TBZ Monthly

A new monthly content service from Brad Edwards

Volume 4, No. 11. ~ November 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!

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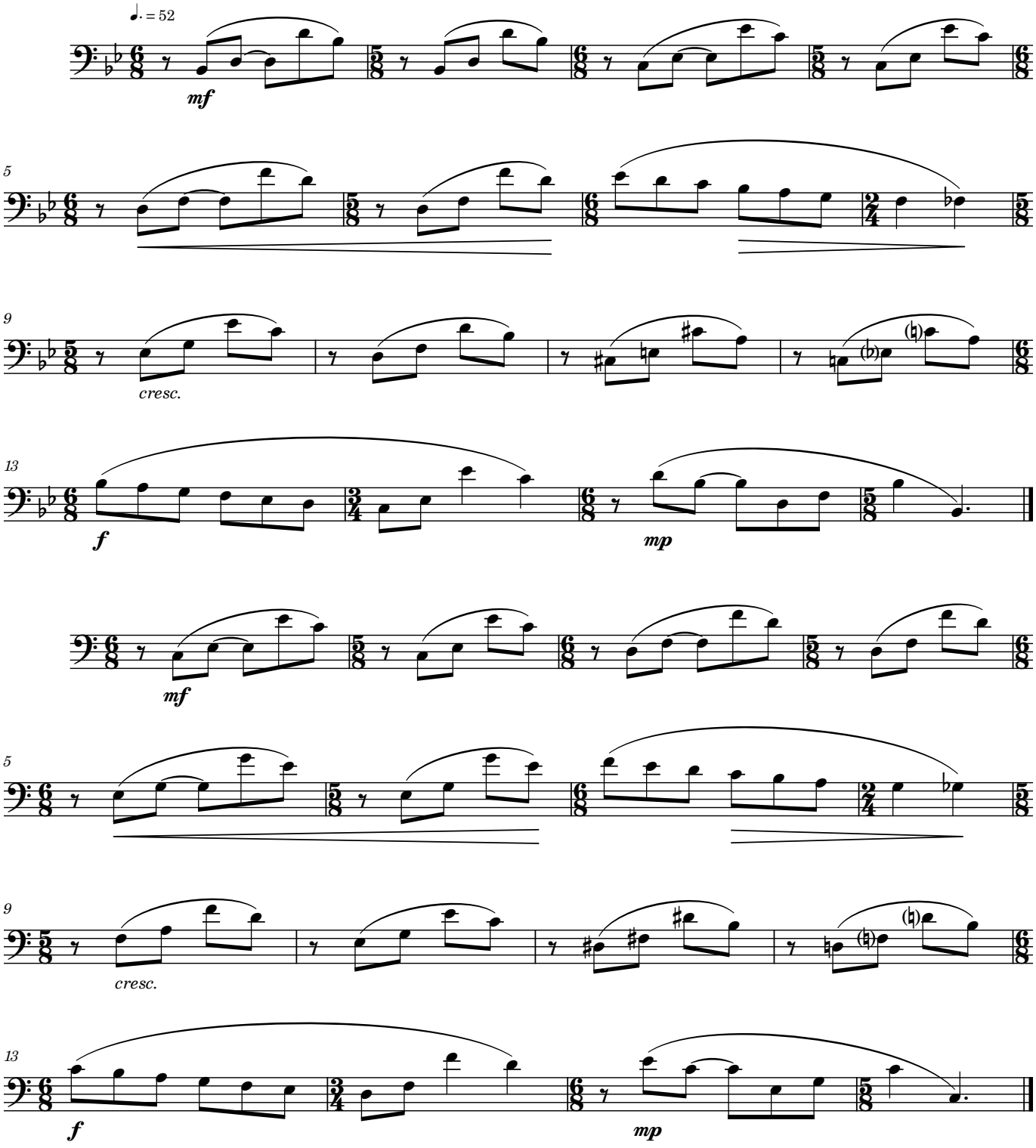
School of Music Dance and Theater
Websites:
Trombone Zone
Hornbone Press
Free Audition Solos
ASU Bones

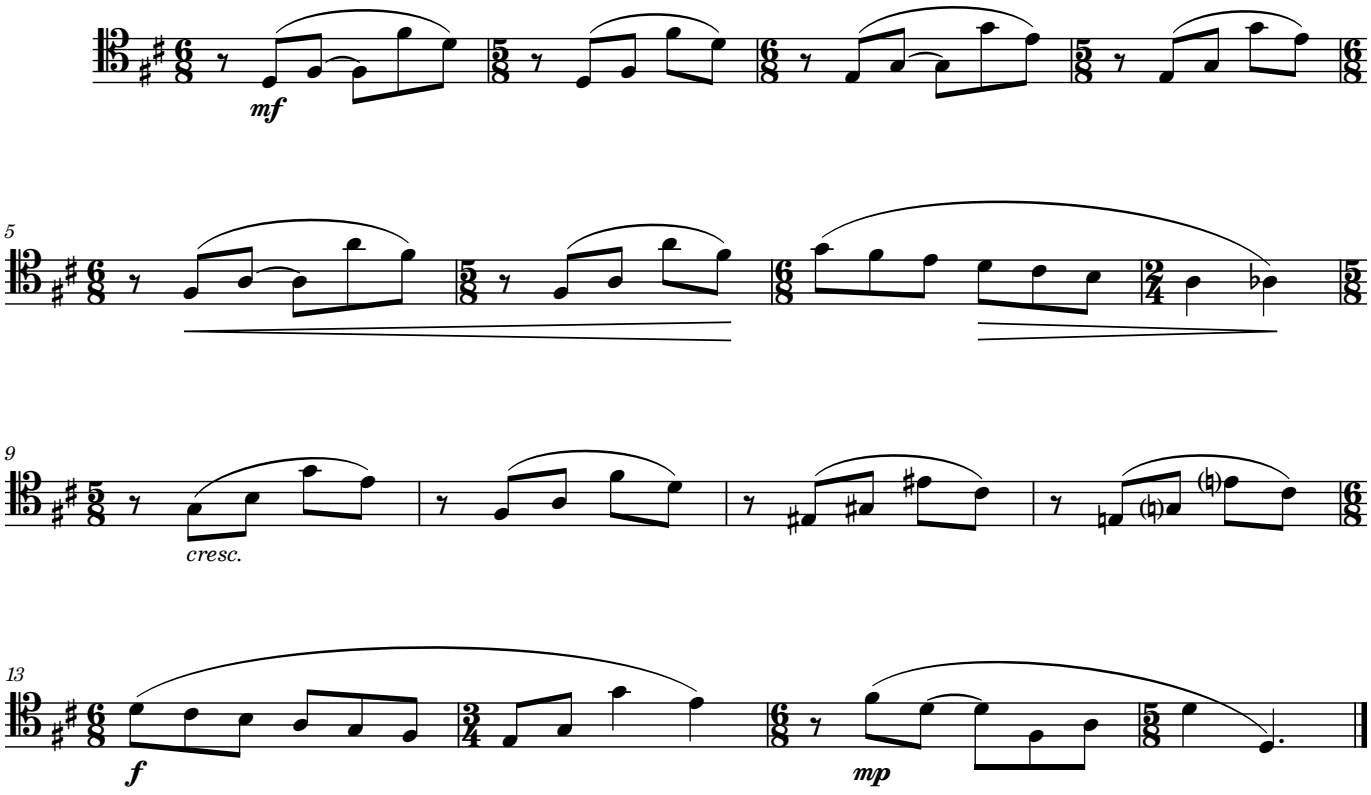
TBZ MONTHLY

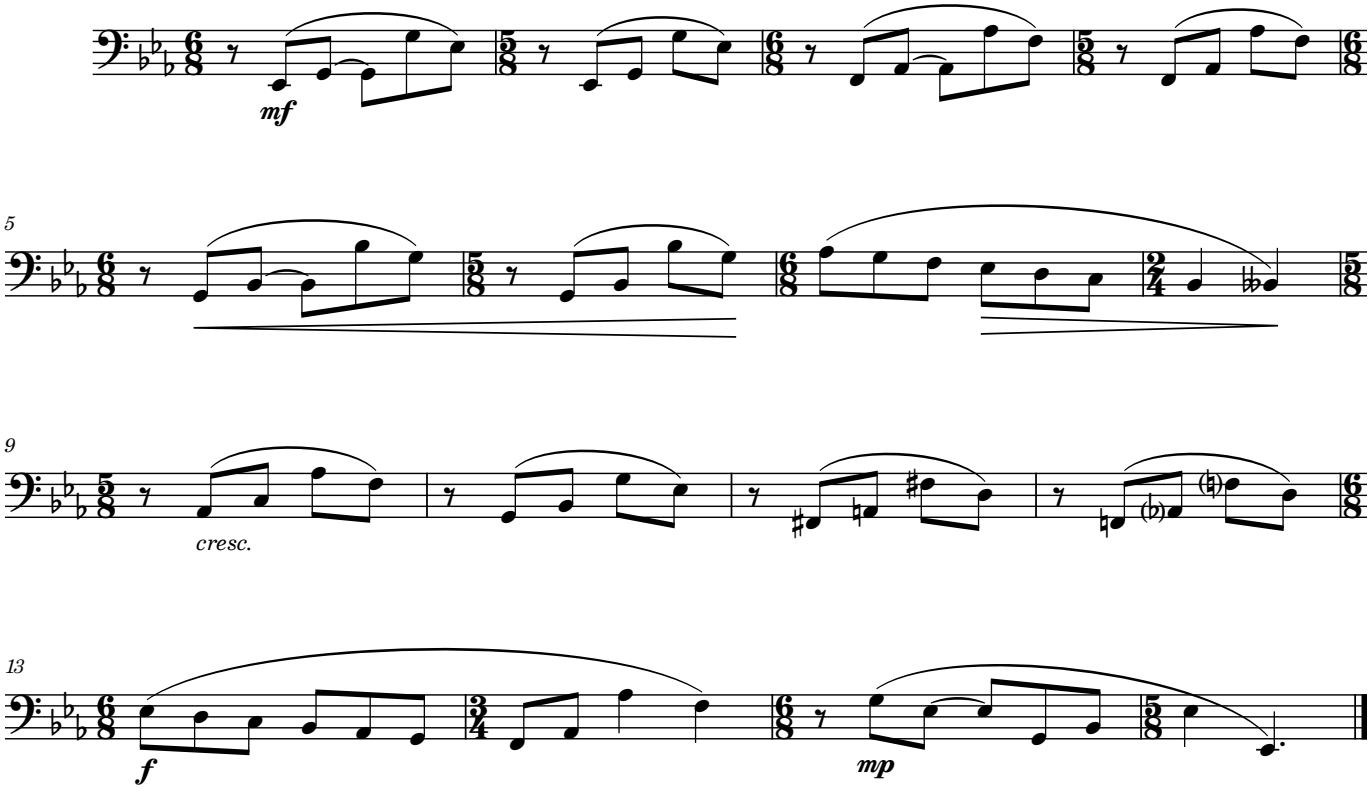
November 2025

A Pretty Good Melody: Floating Thirds



A Pretty Good Melody





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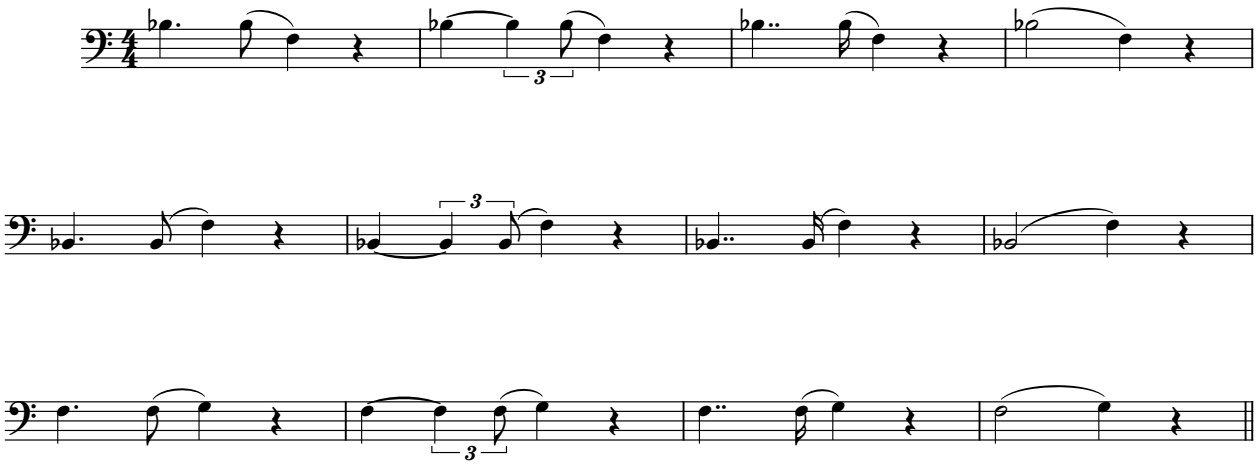
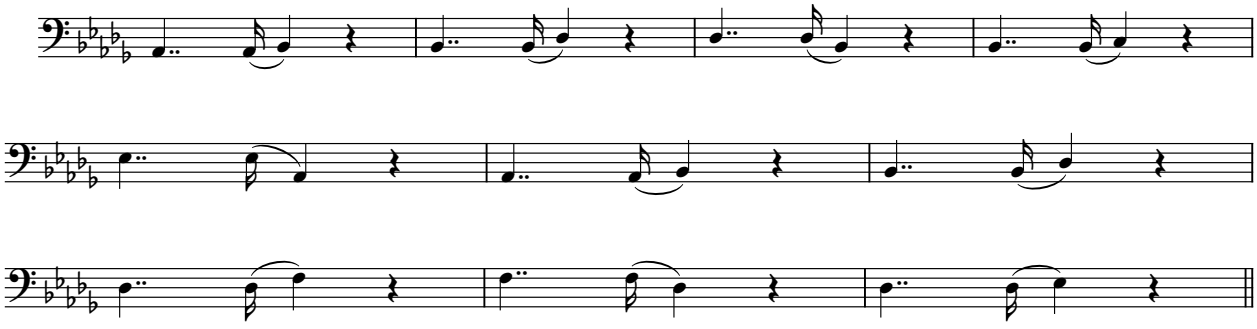
A Useful Lip Slur

Transitions Note to Note

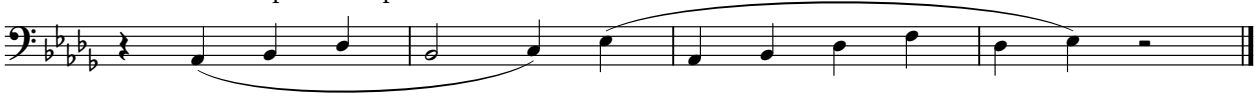
This is inspired by a post by Nikki Abissi about Parkinson's Law (not the disease). In short if you are given more time to do something, you'll do it more slowly. Each of these slurs is the EXACT same speed at the moment you change notes.



This notion of jumping at the right moment can be applied to an orchestral excerpt.
In this case: Symphony No. 3 by Camille Saint Sëans



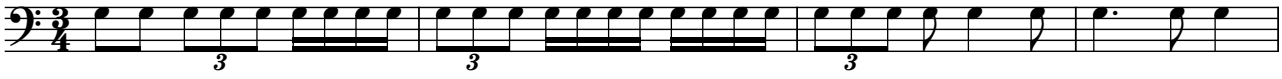
Here's the complete excerpt.



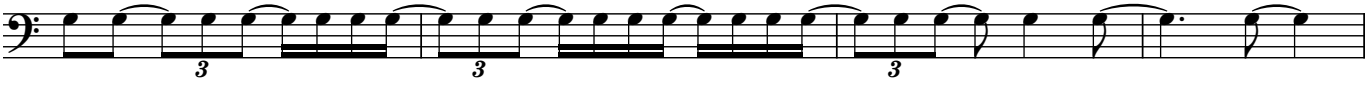
Technique/Rhythm Builder:
Changing subdivisions and adding ties

Some lines just have the changing subdivisions. Others have ties creating tricky syncopations.

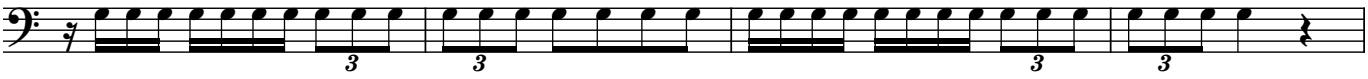
No ties



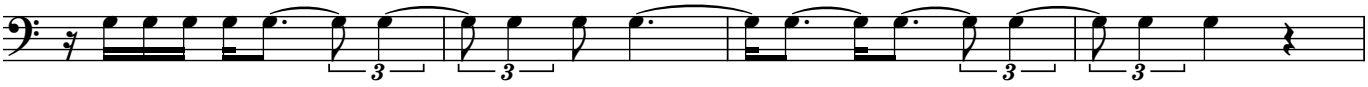
'Late' ties



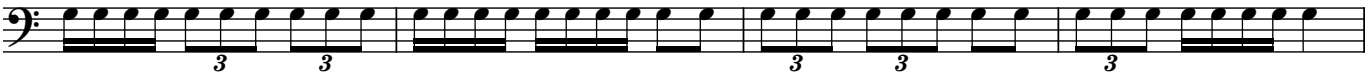
Ties



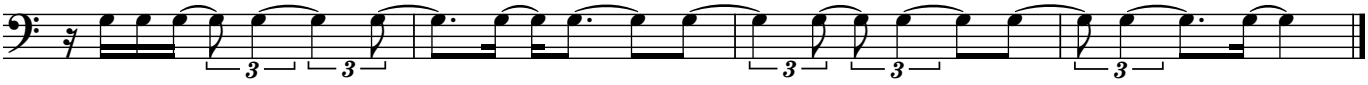
'Early' ties



No ties



Both 'Early' and 'Late' ties



Notice that the lines are in pairs. So, if one person plays the first line, everything should line up with the second line. Using a metronome, you might even try recording yourself playing that first line and then play the second line along with the recording.

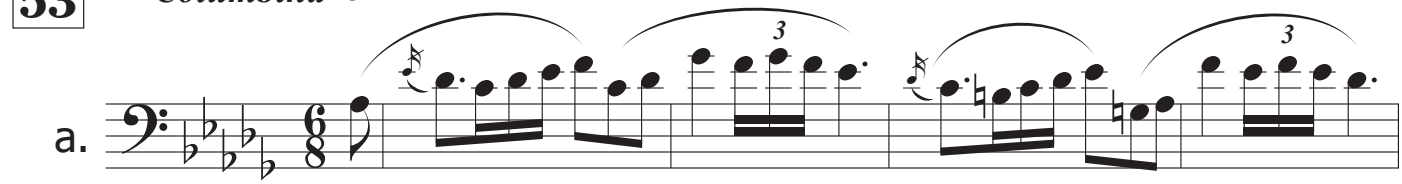
Free book sample: 60 Vignettes #53 Columbina and #54 Harlequin

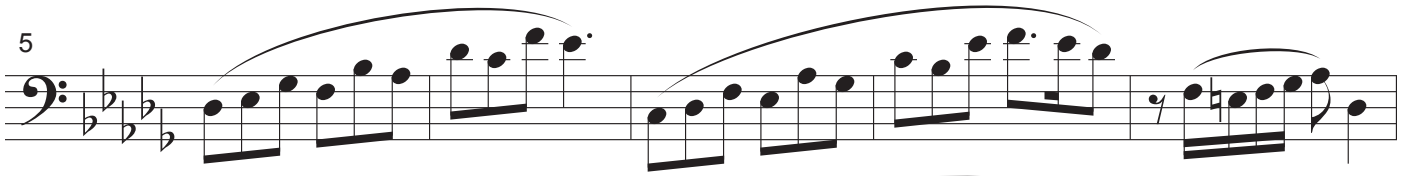
Columbina and Harlequin are stock characters in commedia dell'arte. Columbina (or Columbine) is Harlequin's mistress and wife of Pierrot. So, it made sense that if I wrote a piece called Harlequin, I should pair it with Columbina.

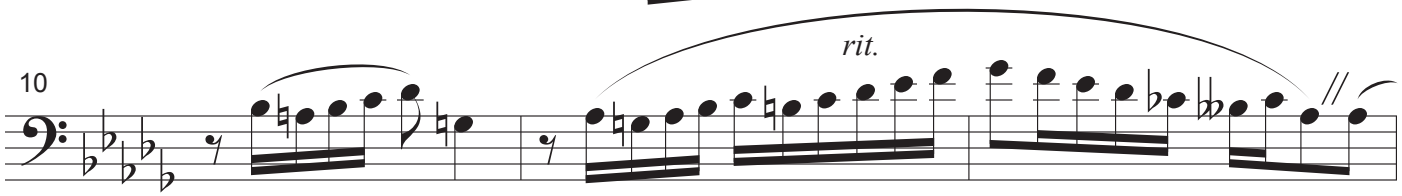
Enjoy!

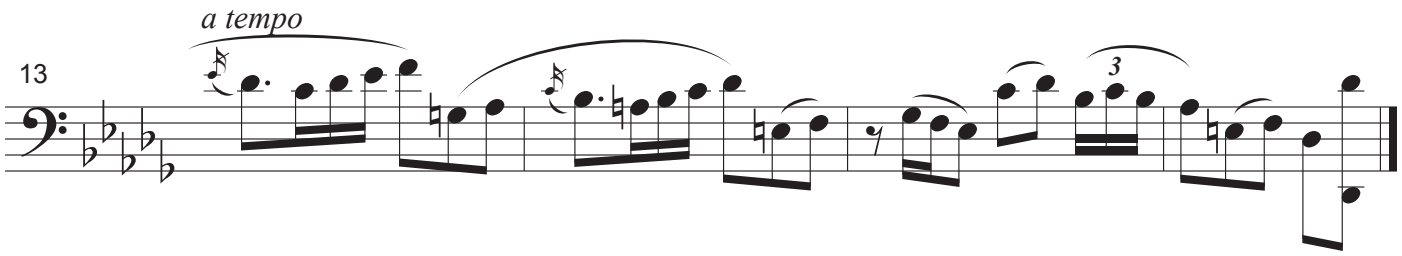
53 ***Columbina*** ♩. = c. 50-60

a.

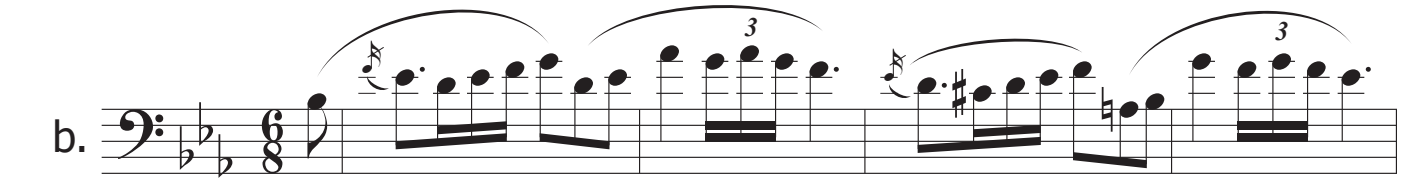


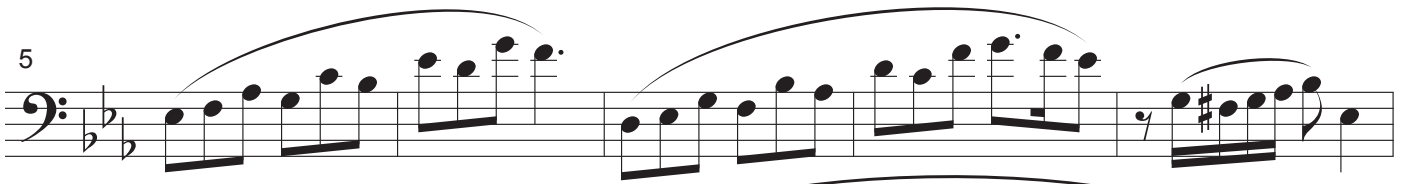


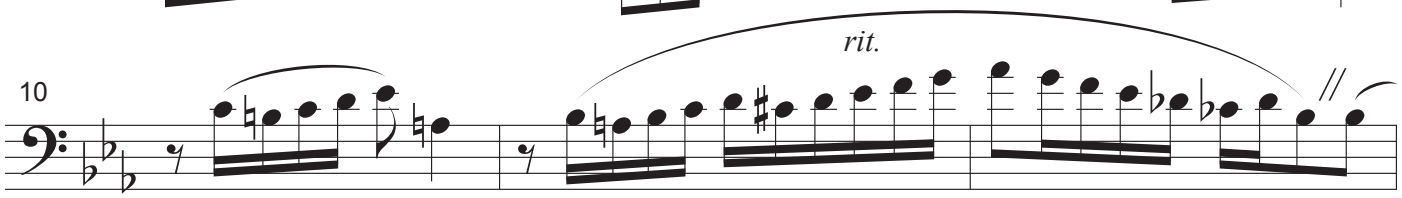


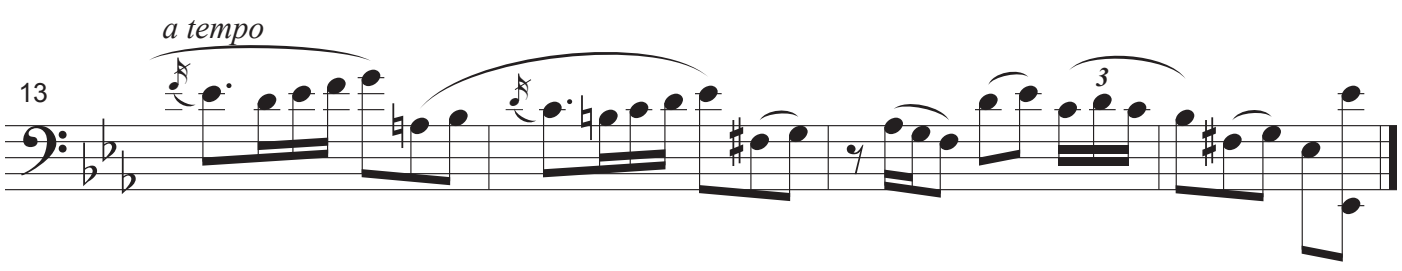


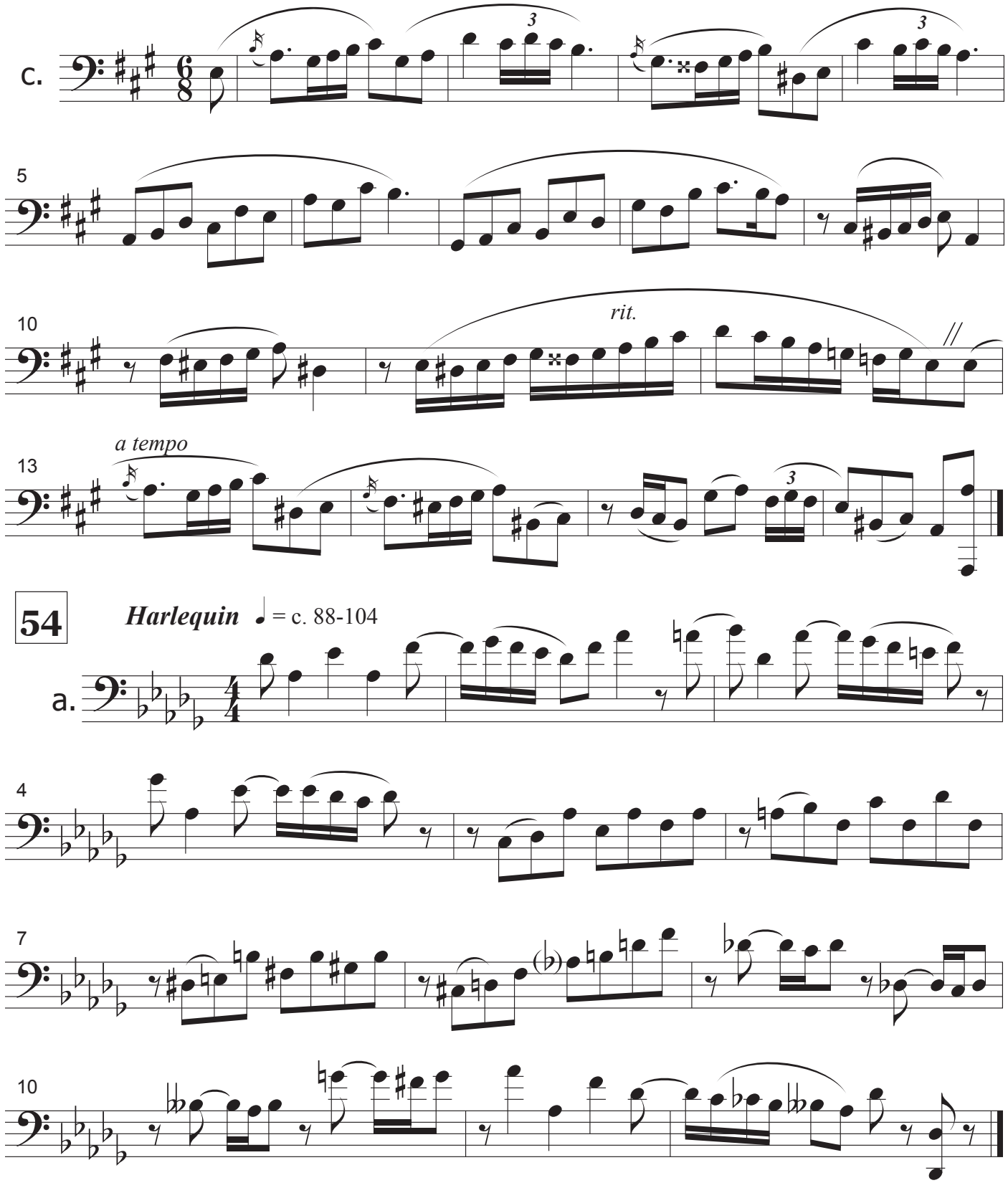
b.

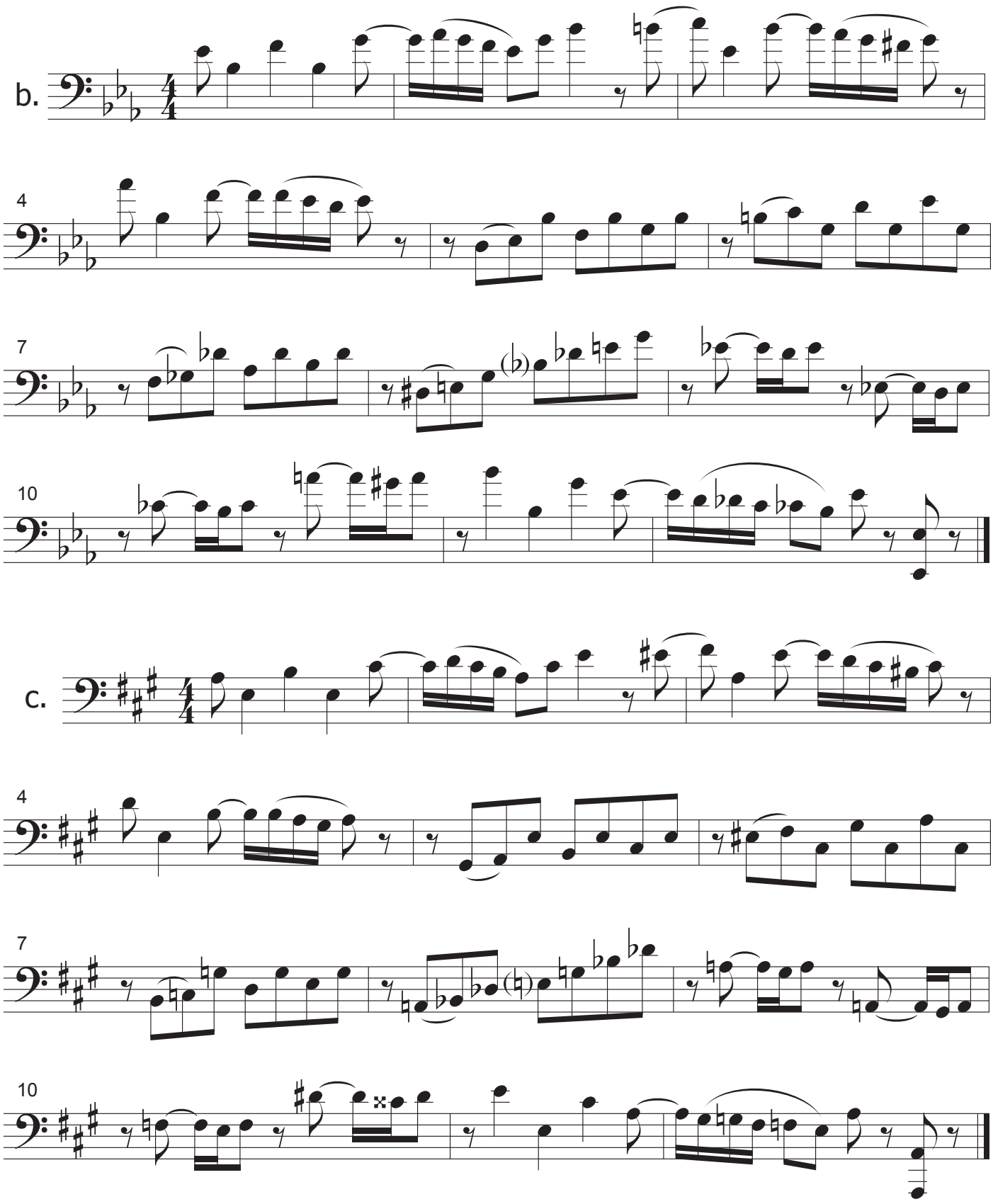









c.
5
10
rit.
13
a tempo
54
Harlequin
= c. 88-104
a.
4
7
10


b.
4
7
10
c.
4
7
10

Playing Tip: Cool as a Cucumber

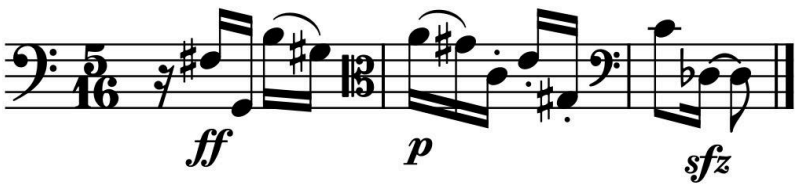
According to this website, “cool as a cucumber” first appeared in a 1732 poem by John Gay. And while the phrase “pert as a pear-monger” has one out of usage, “cool as a cucumber” has stuck around.

When we are uncertain, tensing up is a normal response. However, as we learn a new challenging passage, we also know that we don’t want to learn it with a tension response *encoded* into the music.

I recall years ago when I was singing in a choir. The passage included a quick alternation between C and B-flat Something like this:

At the time, my only trombone had no F-attachment so this passage on trombone would have meant flying back and forth between 1st and 6th. As I sang, I actually felt myself tensing up to sing it! Talk about stimulus-response!

When you are presented with a new passage, your ability to stay as relaxed as possible when learning it will really help you in the learning process. Tensing up always gets in the way of execution. Imagine this passage:



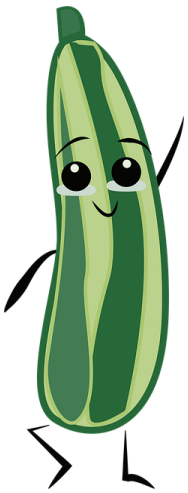
Ok, well, first of all *yuck!!* Where did this gem come from? I just made it up as an example I have no desire to see in my music. Second of all, if I *did* have this in my music, I would have to go about breaking it down all the while staying as relaxed as possible. So, there's that leap with a change to alto clef. Before the instrument even comes up to my face, I think I would want to be sure of the note names and then be able to sing them at the piano. If I dig a bit further I notice this note sequence derived from the original (the circled notes):

Ok, that's not quite as bad. Without the leap I see some notes that are closer together that I can sing. Once I have that in my ear, I can bump the 2nd two notes up an octave and maybe they won't be as stressful.

At the end of the day:

I'll learn faster if I develop strategies for relaxed concentration while learning new material.

Yes, it may be challenging but avoid that natural tense-up response.
Stay cool as a cucumber.



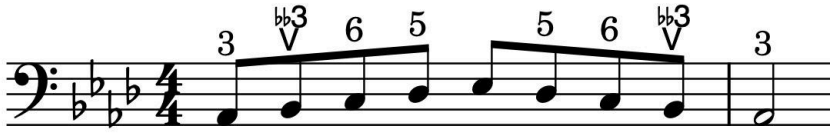
On Teaching and Playing: To Dictate or Not To Dictate?

We can imagine a continuum of teachers:

Perhaps you can remember teachers whose approach leaned towards one extreme or another. I can remember a horn teacher who never assigned his students anything. Whatever you brought it, that's what he'd work on. I remember a trombone teacher saying, "Tone quality is a personal choice." I would place those mindsets over to the left.

I can also remember teachers insisting that students play one particular brand of trombone and mouthpiece. I knew of one horn teacher who spelled out every jury solo a student would play through the first three years of their undergrad degree. No deviation. If the student wasn't ready for that solo, too bad. It was on the curriculum.

There's something to be said for moving your "teaching needle" in the direction of either extreme. I think we would agree that younger students need clearer structure. For example: choice of slide positions. I mostly fall into the camp that legato half steps should be in adjacent positions. That logic leads to this position sequence:



Most students will resist this, thinking that C should always be played in first with the valve and that anything else is just *weird*.

Sometimes to convince them otherwise I come up with a “convincer” lick like this one which I like to call the “Yellow Brick Road”:

I play it for them using either slide position combo and they can see how much smoother my slide action is when I pass through the V B-flat heading out to that nice half step connection between the C and the D-flat. Steadfastly sticking to trigger first for the C leads to an awkward leap to 5th. Not a lot of fun and not helpful for a smooth legato!

So, in this way, my needle moves towards, “Just do it this way. I know what I’m talking about.” But, by having them actually experience this “convincer” I’m guiding them to a place where they can make the discovery for themselves.

I try to remain open-minded without being wishy-washy. I even challenge some of my older students to convince me that their approach is better.

Especially when it comes to phrasing choices I say to my more advanced students, “Try it this way. If you don’t like it, come up with a reason why your approach is better. Convince me.”

I don’t want them to clone my interpretation but to
defend their interpretation.

The Good Stuff - Trombone Pedagogy
Dion Tucker: "Trombone, Tennis & Timing - How Are They All Connected? A Game for Brass Players

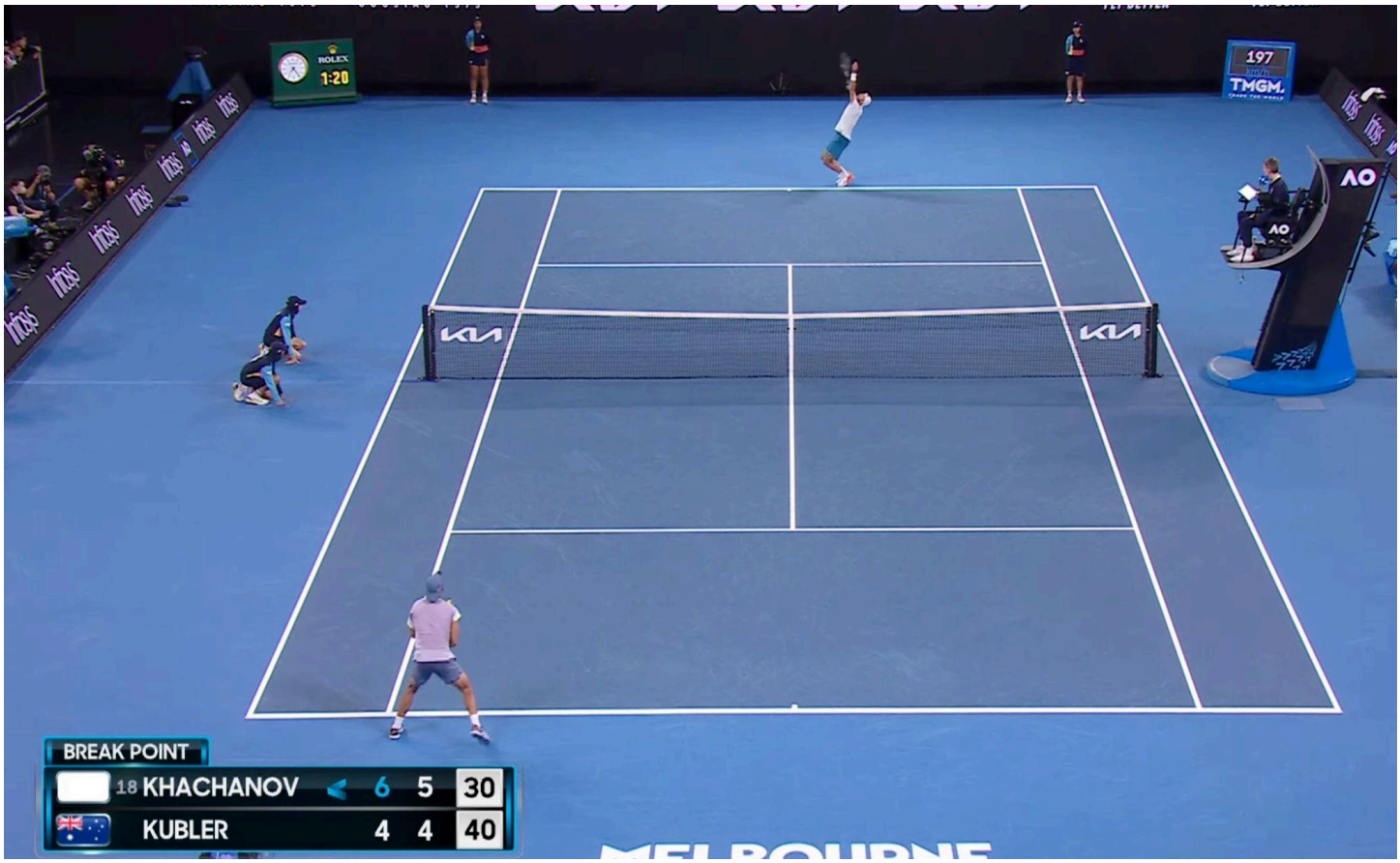
Unlike print sources, this month I'm going to take a look at an educational video by trombonist Dion Tucker. In this video, Tucker says:

When I was dealing with embouchure dystonia, I came up with this little game to help me with my timing. And when I say 'timing' I mean I was having a hard time getting the notes to speak right when I wanted them to. And this exercise helped me out quite a bit…
Normally when I practice I like to find a quiet place with no distractions so I can just focus on what I need to do. If you're dealing with some kind of ailment or dystonia or something like that, sometimes that quiet place is not exactly where you want to be. That gives your brain a whole lot of time to talk to your body and tell it what to do. When I came up with this game, I was really looking for a distraction from myself. I was overanalyzing everything I was doing and it was really affecting my playing. While I was practicing, I broke my own rule and turned the TV on.

Tucker goes on to describe the game which simply meant watching the players hit the ball back and forth and tonguing a note at the moment the ball hit the racket. Those familiar with The Inner Game of Tennis will notice that this activity gives Self 1 (the talking mind) something to do while the Self 2 (the doing mind) gets on with the activity of starting the notes. I have done something similar in which I toss an eraser of a wadded piece of paper into the air and ask the student to start the note when it hits

the floor. In fact, there is a really nice Inner Game video demonstrating the "bounce hit" exercises Gallwey uses.

Tucker also links a YouTube compilation of the longest tennis rallies however it appears that link no longer works. Here's one of a 70-shot rally, though!



I encourage you not only to watch this video by Dion Tucker but also to subscribe to his YouTube channel. There's a lot of good stuff there!

Random Thoughts:

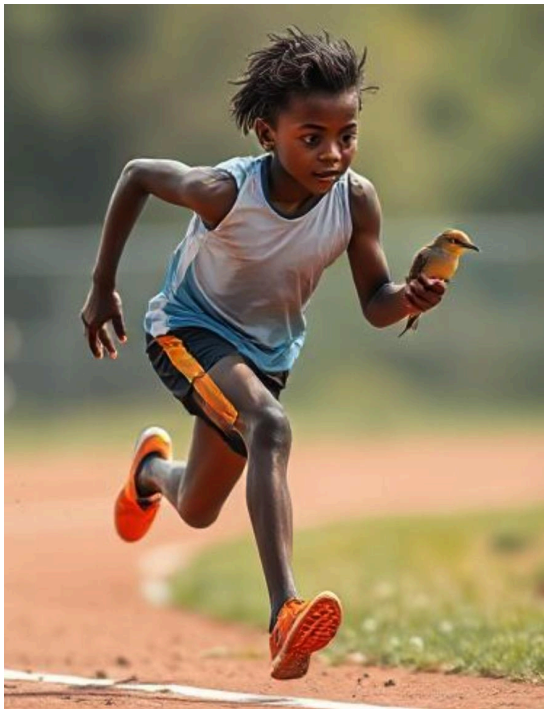
OK, as random thoughts go, these are a bit odd. As I go about my day, ideas for TBZ or for Instagram pop into my head from out of the blue. Not wanting to forget, I quickly add them to a custom to-do list which I can revisit later.

Some ideas patiently(?) sit there for a long time, waiting for their chance but I never find a way to bring them up. So this month is a very small data dump of ideas that have been waiting too long! The first two images are AI-generated by the way.

1. Running fast while holding a baby bird

This random thought has to do with tension. Imagine you are given a recently-hatched baby bird to carry. And then you are asked to run the 100-meter dash. The trick of course is to not clench your hands, hurting that little bird while you run. As we play difficult passages, it is all too easy to unconsciously tense where it isn't needed, causing trouble: the shoulders, the embouchure, the lower back, etc.

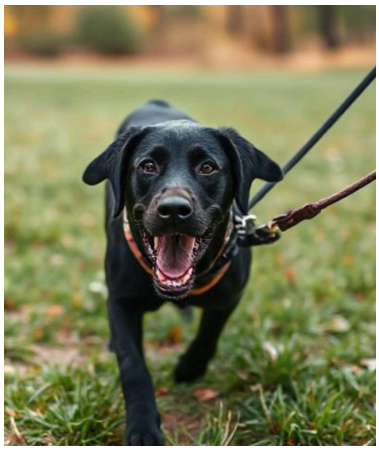
Zero tension isn't reasonable since some exertion is needed. The trick is knowing which muscles to engage and which to relax.



2. Your dog pulling on the leash

In lessons you may have asked your student to play a passage slower. If your experience is like mine, you've noticed that their 'slower' rendition is only slightly slower if at all! That desire to charge ahead and not slow down is ingrained in all of us and extends beyond mere instrument practicing. We want results and we want them NOW! I'm sure you've seen someone walking their dog where the dog is dragging the owner along desperately trying to move ahead faster. Even now, in my imagination, I can hear that dog's labored breathing (I'm imagining a one-year-old black Lab).

Patience doesn't come easily.



3. Retirement portfolios and my faculty recital

On Oct 24th, I performed my faculty recital (which is still on YouTube, I think). I believe this may have been my 29th such recital! As the performance date approached I used the practice strategy of jumping around in my repertoire from tricky lick to another, giving myself one shot at each lick before moving on. Thanks to Molly Gebrian for that idea. For some reason, this business of jumping around makes me think of diversifying one's retirement portfolio. A little investment here, a little there.
Just as I wouldn't want to spend too much time practicing any one thing, I wouldn't want to have too much of my retirement savings in any one fund.