

Fall 2017

Teaching Tuba Students to be Complete Musicians

Brandon E. Cummings
bec38@zips.uakron.edu

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Follow this and additional works at: http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects

 Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Music Education Commons](#), and the [Music Pedagogy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cummings, Brandon E., "Teaching Tuba Students to be Complete Musicians" (2017). *Honors Research Projects*. 577.

http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/577

This Honors Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

Teaching Tuba Students to be Complete Musicians

Brandon E. Cummings

The University of Akron

Abstract

The goal of music educators is to develop complete musicians who successfully learn and perform all musical concepts. One of the limitations of the band classroom is that performers are required to play a part that is specifically written with the needs of the ensemble in mind, and not the needs of the developing musician. These limitations can be seen in the bass instruments of a band which typically play the harmony or bass-line. While the bass-line and harmony are integral portions of the music, they do not often progress as far as other instrumental parts with respect to the elements of music. Because the bass-line lacks development in the elements of music, the tuba player may not receive a complete musical education. To combat the limitations of band literature, this paper examines an instrumental part with respect rhythm, melody and harmony, and formulates an approach to ensure that all students receive complete musical educations.

Purpose of the Paper

The goal of music educators is to teach their students the necessary musical skills and to help them develop those musical skills to the level of a complete musician. Roger Kamien, in his book *Music: An Appreciation*, lists the elements of music as: sound, performing media, rhythm, music notation, melody, harmony, key, texture, form and style (2015, pp. 3-55). Craig Wright in his book *Listening to Music* refers to the three primary elements of music as rhythm, melody and harmony (2017, pg. 17). Of all the different groupings of musical elements, there are three elements that are common throughout: rhythm, melody and harmony. Rhythm is the grouping of musical sounds with respect to duration and stress (Whittall, n.d.). Melody can be defined as, “pitched sounds arranged in musical time in accordance with given cultural conventions and constraints” (Ringer, n.d.). Finally, harmony is multiple notes sounding at the same time to produce chords, and when those chords sound one after the next to create a tonal center (Strunk, n.d.).

To teach these elements of music, educators use various approaches. One of the most common in the band classroom is the method book such as *Standard of Excellence* (Pearson 2006), *Sound Innovations* (Sheldon, et al., 2010), *Accent on Achievement* (O'Reilly & Williams, 1997), *Essential Elements* (Lautzenheiser, et. al., 1999) and many more. In addition to method books, music teachers utilize ensemble literature as a teaching and development tool for the elements of music. Both method books and literature are effective approaches to teaching the elements; however, they both have limitations. One of the limitations of band literature is that students are required to play a part that is written with the needs of the ensemble in mind, and not the needs of the emerging complete musician.

The bass voices of the band are frequently required to play the harmony or the bass-line in a piece. Although the bass-line and harmony are integral portions of the music, they are often lacking in their growth of musical elements. Tuba players are usually required by the literature to play the bass-line and because the bass-line often lacks appropriate challenges within the elements of music, the players may not receive a complete musical education. Frank Battisti (2016), an accomplished conductor emeritus and founder of the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble, suggests in his article, *Selecting Music for High School Bands* that, "...pieces should have interesting individual parts... Tubists like to play melodies as well as bass lines, and horn players like to play more than offbeats. Choose music that will help each student grow musically and technically." It is the responsibility of music educators to recognize the limitations of literature and compensate for them, making sure that the tuba players in their classroom are given the same opportunity as other students to develop in all elements of music and to grow as complete musicians. This paper examines the tubas part with respect to the elements of music and formulates an approach to ensure that all tuba players receive complete musical educations.

Analysis of Tuba Part in Ticheli's *Portrait of a Clown*

Portrait of a Clown is a grade two composition by Frank Ticheli and was published in 1988 by Manhattan Beach Music. It was composed for Cheryl Floyd and the Murchison Middle School Matador Band and was premiered on May 26, 1988 in Austin, Texas. *Portrait of a Clown* is a contrasting work with an A theme that is light and bouncy, a B theme that is "gentle and flowing," and an overall form of ABA which is book-ended by an eight-measure introduction and an eighth-measure coda. The composition takes two minutes and thirty seconds to perform and has a constant tempo of 160 beats per minute. Finally, *Portrait of a Clown* is a programmatic piece of music that is meant to portray the character of a clown and does so through the light and

bouncy A theme and the contrast in the gentle yet “melancholy” B Theme (Blocher, et. al., 2010).

Portrait of a Clown is a quality, young band piece with contrasting sections and many beneficial learning and teaching opportunities. It appears as a recommended/ required piece on many different state lists including: Florida, Indiana, and Texas. Comparable to most band literature, *Portrait of a Clown*, has limitations that teachers must recognize and compensate for in their instruction. An effective music educator examines a piece of literature for the elements (or lack thereof) that it provides the various instrumental parts, and then determines what the students still need for a complete musical education.

There are elements of music which are fulfilled in *Portrait of a Clown* for the tuba, and others that are not. Rhythmically, *Portrait of a Clown's* tuba part is not overly complex. The tuba's part of *Portrait of a Clown* contains all quarter notes, half notes, whole notes and the equivalent rests. Unlike the other instrumental parts, the tuba part does not contain any eighth notes or eighth rests. The rhythms included are important, and could provide a slight challenge for developing musicians because of the tempo of 160 beats per minute and the articulation markings; however, by the 7th or 8th grade year students should be playing eighth notes and eighth rests.

The tuba player in *Portrait of a Clown* never gets to play the melody. This lack of melody is a demonstration of the tuba's lack of melodic growth in *Portrait of a Clown*. The tuba's part most closely resembles a melody when it plays the walking bass-line, as shown in Figure 1, which mimics the opening theme, but is not an actual melody from *Portrait of a Clown*.

Figure 1 shows the Tuba bass-line for measures 68-77. The music is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 160. The first staff contains measures 69, 70, and 71. The second staff contains measures 72, 73, 74, 75, and 76. Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, and *p* (echo). Performance markings include "Come prima", "(legato)", and "(staccato)".

Figure 1. Tuba bass-line measures 68-77.

Unlike its melodic role, the tuba part is harmonically important. *Portrait of a Clown* is in the tonal centers of Bb and F, and for a short period of a time, Ab. Studying the tuba part and the harmonic analysis of the work by phrase, reveals that the tuba part's main function in *Portrait of a Clown* is to highlight the tonal center. The introduction from measure 1-8 is in F major and serves as the dominant of the A theme which is in Bb Lydian (measures 9-25). From measures 1-8 (see Figure 2), the tubas are either playing the note F or highlighting it harmonically by playing its neighboring tones.

Figure 2 shows the Tuba bass-line for measures 1-8. The music is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 160. The first staff contains measures 1, 2, 3, and 4. The second staff contains measures 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. A dynamic marking of *f* is present at the end of measure 8.

Figure 2. Tuba bass-line measures 1-8.

Similarly, in measures 9-25 (see Figure 3) the tuba part heavily highlights the note Bb because the piece is in Bb Lydian through those measures. In these examples (Figures 2 and 3), the tuba's

role as an anchor to the tonal centers is demonstrated by it always playing the root or a neighbor of the root. This is a harmonic trend in the tuba's part throughout *Portrait of a Clown*.

Figure 3. Tuba bass-line measures 9-25.

Supplemental Materials for Tuba Players in Ticheli's *Portrait of a Clown*

An examination of the tuba's part in Ticheli's *Portrait of a Clown* with respect to rhythm, melody and harmony shows that it does not provide tuba players with the opportunity to develop as complete musicians. After examining *Portrait of a Clown* and realizing that the tuba part does not fully address all the elements of music, supplemental materials must be created and implemented into the tuba's education to compensate for the unfulfilled elements of music.

Rhythmic Materials

Rhythmically, *Portrait of a Clown* is not overly complex for any of the instrumental parts. Ticheli has only used rhythmic values of eighth notes and longer and has not used any syncopation. While the rhythms are not overly complex for students of the 7th and 8th grade level, the faster tempo of 160 beats per minute and the articulations might provide some challenges. However, the tuba players, the only instrumentalists who do not have any eighth notes in their part, need to receive an equal rhythmic education.

One approach is having the tuba players play the rhythm of the melodies from the literature. Roderick VanScoy, an experienced middle school band director, wrote an article titled

Middle School Band Rehearsals: Tools and Techniques for Your Middle School Band Classroom

in which he wrote about the technique of deconstructing the rhythm and articulation for middle school musicians. He explained that to teach rhythm and articulation, deconstructing the literature into more reasonable and accessible parts is important. He advocates teaching the articulation on one note and then applying it to the passage.

First, the student becomes familiar with the rhythm of the melody. A simple exercise of the melody written on one note without articulation is shown in Figure 4. The melody for this example is written on a Bb because it is a comfortable note for tubas and because it is the tonal center of the melody that is being “played” rhythmically.

The musical score for Figure 4 is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo of quarter note = 160. It consists of two staves of music, each with four measures. The first staff is marked with a '1' above the first measure and a 'mf' dynamic marking below the second measure. The second staff is marked with a '1' above the first measure. The rhythm is a sequence of quarter notes and eighth notes, with some measures containing rests or specific groupings indicated by '+' and '3-4'.

Figure 4. Rhythm of Theme A from *Portrait of a Clown* on Bb.

Next, adding the articulations to the melody’s rhythm as shown in Figure 5 allows the students to practice and develop the rhythm and articulation of the melody without worrying about pitches.

The musical score for Figure 5 is written in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo of quarter note = 160. It consists of two staves of music, each with four measures. The first staff is marked with a '1' above the first measure and a 'mf' dynamic marking below the second measure. The second staff is marked with a '1' above the first measure. The rhythm is a sequence of quarter notes and eighth notes, with some measures containing rests or specific groupings indicated by '+' and '3-4'. Articulations are shown as dots below the notes and accents above the notes.

Figure 5. Rhythm and Articulation of Theme A from *Portrait of a Clown*.

A second approach to supplementing rhythmic development is to write level appropriate rhythms on a single line staff and have the students play repeated notes on the rhythmic examples or give them a scalar exercise along with a rhythm pattern. This idea draws from and expands upon the many method books, such as *Standard of Excellence*, which have one line staff rhythm examples in them. Figure 6A is an example of a rhythm pattern found in *Portrait of a Clown* which mimics the method books, and Figure 6B makes use of the main scale of the piece which takes the idea from the method book and goes one step further.

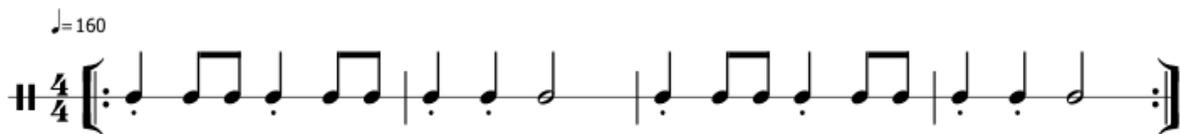


Figure 6A. Rhythm pattern from *Portrait of a Clown*.

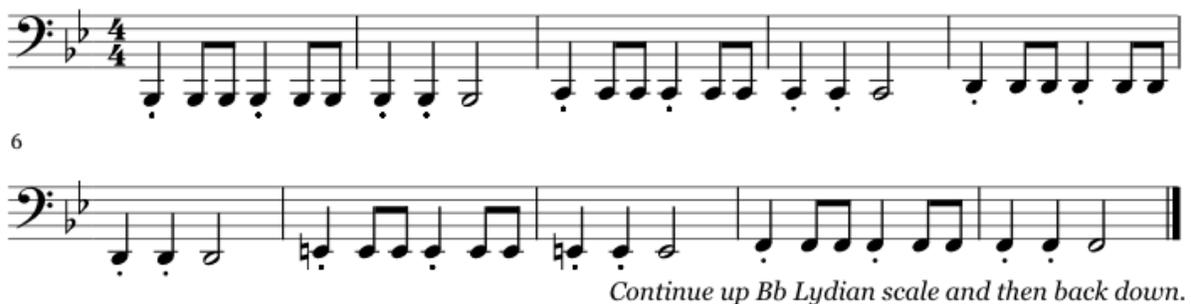


Figure 6B. Bb Lydian Scale Rhythm and Articulation Exercise

Melodic Materials

Tuba players are not given the opportunity to improve their melodic skills in *Portrait of a Clown*. They play the bass-line that imitates the opening theme, but they never get the opportunity to play the melody. Realizing the tuba does not have a melodic role, music educators must supplement the lacking element of melody for their tuba players. Teachers need to plan to

implement the supplemental materials they find or create into their lessons to get their tuba players playing the melodies from the literature.

To begin getting the tubas to play the melodies from *Portrait of a Clown*, introduce the scales that are used. In *Portrait of a Clown*, the scales Bb Lydian, F major, and Ab major are used for the various melodies. This idea of learning the scale that corresponds to the excerpt mimics the popular instrumental methods known as the Rubank Methods (Gower & Voxman, 1951). In these methods, scales and scalar exercises are introduced and then there are melodies presented that correspond to those scales. The scale in Figure 7 is the Bb Lydian scale in quarter notes and corresponds to a melody in *Portrait of a Clown*. Only the first five notes of the Bb Lydian scale are used in the *Portrait of a Clown* melody; however, becoming familiar with the whole scale will be beneficial for students' understanding of the Lydian scale versus the Bb major scale, which they already know.



Figure 7. Bb Lydian Scale.

Another scale used by Ticheli in *Portrait of a Clown* is the F major scale (see Figure 8). Prior to learning the respective F major melody in *Portrait of a Clown*, students should become familiar with this scale. This scale is written in two octaves because the low example might be too low and the high example too high for some students. If needed, students should displace octaves to maintain a successful range.



Figure 8. F Major Scale.

Teaching students the relevant scales to a melody is imperative to their success and their potential growth as a melodic musician, and should not be over-looked.

Next, to supplement the tuba's melodic development within *Portrait of a Clown*, educators should write out the melodies for the tubas in an appropriate range. Expectations for students playing the melodies should be consistent and unchanging for both those students who have the melody in the composition and those students, such as the tuba players, who are playing the melody as a supplement. Articulation, phrasing, dynamics, correct notes and rhythms and all other melodic requirements are expectations that will not change for all students playing the melody. Theme A written for the tuba, as shown in Figure 9, is the melodic example that corresponds to the Bb Lydian scale in Figure 7.

The musical score for Theme A is presented on two staves in bass clef, 4/4 time. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 160. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. Measure 9 starts with a dynamic marking of *mf*. Measures 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 are numbered above the staff. The piece ends with a double bar line in measure 16.

Figure 9. Theme A from *Portrait of a Clown*, measures 9-16.

This is the first theme from the B section of *Portrait of a Clown* written out for the developing tuba player as shown in Figure 10.

The image shows a musical score for tuba, measures 34-41. The score is in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a tempo marking of quarter note = 160. Measures 34-37 are on the first staff, and measures 38-41 are on the second staff. The music features a melodic line with slurs and a dynamic marking of 'espr. mf'.

Figure 10. Theme B from *Portrait of a Clown*, measures 34-41.

The tempo of 160 beats per minute in *Portrait of a Clown* means students will need to begin at a slower tempo and work over time to increase the tempo to one-hundred and sixty beats per minute. William Berz (2008), Professor of Music at Rutgers State University, claims that the key to efficient practice is slowing it down and breaking it down, and that if those two things are done, rhythms and notes come much easier for students over time. Finally, teachers should rehearse and teach tuba players the melody just as they teach the students who have the melody scored in their part by Ticheli.

Beginning tuba method books that contain melodic content include but are not limited to: *Breeze Easy* by John Kinyon (1999), *Do It!* by James Froseth (1997), and *Method for BBb Tuba* by Walter Beeler (1995). These materials will not be perfect for each situation; however, finding one or more that meet the requirements for the situation is important. Finally, it is important to know that teachers may need to make changes or slight adjustments to a method book and its examples so that they help their students make progress towards the musical goal of melodic growth.

Harmonic Materials

Harmonically the tuba player's responsibility is to highlight and ground the work in the tonal center and its changes. While this is important, tuba players do not consistently get the

opportunity to play any harmonic part that is not the root of the chords. This means that the tuba is mostly playing the first or bottom note of the chords and not the third, fifth, or further extension of the chords. All these notes and extensions require different attention and different nuance, and for this reason it is important for students' harmonic development to learn about playing each part of the chord.

To help young tuba players grow their harmonic skills, abilities and knowledge, the teacher should provide them with materials that ask them to do more than simply play the root of the chord. One way to do this is by writing a part that plays the thirds and fifths in *Portrait of a Clown* such as the horn and tenor sax parts out for the tubas and having them play that with the ensemble rather than their written part. This allows them to play a different harmonic role than just playing the root of the chords. The example in Figure 11 is the horn and tenor saxophone part (full-size notes) and the tuba part (cued notes). The tubas should be allowed to play the horn and tenor sax part in practice to get them playing notes other than the root of the chord.

Figure 11. Horn 1-2/ Tenor Sax Part, Measures 17-26, Written for Tuba.

The examples in Figures 12A and 12B are the beginning two chromatic examples from the “Long-tone Studies” chapter (numbers 1 and 2) in *Basics Plus: Studies for 1 or 2 Bass Clef Instruments*, and can be used with any combination of instruments as another approach to teach

harmonic development in students (Guggenberger, 2007). A focus should be put on matching the other player and intonation between the two parts. This can be useful in developing intonation between intervals, and if one interval is giving the students trouble, then the exercise could be tailored by the teacher to focus on the goal interval.

Figure 12A. Guggenberger Exercise Chapter 2 No. 1.

Figure 12B. Guggenberger Exercise Chapter 1 No. 2.

Figure 13 is an example of a *Function Chorale* by Steve Melillo (1980). These are exercises written in SATB format that allow different instruments to play different positions in the chords. The tubas, who are used to playing the bass part harmonically, can now play the soprano, alto or tenor part and develop harmonically because of this new harmonic experience. This expands the harmonic abilities of the tubas and all other instrumentalists in the ensemble. For the purposes of use with *Portrait of a Clown*, the ensemble could play this chorale in Bb Lydian. The proper accidentals have been added to Figure 13 for the chorale to be played in Bb Lydian.

2 "Basic Change" by Stephen Melillo

RHYTHM	-	-	J	J	-	'	-	-	J	J	-
S	1 ⁽⁸⁾	1 ⁽⁸⁾	1 ⁽⁸⁾ 7	1 ⁽⁸⁾			5	6	6	5	5
A	5	6	5 5	5			3	b4	b4	2	3
T	3	b4	3 2	3			1	1	1	7	1
B	1	b4	5 5		1	1		b4	3	2	5

Figure 13. SATB Function Chorale by Steve Melillo

Finally, examples of useful warm-up exercises for harmonic development include both scales and Remington-like long-tone exercises. One example of an appropriate scale exercise is playing scales-in-a-round. Using the scale or scales that are utilized in the piece of focus, the ensemble is split into two, three or four different groups depending on the level of the ensemble. Group one plays from the beginning to the third of the scale, where group two will join them, playing the scale from the root. Finally, group three will begin playing from the root of the scale when group one reaches the fifth and group two reaches the third. Each group will begin on the root and play the scale up, not repeating the top note, and then back down. It is important that the groups move at the same rhythmic value. Figure 14 is a three-part score of the scale-in-a-round exercise (group 1 at the top and 3 at the bottom) written for three voices in bass clef. Any instrument or combination thereof can participate in the exercise, so long as they are all playing the same concert pitch.

Figure 14. Scale-in-a-round.

The next exercise (Figure 15), is Remington-like and involves a drone (Bb in this case) being held by some instruments and others moving from the drone note by a certain interval (along the Bb Lydian scale for this example) and then returning to the drone note. The exercise is effective because it serves a similar purpose to the scale-in-a-round but is less complex which allows for more specific feedback and direction from teachers. Educators focused on helping students adjust their notes to tune the intervals between the drone and their note will be most productive. Tuba players should not always be expected to play the root or the drone and they should be given the opportunity to develop their ability to play in-tune intervals against a drone or bass note.

Figure 15. Long-tone Remington exercise.

There are an endless number of variations for these types of exercises and adjusting them to fit the needs of the student is an important skill for music educators to have.

Conclusion

It is important that music educators give all their students a complete musical education. Instrumental music educators often default to method books and literature to provide their students materials upon which they will develop in the three common elements of music: melody, harmony and rhythm. Both method books and literature often provide appropriate material, but they both have limitations that must be identified, planned for and supplemented in the classroom. It is unrealistic to expect every composition to fulfill and challenge students in all elements of music; however, it is the music educators job and responsibility to make sure that all their students are given equal opportunity to develop musically. The instrument that students play should not be a factor in their potential musical education because music educators are teachers of music and not teachers of instruments.

Although *Portrait of a Clown* is a quality grade two band composition it still does not provide each instrument with room to grow and develop in each of the elements of music. The tuba part is one of the instrumental parts in *Portrait of a Clown* that is not fully developed. Because of this lack of development, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide the students with that development, and this paper has attempted to exemplify that process. Although this paper is specific to the tuba, music educators should complete this process for all the parts and students in their classroom. Music educators aim to develop complete musicians that successfully learn and perform all musical concepts regardless of the instrument that that students are playing.

References

- Battisti, F. (2016). Selecting music for high school bands: Guidelines and recommendations for grade 4-6 music. *The Instrumentalist*. Retrieved from <http://theinstrumentalist.com/articles/The-Instrumentalist/October-2016/Selecting-Music-for-High-School-Bands/>
- Beeler, W. (1995). *Walter Beeler method for BB-flat tuba*. Los Angeles, CA: Alfred.
- Berz, W. (2008). Practice man, practice: How do you get to Carnegie hall?. Retrieved from <http://www.banddirector.com/article/pg-concert-band/practice-man-practice>
- Blocher, L. R., Cramer, R., Corporon, E. M., Lautzenheiser, T., Lisk, E. S. & Miles, R. (2010). Portrait of a clown. In R. Miles (Ed.), *Teaching music through performance in band*, Vol. 1 (2nd ed.), (pp. 211-216). Chicago, IL: GIA.
- Froseth, J. O. (1997). *Do it! play tuba: A world of musical enjoyment at your fingertips*. Chicago, IL: GIA.
- Gower, W.M. & Voxman, H. (1951). *Rubank elementary method*. Chicago, IL: Rubank.
- Guggenberger, W. (2007). *Basics plus: studies for 1 or 2 (bass clef) brass instruments*. Rot on der Rot, Germany: RUNDEL.
- Hovey, N. W. (Ed.). (1989). *Rubank elementary method – bass/tuba (B.C.)*. Chicago, IL: Rubank.
- Kamien, R. (2015). *Music: An Appreciation* (brief 8th ed.). Ney York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Kinyon, J. (1999). *Breeze easy: Method for Bb tuba, book 1*. Los Angeles, CA: Alfred.
- Lautzenheiser, T., Higgin, J., Menghini, C., Lavender, P., Rhodes, T. C. & Bierschenk, D. (1999). *Essential elements*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard.

- Melillo, S. (1980). *Function chorales*. Hampton, VA: Stormworks.
- O'Reilly, J. & Williams, M. (1997). *Accent on achievement*. Los Angeles, CA: Alfred.
- Pearson, B. (2006). *Standard of excellence*. San Diego, CA: Neil A. Kjos.
- Ringer, A. L. (n.d.). Melody. In *Grove music online*. *Oxford music online*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18357>.
- Sheldon, R., Boonshaft, P., Phillips, B., Black, D., Moss, K., Bernotas, C.... Yearly, J. (2010). *Sound innovations*. Los Angeles, CA: Alfred.
- Strunk, S. (n.d.). Harmony. In B. Kernfeld (Ed.) *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. *Grove music online*. *Oxford music online*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/J990085>.
- Ticheli, F. (1989). Portrait of a clown: for concert band. Brooklyn, NY: Manhattan Beach Music.
- VanScoy, R. (n.d.). Middle school band rehearsals: Tools and techniques for your middle school band classroom. *American Band College*, 28-33. Retrieved from http://www.bandworld.org/pdfs/rehearsaltechabc_vanscoy.pdf
- Whittall, A. (n.d.). Rhythm. In *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford music online*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5635>.
- Wright, C. (2017). *Listening to music* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.