of tone, but would serve as a great tool to work on basic musical skills. Beside this link, are multiple links that address different aspects of playing. Some include printable handouts for students to practice. The links provide brief tips on the subject. Since they are brief, younger players may not understand the material. The site also offers three free video lessons that students can download and watch. The videos cover basic information such as how to hold and finger the instruments. Students also have the option to purchase more video lessons.

Overall the site would be helpful for students at a junior or senior level of skills, or students who have a solid foundation and looking for different ideas to approaching fundamentals of playing. The free printouts would benefit students needing an idea of where to start and is also a useful resource for band directors. There are many benefits to this site, however they are not easy to find.

Georgepalton.com is a website that I have known through my friendship with George. His website is a great source for students looking for direction in their study as it is set up to serve students in resource-deprived areas.

The website’s easy layout helps students navigate with ease to find what they are looking for. The home page has links that can directly go to the desired resource. George has posted videos of live performances, and recordings of Kentucky and West Virginia All-State band etudes. These are an excellent source for students to hear a quality performer.

The available resources in terms of warm-ups, scales, exercise for tuba and euphonium players is extensive. Euphonium versions often have both bass and treble clef. Along with the individual exercises, group exercises are also available. These would be great for any low brass section or band director. George also has a link dedicated to young, beginning players. This would be helpful for band directors.

After doing a possible high school student google search of “euphonium websites,” one of David Thornton appeared, <http://www.euphoniumsoloist.co.uk/>. His website is typical of many other professionals. It includes links to a bio, a place to purchase recordings, a performance calendar and links to the schools where he teaches and his brand sponsor. The positive for high school students with this site, and the others like it, are the links to his recordings. Thornton has a link to view live performances via youtube. These are wonderful models for students gain an idea of a wonderful euphonium sound. If a student is looking for other pedagogical material, they will need to look somewhere else.

Another powerful multimedia resource available for students is youtube. Many recordings are posted by professionals. If a student is looking for a specific piece that is performed, youtube would be a great place to start looking, or even if a student just wants to hear recordings of their instrument. Even though there is the possibility of a student finding a poor recording, the benefits far outweigh this negative. It would also serve students well to expose themselves to other styles of music. Having a wide range of styles at the tips of your fingers could really expedite the growth as a musician.

After looking through resources for high school students, I expected that the internet would be an ideal place to find a plethora of material. This does not to be the case, especially if a student does not know where to look. The written, and seemingly dated books have stood the test of time for a reason. Their explanation and detail is difficult to top. Some of the writing may be difficult to understand, but a student should be able to figure these aspects out by just playing the instrument. These written books seem to be written for the general good of all players, while the websites at times seem to be a teaser to invite a student to spend money on a recording, or help spread the name of a budding professional. The best resources have clear written direction, photos of what is being described in the text, and written music for students to play. These will be ideas to keep in mind as I begin my journey as an educator.