

Valves, Breathing Gadgets, and “Small-Large Ensembles”

American Band College

Michael Grose

University of Oregon

YouTube Channel - TubaPeopleTV

Web - TubaPeople.com

Valves: Better tubas and euphoniums will always have at least 4 valves. The models with 3 valves are generally a lower level quality instrument.

The 4th valve serves to extend the range, and also offers alternate fingering options for improved intonation. For example, the 1&2 valve combination tends to be a little sharp but can be substituted by using valve 3 instead. Similarly, the 1&3 valve combination rides high in pitch, by using valve 4 as an alternation the pitch will lower.

Compensating Euphonium vs. Non-compensating Euphonium

Compensating euphoniums have superior intonation in the low register, in particular, and are generally a higher quality instrument than a non-compensating instrument (either 3 or 4 valves).

Recommended **Euphonium manufacturers** (in no particular order):

Yamaha (4-valve), Willson, Adams, Miraphone, Wessex (top of the line), Eastman (top of the line)

Recommended **Euphonium mouthpieces:**

Bach 5G, Bach 4G, Schilke 50, Schilke 51D

Recommended **BBb Tuba manufacturers** (in no particular order):

Jupiter, King, Menil-Weston, Yamaha, Miraphone, Wessex

Recommended **CC Tuba manufacturers** (in no particular order):

Miraphone, Meinl-Weston, Yamaha, Eastman (both the 4/4 & 6/4 models), Wessex (6/4 model)

Recommended **Tuba mouthpieces:**

Conn Helleberg, Conn Helleberg 7B, Schilke Helleberg II, Schilke 62, Schilke 66, Bach 18, Bach 24AW, Bach 7, Laskey 30H, Laskey 28H

What's the deal with **Tuba “quarters”**? 3/4, 4/4, 5/4, 6/4

Rotors versus Pistons: It is thought that rotary valve tubas have a slightly darker tone color than piston tubas. This is a subjective assessment which is not unanimously held. It's personal taste! Unlike pistons, rotors can be finicky to maintain.

Gadgets - When using them, always do so away from the instrument so as not to cloud thoughts of music with thoughts of mechanics. Learn the mechanics of breathing away from the instrument and then apply them while playing. Don't try to learn them both simultaneously. Music should be the dominant thought while playing. Body mechanics should be a minor.

Why are gadgets helpful?? Subjective to Objective: By utilizing the various human senses, the following devices are used to help transform what is a subjective experience into one that is objective. Airflow can be difficult to quantify, but with the use of these tools one can see and feel improved/increased airflow.

Breath Builder

This device is excellent for developing a sense of “frog to tip” breath motion. Many times, students do not realize that they are not breathing to their full capacity. The Breath Builder helps to develop full use of one’s lung capacity.

Anesthesia Bag (5 and 6-liter sizes)

This can be used in multiple ways, such as blowing into, breathing from, and buzzing the mouthpiece into the bag to see what the air is doing.

Pinwheel

The pinwheel is great for modeling airflow. It is another “incentive” device that gives visual confirmation of air movement.

Paper

Blowing on a sheet of paper is great visual motivation for developing good airflow habits that can then be transferred back to the instrument.

Candle

Admittedly, an open flame is not something which is allowable in a public building. However, virtually everyone has blown out a candle or a match. Simply suggesting to a student to use airflow that is similar to blowing out a candle (or bending the flame) can be immediately useful.

Hand

The sense of sight and sense of touch are very useful when developing consistently good airflow. One can develop a great sense of airflow “feel” on the hand and then use the memory of that flow feeling as motivation for the air while playing.

Small-Large Ensembles = Chamber Music

Chamber Music is vital for your large ensemble because it:

- 1) Gives each ensemble member the opportunity to develop musical and technical ownership in their playing
- 2) Develops communication skills between ensemble members
- 3) Develops visual communication skills from each ensemble member which can then be used in a large ensemble setting interacting with the conductor
- 4) Gives the opportunity for all members to shine
- 5) Helps to provide musical impetus to improve and refine the skills of each ensemble member