

HOW TO BUY A EUPHONIUM

By Mark Kellogg

The euphonium is, without a doubt, the unsung hero of the brass family. Whether we are enjoying its beautiful solo passages from British band literature, a tuneful counter-melody in a Sousa march, or the imposing presence it provides in orchestral works like Gustav Holst's masterpiece "The Planets," the euphonium possesses a singing, noble tone quality that has intrigued the imaginations of composers and audiences for years. In fact, the rough translation of the word "euphonium" is "pleasant sounding." Never has an instrument's name more aptly described its finest qualities.

Different Types of Instruments

Although sometimes played as a doubling instrument by trombonists because of the similarity of mouthpiece size, the euphonium is actually a member of the tuba family. Some composers and musical cultures even refer to the euphonium as a tenor tuba. The euphonium can best be described as a large bore conical instrument (like the tuba or French horn) with four piston valves. Some European instrument makers manufacture rotary valve instruments, but in the United States we see piston valves almost exclusively. The first three valves are operated with the right hand, and the fourth valve, found on the side of the instrument, is manipulated by the left hand. Most professional instruments are referred to as "compensating instruments," meaning that they are equipped with an extra set of tuning tubes that extend out from the back of the valve section. These extra tubes aid the somewhat flawed pitch of the euphonium (or any valve instrument) and enable the performer to play with a keener sense of intonation. Professional euphoniums also require a deep mouthpiece with a large or medium shank. Most student-model instruments are different in that they are of a slightly smaller bore size, are non-compensating instruments, and all four valves are configured next to one another. These instruments usually require a small shank mouthpiece.



Many times, the euphonium is confused with another member of the tuba family: the baritone or baritone horn. A true baritone is a smaller instrument comprised of narrower tubing that is actually more cylindrical than conical. It has three valves, is a non-compensating instrument, and produces a brassier, smaller sound quality than its conical cousin. A mainstay of the British brass band instrumentation, the baritone requires a shallower, small shank mouthpiece. While music educators and conductors often use the two words "euphonium" and "baritone" interchangeably, there really are striking visual and aural differences between these two instruments.

Care and Maintenance

It is very important to maintain any musical instrument at its highest level so that the instrument is never an impediment to a young student's development. The entire instrument can be cleaned internally by just running warm water through the tubing to loosen small bits of debris that develop. This should be done via the instrument lead pipe on a weekly basis. Another good habit is to take the instrument apart and soak it in a bathtub full of warm water with just a bit of mild dish detergent every three months. After the instrument soaks for approximately a half hour, clean the tubing by using what is commonly referred to as a "snake" - a long coiled wire with thick bristles on either end to push or pull out any bits of accumulated grit in the euphonium. Before putting the instrument back together, rinse it, and allow it to dry thoroughly. In addition to these procedures, it is a good idea to have the instrument cleaned once or twice a year by a qualified repairperson using what is called a chemical flush. While the repairperson has the euphonium, he can also attend to any felts, springs, etc., that need replacing.

There are two basic moving parts of the euphonium that require special attention - the tuning slides and the valves. After the main tubes of the instrument have been cleaned and dried, the tuning slides are ready to be lubricated to ensure easy adjustments of intonation. Coating the tuning slide with some type of Vaseline or petroleum jelly is usually all it takes. If the tolerance of the tuning slides is exceptionally tight, try trombone slide cream instead. The valves are also quite easy to maintain. After rinsing and wiping the pistons with any type of lint-free cloth (perhaps a piece of light flannel material), swab out the valve casing with the same type of material. After screwing the valve caps back on the bottom of the casing and inserting the springs, put the pistons back in their appropriate valve casing by lining up the valve guide within each casing. Lubricate the

valves liberally with any professional grade valve oil, screw the top of the valve in place and they should be as good as new. It's best to oil the valves a little every day. This can be done using the method I have described or by putting a few drops of oil in the hole of each valve cap and down the lead pipe. This is another way to coat the inside of the instrument with the proper lubricant.

If the valves are still a bit sluggish or sticky, consider trying a different type of valve oil. If a student changes oil brands, remember that it is always best to clean the valves thoroughly because not all brands of valve oil are compatible. Another explanation for sticky valves is that the student is not pushing the valves down straight, causing the valves to be slightly out of alignment. Changing hand position so that the fingertips or finger pads of the first joint make contact with the valve top will ensure a straighter downward motion. If neither of these steps seem to make a difference, seek out a qualified repairperson.

Selecting An Instrument

When most young people begin learning the euphonium, they play on a school-owned instrument. This is because the cost of most instruments is prohibitively expensive for the beginning euphoniumist. Also, the case is quite large and, for safety reasons, many school districts now prohibit euphoniums being brought on school buses. If a student is fortunate enough to live in a school district with good financial resources, he or she may be able to have one instrument at school for rehearsals and one instrument at home for individual practice. If this is not the case, some type of practice plan needs to be devised with the help of the band director so that the student can practice either before or after school or perhaps during a free period during the school day. While this scenario is a bit of a challenge, it definitely helps to develop good time-management skills.

When the budding euphonium student reaches middle school, it might be time to consider purchasing his or her own instrument, especially if the student is considering a music major or minor in college. This purchase will range somewhere between \$2,000 to \$5,000, depending on the model. Obviously, the seriousness and interest of the student will best dictate the amount of the expenditure. When choosing a euphonium, first and foremost consider the instrument's sound quality. After playing the instrument, the student should ask himself, "Is the sound...focused... full...robust...buoyant, even between registers? If the answers are affirmative, continue the selection process by using a tuner to check the horn's intonation. Notes to pay careful attention to include middle C (often flat), A, below middle C (often flat), G, below middle C (often sharp), and E flat, E, and F, above middle C (often sharp). If the intonation seems workable, the final step is to check the valve action carefully. If the action is smooth and there is no apparent corrosion, this just might be the perfect horn! Enlisting the help of a professional euphoniumist is an extremely informative way to gather another educated opinion about any used or new instrument. Often, we gain invaluable insights about an instrument by hearing others play it.

Into the Past...Toward the Future

In the United States, the euphonium rose to great popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thanks to the wonderful touring concert bands of John Philip Sousa, Herbert L. Clarke, Arthur Pryor, and Patrick Gilmore. Quite often, these ensembles would prominently feature their first-chair cornetists, trombonists, or euphoniumists as soloists. Euphoniumists of that era, like Simone Mantia, Joseph DeLuca, and later, Leonard Falcone, displayed amazing technical facility and a sweetness of sound that inspired composers to write for this "pleasant sounding" instrument. Today there are new euphonium soloists who continue to inspire composers like David Gillingham, Jan Bach, and James Curnow with their technical and musical command. These composers, and their colleagues, are creating the euphonium literature of the 21st century.

Although the euphonium is needed in a handful of large, orchestral works (Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 7, Richard Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* and *Don Quixote*, and Leos Janacek's *Sinfonietta*, to name a few), its claim to fame is still as "the cello of the band." This explains why the most highly coveted euphonium jobs in the United States are positions in any of the top service bands of the United States Marines, Navy, Air Force, Army, or Coast Guard. The players in these bands preserve the wonderful playing traditions of the past and lead us toward the exciting accomplishments of future generations of euphoniumists.

Mark Kellogg has been a member of the Rochester Philharmonic since 1989 and currently enjoys the dual appointment of principal trombone of the RPO and associate professor of trombone, euphonium and chamber music at the Eastman School of Music. He has performed with the San Francisco Symphony, the

National Repertory Orchestra and the Syracuse Symphony. In 2003, Kellogg will premiere Jeff Tyzik's Concerto for Trombone with the RPO, with the composer conducting.

A founding member of the brass and percussion chamber ensemble Rhythm and Brass, Kellogg performed on tour for two years across the U.S. and Japan, also recording four CDs with the group. Other chamber music credits include performances with Chicago's Music of the Baroque, Chamber Music West in San Francisco, the Society for Chamber Music in Rochester, and Fortissimo! At Eastman, Kellogg teaches alto trombone, trombone, euphonium and coordinates the brass chamber music program. He has given recitals and masterclasses at schools and music festivals around the country. He is also an artist/clinician for the Yamaha Corporation of America.