

Intonation Tuning Routine

(WBDI Article)

by Sally Wagner

I spend more time dealing with intonation problems than just about any other aspect of performance. Over the years, I've discovered a few shortcuts that work for me. Maybe they'll work for you too.

The biggest help is careful tuning at the beginning of each rehearsal. While this takes about 15 to 20 minutes each day in the early part of the year, it eventually drops to 5 to 7 minutes as students become more proficient at listening and adjusting.

Preparation

Tuning Tubas

Tubas are always tuned first in my band. This encourages all students to listen down. It also encourages the tubas to take more responsibility than they sometimes think they have. Theirs is the foundation which all intonation is built! Using a chromatic tuner, I make sure each tuba sounds a true BBb. (I use 440 every day of the year.) Then I have them listen to each other to sustain good intonation. If there is no tuba, tune to the lowest instrument you have.

Tuning Euphoniums

Ask students to play Bb at the top of the staff, matching tuba pitch as closely as possible. It is helpful if they play up from F (F-G-A-Bb) to achieve a more realistic Bb. Also, check the pitch of the compensating valve (4th valve on low C). Other problem notes to learn to adjust are D above the staff (might need to be played 1&2 on sustained notes) and high F (if sharp can be played 3rd valve).

Tuning Trombones

Be sure to tune both sets of tubing if students play on instruments with an F attachment. Tune to Bb at the top of the staff, same as euphoniums. (I often also tune the F just below). Then 2nd space C using the trigger. Have more advanced players check their high F; this is a sharp note and should not be played in true first positions.

Next time: More brass and woodwind tuning tips.