

The Band Boot Camp

A Supplemental Method Book for Woodwinds, Brass and Keyboard Percussion

Description and Explanation of Each Component

1. Whole Notes in Half Steps

All players start in the middle register and descend via pairs of consecutive half steps to the bottom of the playable range for three valved brass instruments. A primary goal of the exercise is to play the groups of eighth notes with an airstream as smooth as that used when playing a whole note, hence the name. This exercise provides directors an opportunity to teach and/or reinforce alternate fingerings/positions where appropriate for each instrument, as well as the opportunity to introduce enharmonic equivalents. For the brass players, the exercise offers students the opportunity to develop a more resonant tone quality and more efficient embouchure by playing in their lowest register. Most players will be presented with the opportunity to practice awkward fingering combinations in the course of the exercises. For advanced brass players, the exercise can be performed as a lip glissando, in which the players finger the first note of each chromatic pair but glissando down to the second note using only their embouchure. If the woodwinds (and perhaps some of the brass section) perform the exercise using the standard fingerings, those performing the glissando will have a sonic reference point to guide their ears and thus their lips.

2. S.A.M. (Smooth Air Movement)

The title of the exercise is also an acronym for my tuba teacher in graduate school, J. Samuel Pilafian, who introduced me to this exercise more than a decade ago. This incarnation for band invites the students to develop fluency in a wide variety of key signatures as they descend into the low registers of each instrument. Particularly for the brass, learning to relax the throat, jaw and upper body by practicing in the low register can improve air flow and overall relaxation across the instrument, resulting in better tone quality and better intonation. The pattern of intervals remains constant throughout the exercise, allowing students to quickly form an auditory reference point while navigating each key signature. Students and directors are encouraged to sing each pattern of intervals before playing, to establish the desired sonic goal. Once the performers can sing the exercise in tune, the director must challenge them to maintain a high standard of intonation while playing. No instrument will play every note perfectly in tune, although an instrument of reasonable quality can be guided to play better in tune by way of adjustments from the player. While this exercise offers the opportunity to remind the students of the mechanics of key signatures and the opportunity to apply that knowledge, the highest goal is to help players practice the art of *listening* and *adjusting*. The intonation difficulties inherent in most wind instruments while playing in keys with multiple sharps or flats actually increases the value of the exercise from this perspective.

3. Flexibility for Band

This exercise becomes progressively more difficult. Fingerings or slide positions are provided for the brass section, since in the longer finger combinations the students must use alternate fingerings to perform the notes as a lip slur, i.e., to stay within a single harmonic series. Some brass players may need assurance that the notes called for are in fact possible using the fingerings/positions specified. Fingerings are not provided for the French horns, due to the difference in fingerings between single horns in F and double horns in F/Bb, both of which are widely used. However, students holding a double horn could utilize the same fingerings as the trumpets, if they play all the exercises while holding down the thumb (Bb) valve. Otherwise, horn players can simply finger the exercise. For the first three segments, the brass perform arpeggios using lip slurs while the woodwinds play descending chromatic passages, based on the starting note of each lip slur in the brass. Starting with the fourth segment, woodwinds and brass are scored in unison. Although the rhythmic values indicate rapid velocity, in fact slow tempos will be more appropriate for most ensembles. Until a smooth lip slur is achieved by the brass at a slow tempo, going faster will not develop the appropriate skills in the players. In fact, going too quickly will invite bad habits, such as excessive jaw shifts or large movements of the instrument. Once they have mastered the required fingerings, the woodwind section can provide the brass with an ideal sonic model for this exercise: smooth slurs, performed without accents, supported by a constant airstream at a moderate dynamic level.

4. Natural Lip Slurs for Band

This exercise outlines the first eight notes of the natural harmonic series, which also give the exercise its name. Like the preceding exercise, the fingerings are marked for the brass. Since this drill covers a two octave range, even more of the notes in a given key signature/harmonic series must be played using an alternate fingering. As above, fingerings are not provided for French horn, although double horn players can utilize the trumpet fingerings while holding down the Bb thumb valve. Again, the woodwind choir can provide a valuable sonic model for the brass section, not only in terms of fluidity but in terms of finding the right note. Some brass players may struggle to find the lowered seventh scale degree in each key. However, in making the attempt to do so, the strength of their embouchure will greatly increase, as will their ability to play better in tune. In the higher key signatures later in the drill, many brass players may not be able to perform the notes past the fifth harmonic. In this case, advise these students to rest as the notes exceed their range, and then to re-join the exercise as it descends back into their playable range.

5. Scale fluency drills are offered in three key signatures, Bb, Ab, and G. In each, the goal for the students is to become familiar not just with the scale but with scale patterns, leading to mastery of each key signature. To that end, I often remind students of the goal to “conquer” each key. The scale patterns are the same within each key signature, so that the sonic model established in the familiar key of Bb can be transferred to the other keys. The three forms of the minor scales can each be applied to the entire exercise, creating in effect four versions of each scale fluency drill. Certainly, these patterns can be used to develop intonation within the ensemble, as well as rhythmic accuracy. The use of a metronome, magnified through a stereo system, guitar amplifier or other device can help establish a firm sense of pulse for all ensemble members. It can also be used to set specific technical goals for the ensemble as a whole or its individual members. Furthermore, a wide variety of articulation patterns can be applied to each segment within the

exercise. Combinations of legato, staccato, slurs or dynamic contrasts can raise the student's sensitivity to these elements of musical once familiarity with the scale patterns has been achieved.

6. Chromatic Confidence

All instrumentalists can improve their technical skill by rehearsing chromatic scales. In this exercise, fragments of the chromatic scale are presented to the players in sequentially longer passages. In particular, all of the brass players (besides horn) start every sequence from a note in the harmonic series that can be played without valves, i.e., an "open" fingering for trumpet, baritone and tuba or first position on trombone. As a result, each sequence offers the brass players described above an opportunity to practice the chromatic fingering pattern from one "open" note to the next "open" note in the harmonic series. Since this pattern is the same in every case, the students are provided frequent opportunities for reinforcement and should thus be able to quickly increase their confidence while playing the chromatic scale. Brass students should be reminded of this continuity in the finger patterns while they play. Woodwind students will need to be reminded of the appropriate use of alternate fingerings (and their rationale) while playing.

7. Major Scales

All twelve major scales are presented to the students in chromatic order, in three parts. In Part 1, the pattern starts by descending while playing a Bb scale, ascending while playing a B scale, descending in the key of C and so on. In Part 2, the pattern starts in the same way, descending while playing a Bb scale, but this time ascends while playing an A scale, descending while playing an Ab scale, and so on. In Part 3, the pattern from Part 1 is reversed, that is, ascending while playing a Bb scale, descending while playing B scale, ascending while playing C, and so on. Accurate playing through the series of key signatures should be the top priority in rehearsal. However, once accuracy is achieved, metronome goals can be set to measure the proficiency of the ensemble and the individual members within it. Many band directors use these materials as assessments for final exams, chair placements, and the like.