TBZ Monthly

A new monthly content service from Brad Edwards

Volume 4, No. 5. ~ May 2025

Welcome!

Here is the next issue. Thank you to everyone who has subscribed so far. I'm always looking for ways to connect with trombonists and I love having the opportunity to share with people in a way I hope will provide benefit. If you are getting this pdf without having subscribed and would like to subscribe to future issues, simply follow this link. This little digital publication will evolve over time. If there's something you'd like to see included, please reach out to me: brad.edwards6251@gmail.com. (IG: @brad_edwards_trombone)

In this issue:

Enjoy!

Brad Edwards

Trombone Professor, Arizona State University

School of Music Dance and Theater

Websites:

Trombone Zone

Hornbone Press

Free Audition Solos

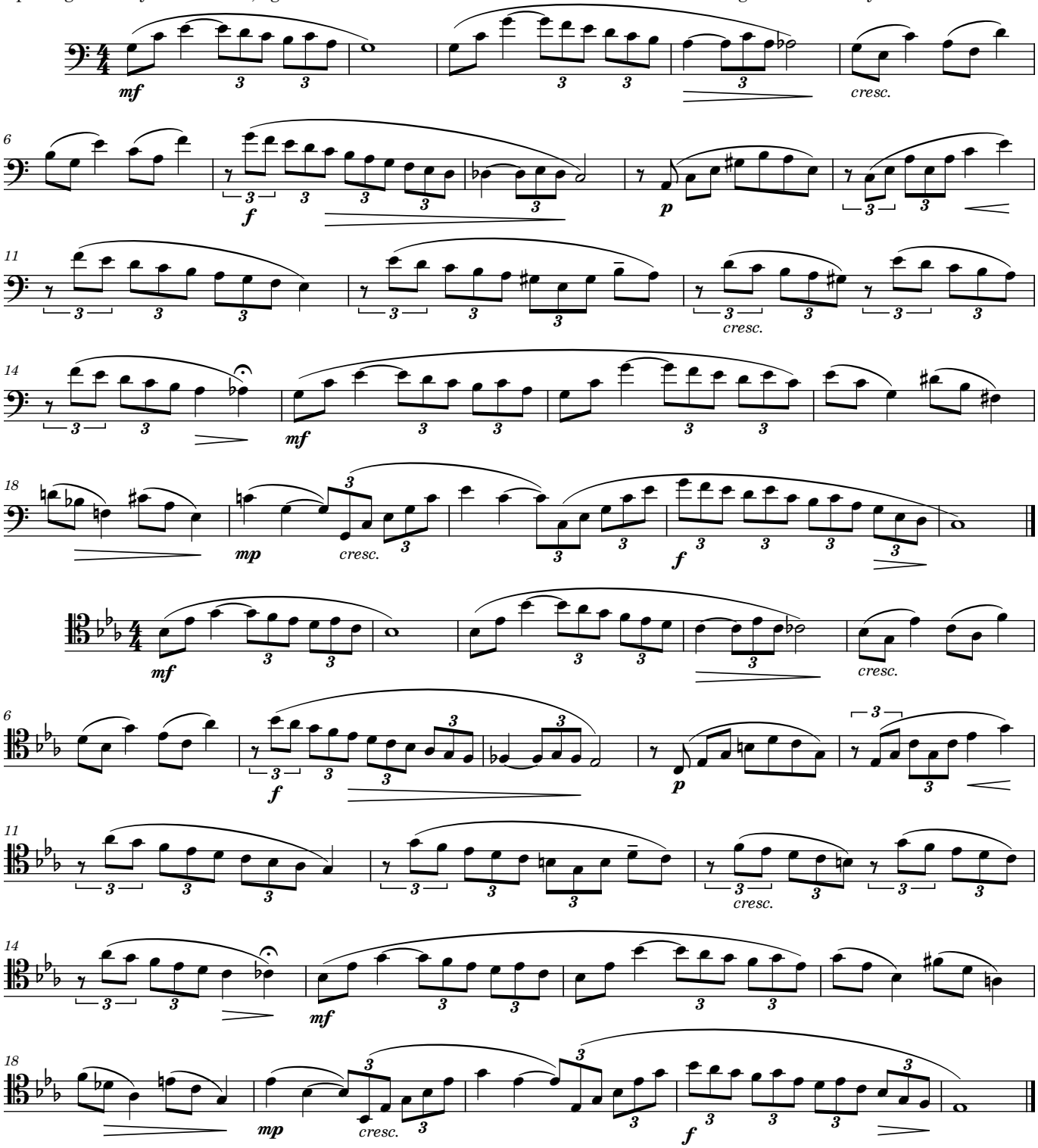
ASU Bones

TBZ MONTHLY

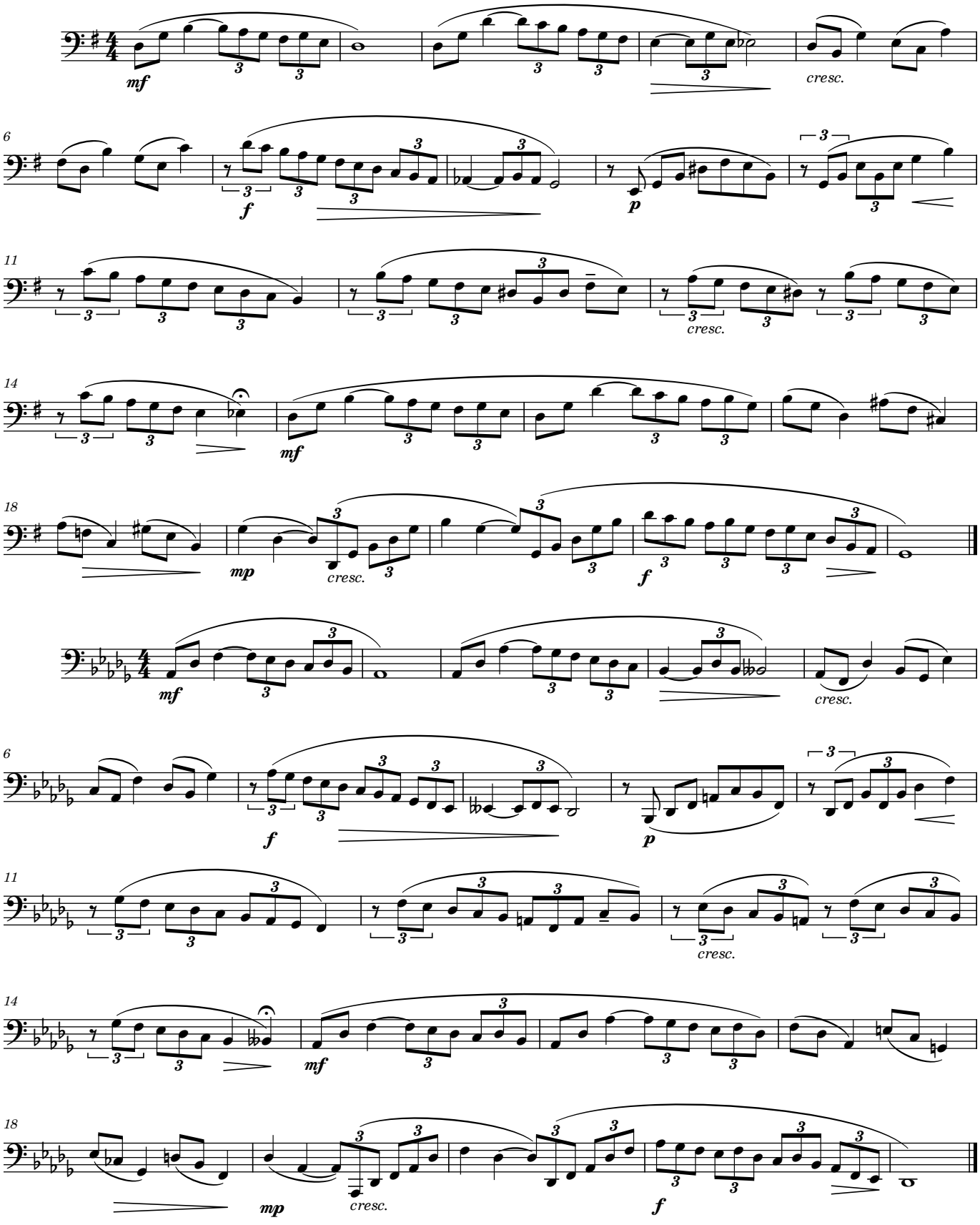
May 2025

A Pretty Good Melody

This is the first tune I composed in Dorico on my laptop without access to a musical keyboard. I played passages on my instrument, figured out what I liked and then sat down to write things from memory.



A Pretty Good Melody



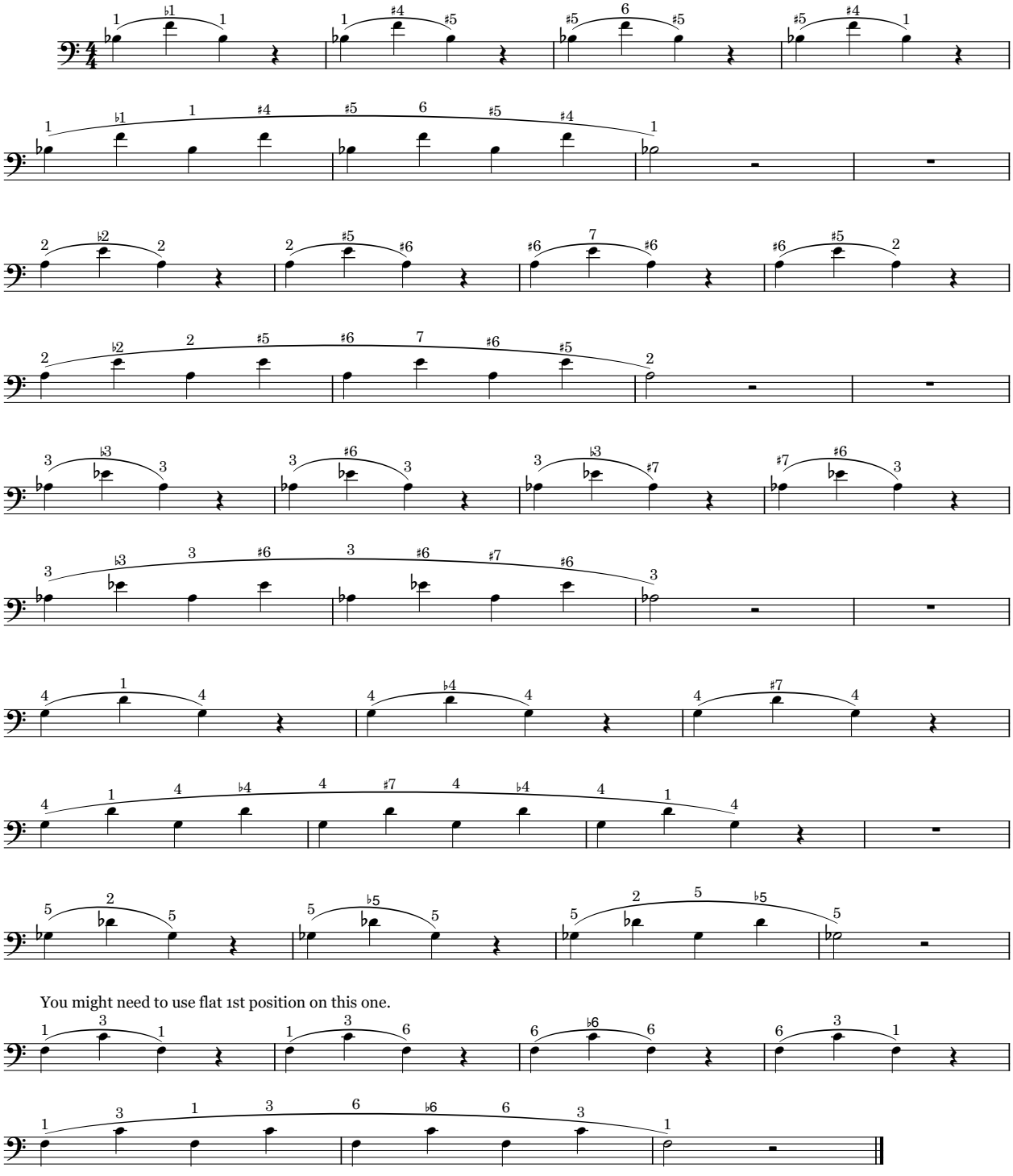
TBZ MONTHLY

May 2025

A Useful Lip Slur

Tuning Up Some Other Positions

Speaking of alternate positions: listen carefully for your intonation here. Make them sound as equal as possible.



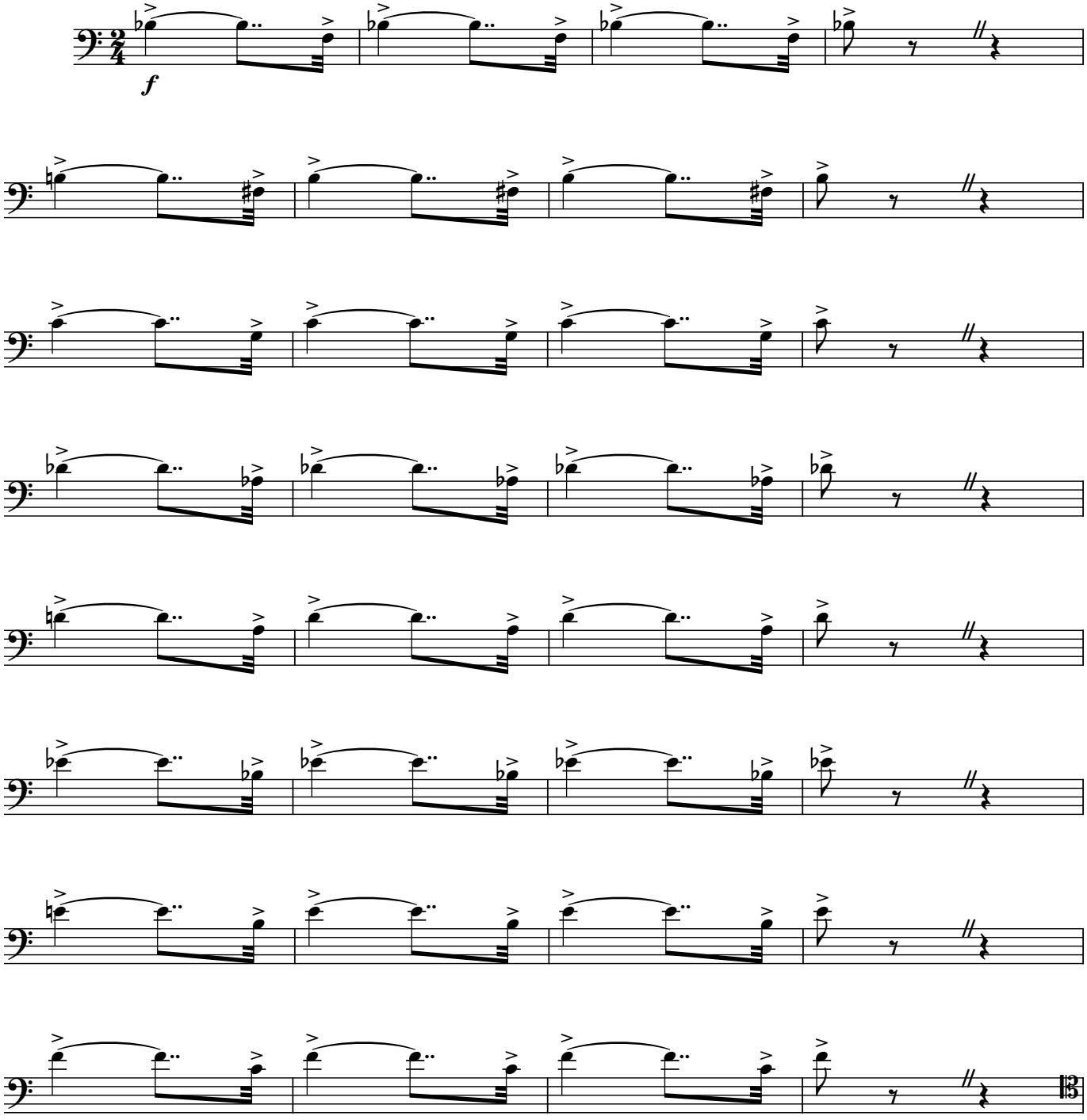
You might need to use flat 1st position on this one.

TBZ MONTHLY

May 2025

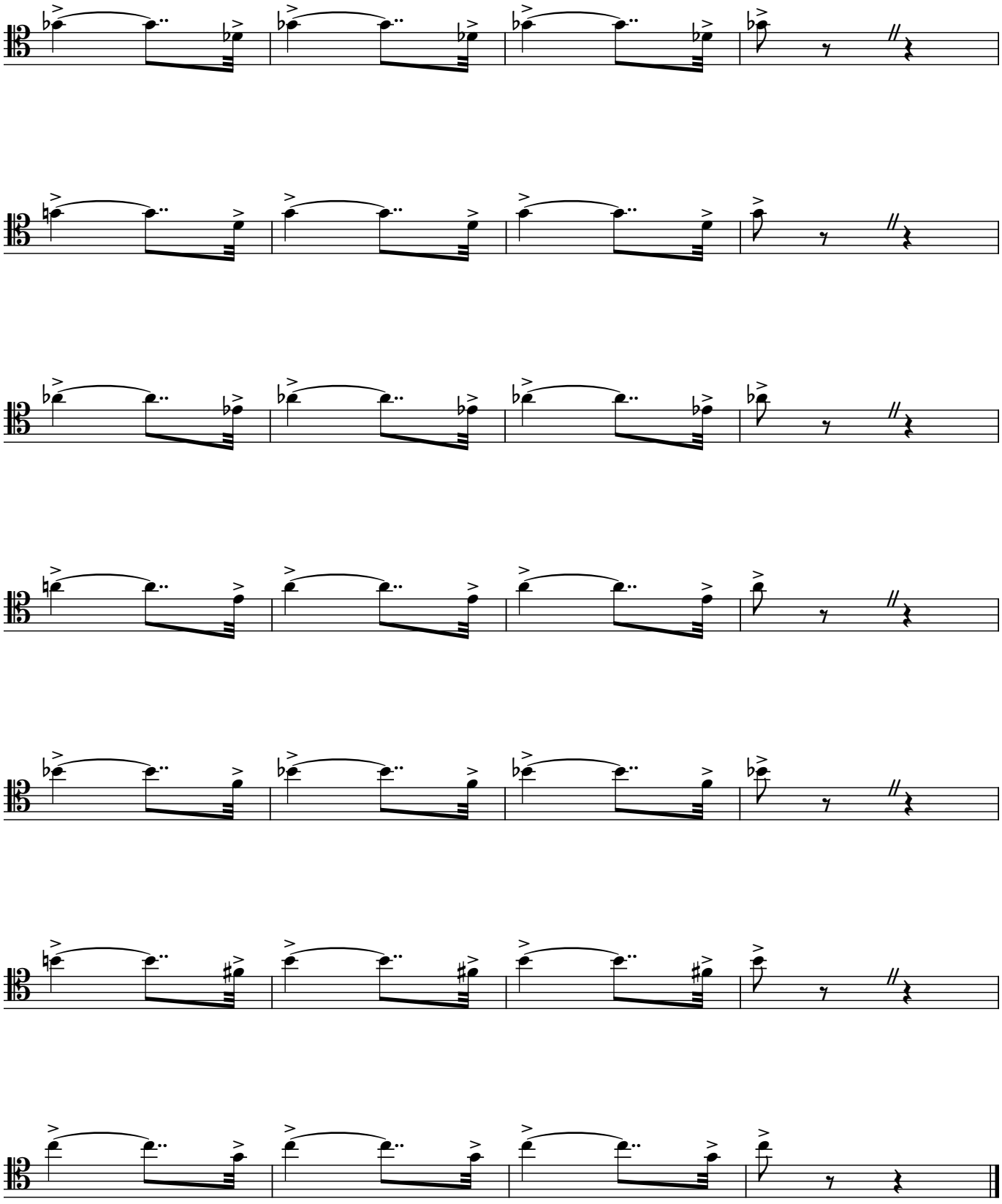
Technique/Rhythm Builder: Confident Attacks

This kind of exercise really targets moments when the trombones have to project with a confident, centered sound. It goes up into that "money range" that can make or break us. Avoid the urge to tense up for moments like this.



Pause and rest for a moment before going on.

Technique/Rhythm Builder:



Higher?

Free book sample: 2.18 Sextuplets From: Trombone Craft and Bass Trombone Craft

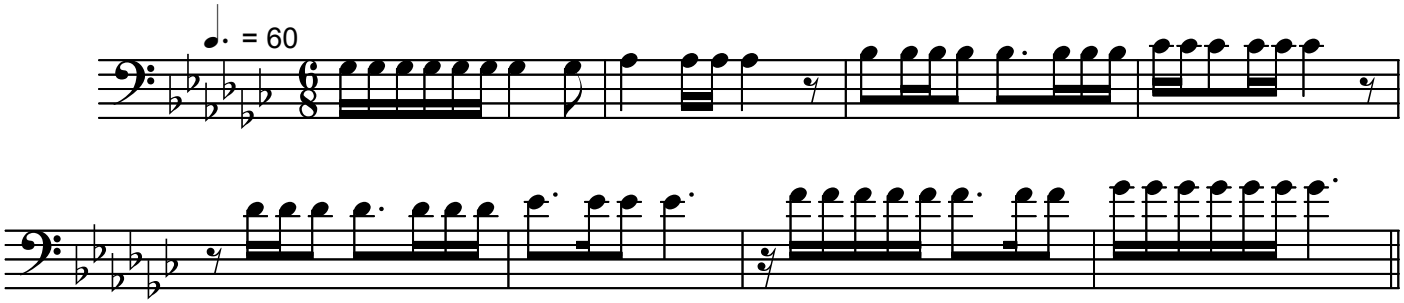
Here is some fairly tricky rhythm practice from the Craft books. Also a bit of trivia concerning the name “Trombone Craft.” It was a big project and originally I released the tenor trombone version in three volumes. Once I had finished volume three, I realized that everything should be contained in a single volume which I called Trombone Craft Complete (TCC). Laying around out there, you might find Trombone Craft, Vol. 1, etc. These are pretty rare and I’m sure they will be extremely valuable collector’s items any day now…

As for these sample pages, if they are too tricky at the written tempo, try having the metronome sound in 8th notes. Maybe a marking of 120 might be a good speed but, if you stumble, just go slower.

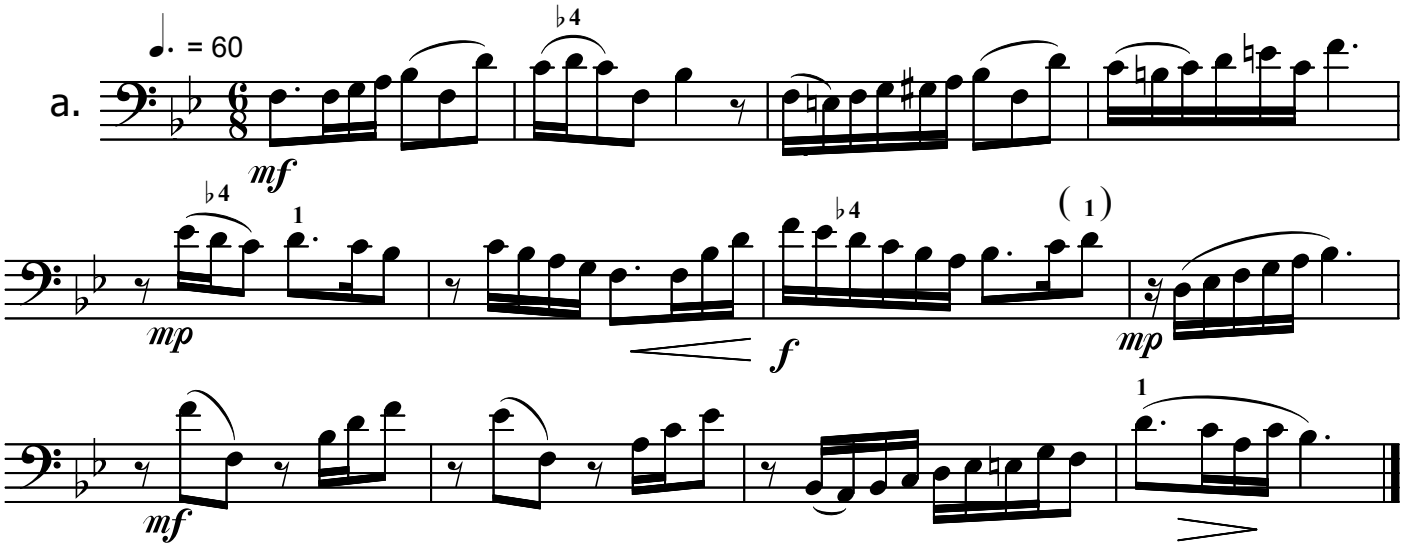
Enjoy!

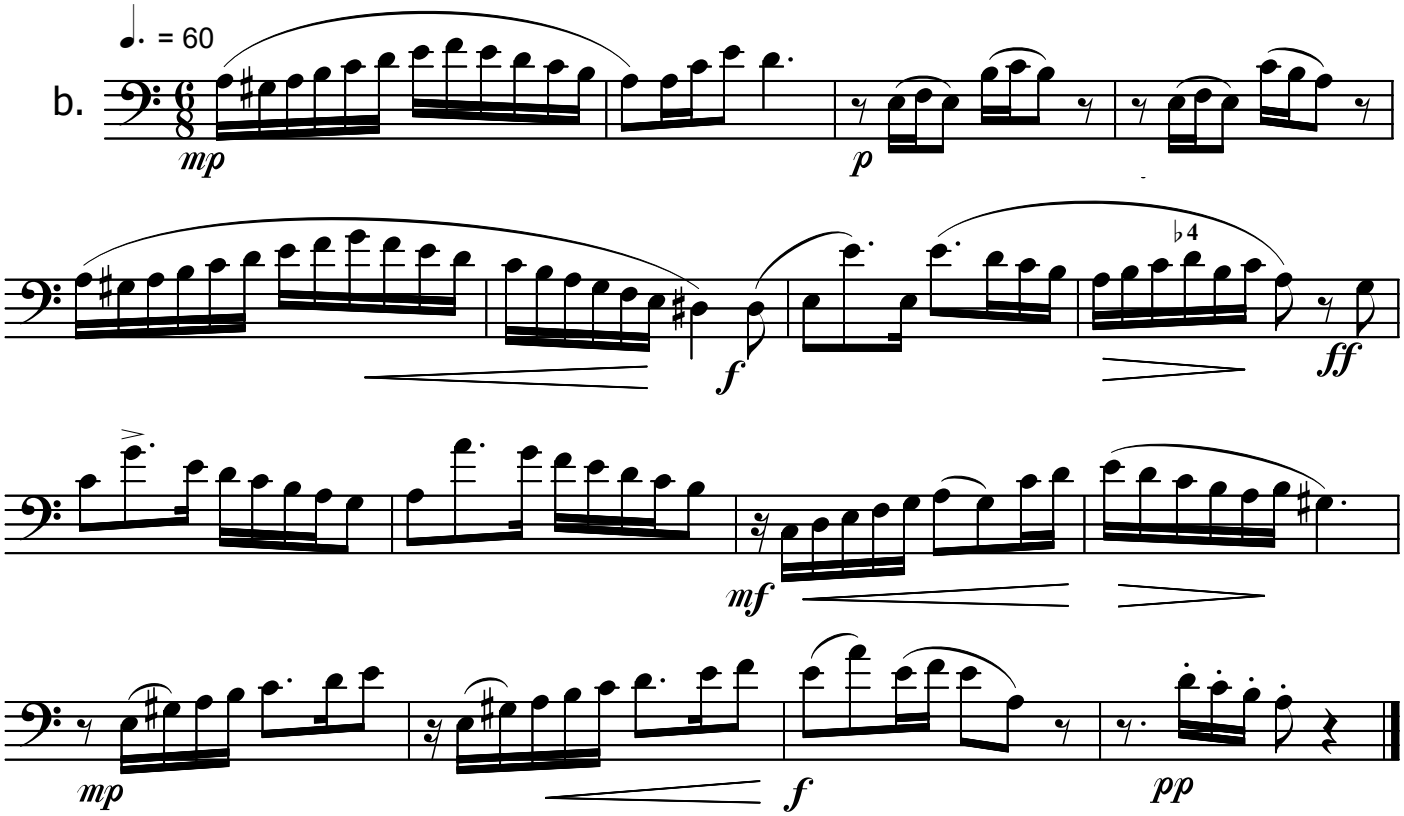
#2.18 Rhythm Builder: Sextuplets

Basic Rhythm Exercise



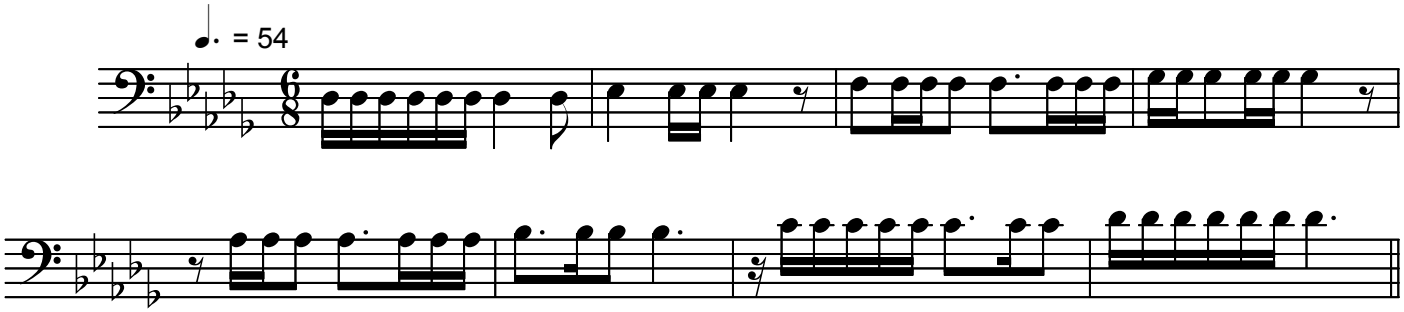
Two Etudes





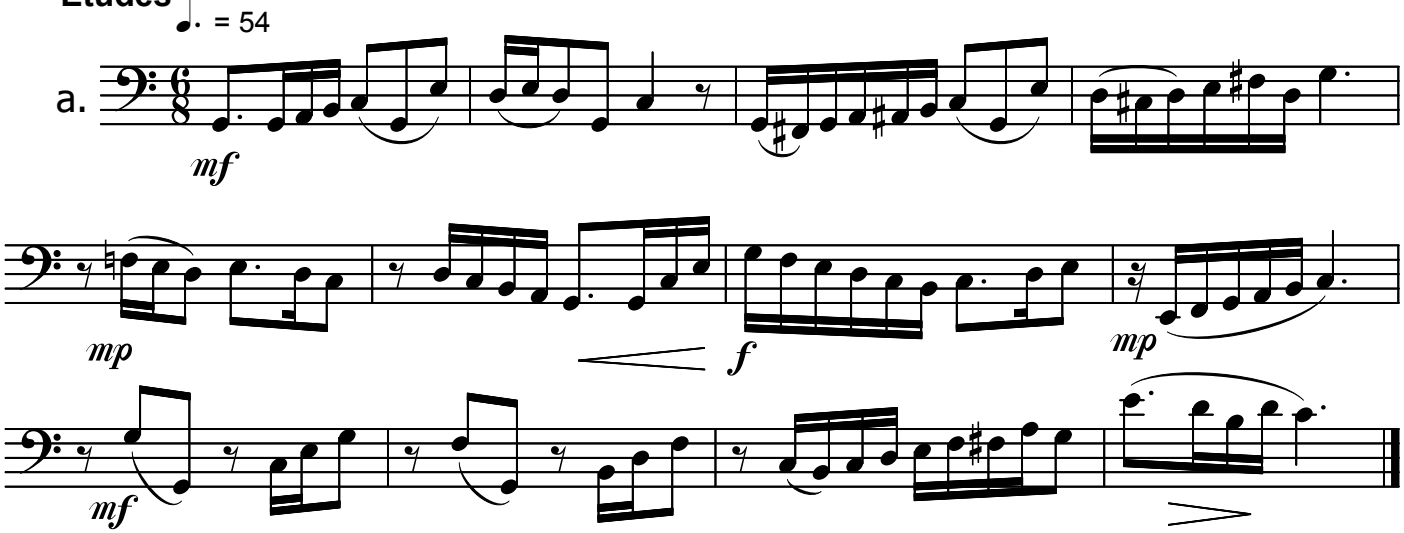
#2.18 Rhythm Builder: Sextuplets

Basic Rhythm Exercise



Etudes

a.



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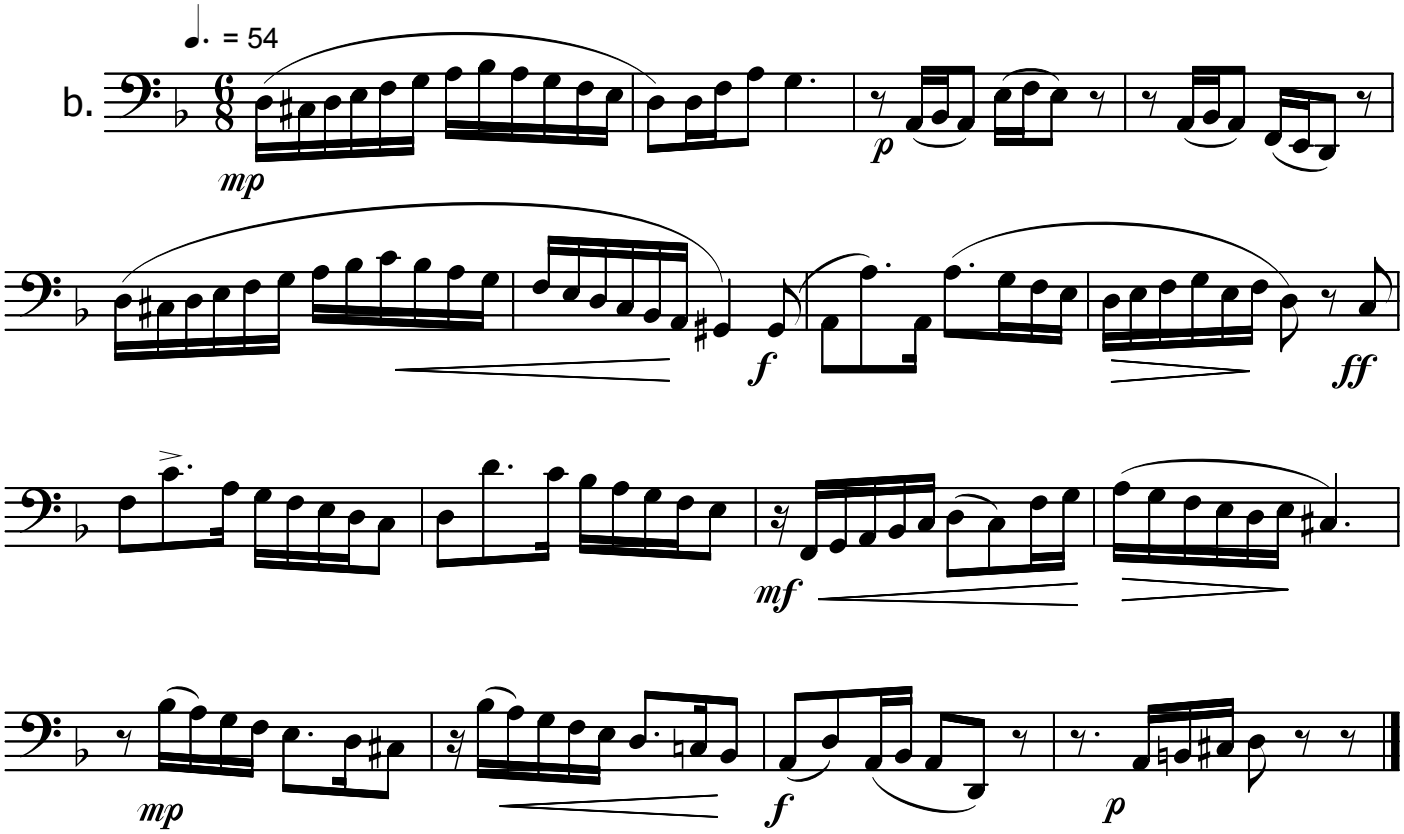
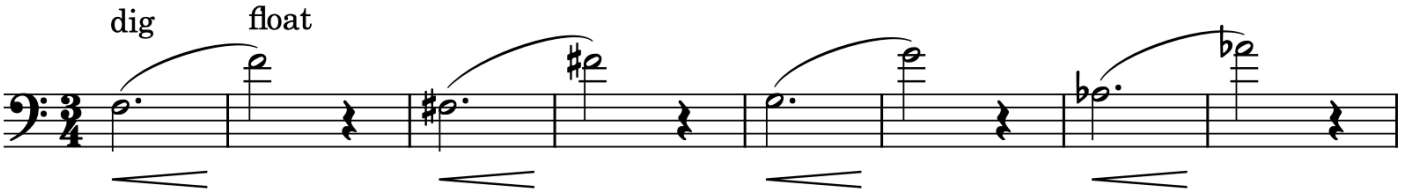


Playing Tip: "Dig and Float" Trampolines

It is natural to tighten and squeeze when reaching for higher notes. But we often tighten up so the air is quite forced, the mouthpiece is pushed in too much, and the lips are pressed together so they cannot vibrate.

This "Dig and Float" technique (which likely goes by many names) involves using a crescendo on the lower note to accelerate the air in advance of the upward leap. Here's an example exercise:



The secret here lies at the end of the bottom note for each slur. Keep the air moving and volume increasing (gently) and allow the top note to float out of that sound. Yes, we do make a physical change for the upper note but most people really overdo it! I'm not asking for the top note to be softer (although it could be!), just that it be no louder than the very end of the bottom note.

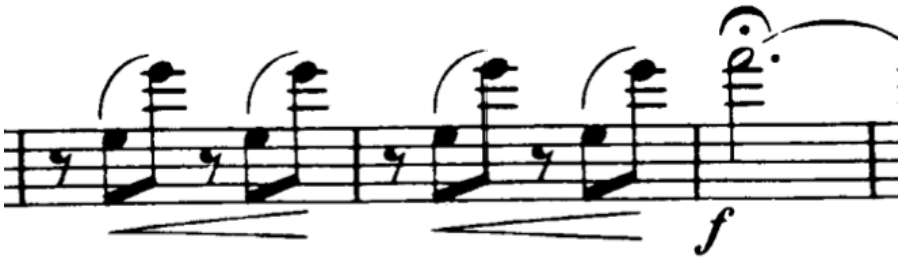
As you do this, keep in mind that to the human ear, higher notes will naturally sound louder (up to a point).

There are other tricks I use in leaping to higher notes (more than I will cover in detail here) which include:

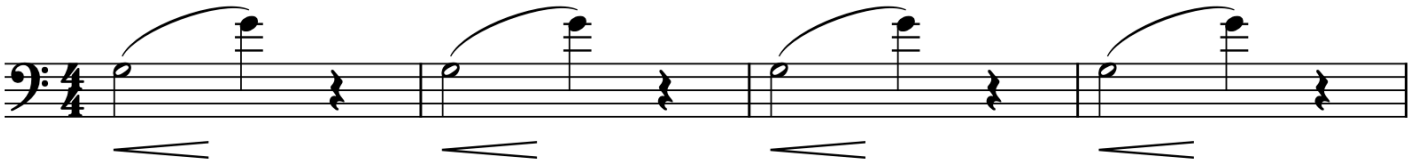
- Reshaping from an ‘aah’ to an ‘eee’ vowel inside the mouth so the middle of the tongue arches (think of your finger over a garden hose putting the water under pressure so it sprays farther).
- Pressuring the air (think of making the ‘ssss’ loudly). Notice that, as you do this, your abdominal muscles will contract somewhat. This is helpful if not overdone.

This exercise reminds me of bouncing on a trampoline where we transfer the energy of the bounce into a nice floating sensation in the air.

If we look at the Bordogni vocalises, we can find many examples of leaps to higher notes. Here’s one from #9 in the Rochut edition:



Lots of octave leaps here! In order to work on the ‘dig and float’ concept, I might try this exercise.



Dig into the bottom note and let the upper note float out.

On Teaching and Playing: Alternate Positions, Balancing the Scales

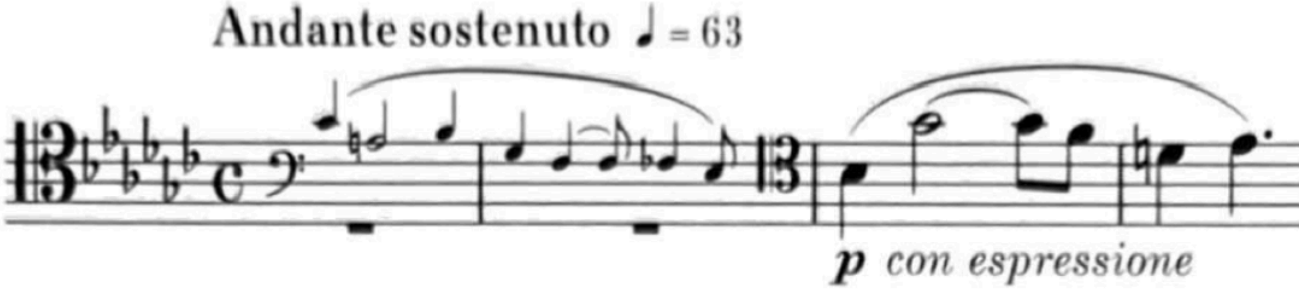
Each slide position is a choice with advantages and disadvantages. In my teaching, I want my students to discover these things, usually by going back and forth between two options.

I am the product of my teacher (aren't we all?). My undergraduate teacher expressed the opinion that a trombone has seven positions and we should use all of them. My master's teacher used to say, "You should just use the real positions." When I asked him about the efficiency of alternate positions, he would simply reply with, "Move your slide faster."

Here's one argument I hear:
Complaint: "The alternate positions don't sound as good."
Response: "That's because you avoid them. Practice them more and they'll sound just as good."

That response is good up to a point but I believe no amount of practicing will ever make 6th position as stable as 1st position. Why? Here's my guess: when instrument makers pick dimensions for an instrument (how big this should be compared to that) they probably design for maximum resonance in first position. When the slide gets longer, the bell doesn't get bigger (we're still waiting on you, nanotech!). So the instrument effectively goes "out of scale," becoming less acoustically stable. I suppose they could design an instrument so that it "rings true" in 6th position but then wouldn't 1st position become wobbly? Who would want to buy such a horn?

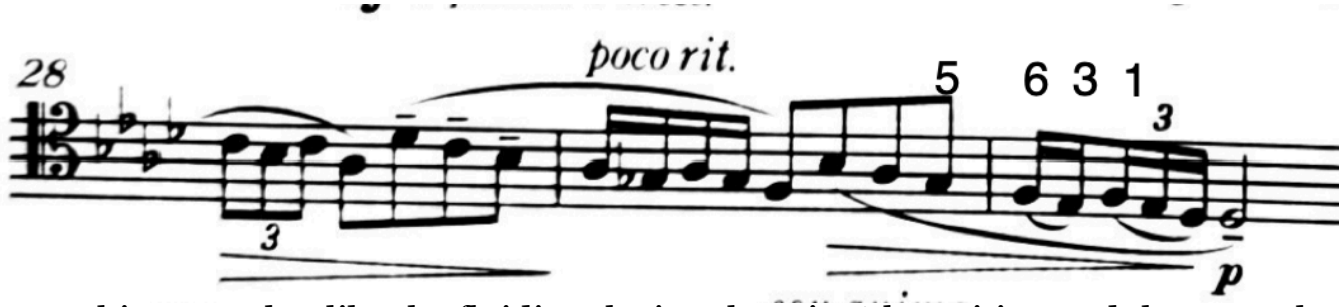
One classic example of such a choice about alternates comes from the opening of Guilmant's *Morceau Symphonique*.



With the first note, B-flat3, we can either play in 1st or 5th.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Start in 1st	More secure (esp. since it is the first note - less scary) Probably more in tune	The leap to the G-flat is less clean/harder because: 1. You move from the 4th to the 7th partial, having to skip over the 5th and 6th partials. 2. Upward leaps are usually harder when the slide is moving out.
Start in 5th	The leap to the G-flat is cleaner/easier because: 1. You move from the 5th to the 7th partial only skipping the 6th partial 2. Upward leaps are usually easier when the slide is moving in.	Less secure since your first note is in an alternate position. A tuning adjustment is likely needed (usually the 5th partial is flat and needs correcting).

Here's another example, something a bit more exotic, from the Grøndahl *Concerto*.



In this example I like the fluidity playing the F in 6th position and then travel across 3rd to the F in 1st position. However, if your slide technique is sloppy, you'll miss the positions pretty badly.

So many choices!

The Good Stuff - Trombone Pedagogy Jay Friedman, "Preparing and Executing a Melodious Etude"

(Blog post on 11/10/2020)

As I write this, news is racing across the internet about the possibility that Tim Higgins, Principal Trombone of the San Francisco Symphony, might become that next principal in Chicago. Jay Friedman has held that chair since 1964 (joining the orchestra in 1962). What a run!!

We should be eternally grateful to Mr. Friedman not just for his wonderful musicianship but also for contributing his thoughts in the form of a blog begun in the 1990's. I came across this post and wanted to reflect on it.

The term "sostenuto" has been widely misunderstood by many people. It is widely assumed to mean that a note is to be sustained at the same volume throughout the duration of a pitch. I believe that the term has a simpler, more basic meaning; referring to the length of the note, not its shape. Therefore the way I describe the method above [see post] would still be classified as sostenuto, even with a slight diminuendo on each pitch, but lasting as long as a note that was sustained at the same volume throughout. The shape of a note should be a different issue than the length, giving us another tool in the quest for variety in playing, otherwise known as "style."
Blog Post, paragraph 5.

This differentiation between a note's length and the degree of taper is interesting to me. I often see younger players attempt to play tenuto notes and sustain with no taper until the very next note, beginning the next note with a solid "tah" attack. I find this difficult to do and, what's more, I find it can lead to an unmusical sound. Just as with violin (something Friedman mentions in other articles) a *slight* decay is natural and produces a more pleasant sound to my ear.

In an earlier paragraph, Friedman talks about keeping the torso relaxed and avoiding any tendency to tense up and push.

> …The torso will remain completely relaxed and act as a resonating chamber, resulting in maximum resonance with minimum exertion. What expels air without pushing? Elasticity in the lungs. When a large amount of air is inhaled the lungs expand and when allowed to contract they will push out air without any assistance from muscles in the body. The sealed embouchure starts the lungs emptying rapidly and will sustain all but the longest notes with an almost undetectable decay. This is exactly the same method as required in singing, and since the trombone is known as the closest instrument to the human voice, it should employ the same basic mechanics.

I really like this notion of maximum resonance with minimum exertion. My work definition of resonance is: ***The most vibration for the least effort.***
So often we try to push out the air. In fact, band directors are often guilty of telling us to do this. Some push might be appropriate for a smaller brass instrument like trumpet but telling your students (especially young students) to push out notes often leads to a labored, tense approach where in truth they are fighting against themselves.

I strongly encourage you to listen to Mr. Friedman's playing examples and read the entire blog post.

A Random Thought: Of Insects and Folksongs

According to an entomology blog, "A recent study published in the journal Biological Conservation suggested that 40% of all insect species are in decline and could die out in the coming decades." The blog goes on:

The main cause of the decline is agricultural intensification, which involves the elimination of all trees and shrubs. Habitat destruction, such as intensive agriculture, the use of pesticides (particularly insecticides), introduced species, and to a lesser degree, both the number and diversity of insects are declining around the globe due to habitat loss, pollution, and climate change. Environmental writer Oliver Milman says habitat loss, pesticides, and climate change are killing off insects worldwide, which, in turn, threatens everything at stake. "Why are insects disappearing" - Entomologist blog, Mar. 1, 2025

OK, fewer bugs. I mean, how bad can that be? Well, as long as we don't think about pollination or the food pyramid (you know, what birds eat and so on).

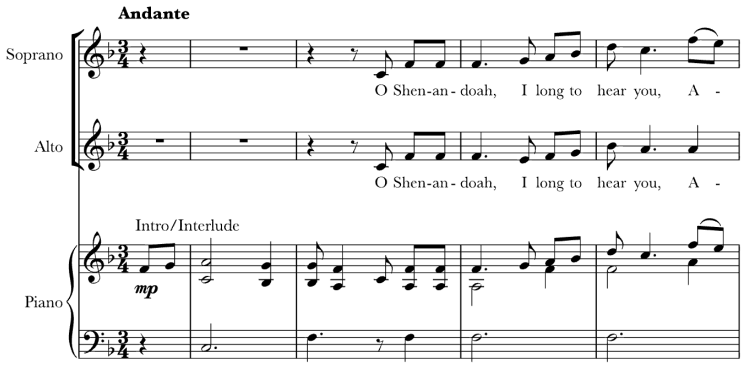
Let's leave that depressing subject and talk about folk songs. It seems that, with each passing generation, fewer folk songs are generally known. Even in my years of teaching, my students know fewer and fewer songs. Take *Shenandoah* for example. There was a time when students generally knew this tune and could figure it out by ear. Now? Not likely they would know the tune. Ditto with *The Farmer in the Dell*, *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*, *Sakura*, *Greensleeves*, *Pop Goes the Weasel*. It's

possible that these tunes have been replaced by theme songs to video games or TV shows. The latest craze, apparently, is the Lava Chicken song from the Minecraft movie.

Still, I like to think about that pre-radio time when people found entertainment by gathering in the parlor to sing together. Reality? Maybe not but, without the internet, TV or even radio, music wouldn't exist ***unless we made it ourselves***. Likewise, more people went to church and participated in congregational singing during services. Even that seems to have faded.

Instead of being music makers at a young age, it seems more people are passive consumers of Spotify and short-form videos. In this way, we have lost something really valuable. When we go to pick up an instrument, we are no longer blessed with a bounty of tunes in our heads. In this way, we are musically handicapped.

Shenandoah



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Est. 2023

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