THE INFLUENCE OF JAZZ ON TIMBRE IN SELECTED COMPOSITIONS FOR

SOLO TROMBONE

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A significant body of solo literature for the trombone has been written in the last fifty years that draws as much from the jazz tradition as from that of European classical music. While much attention has been paid to these works’ use of characteristic jazz rhythms, harmonies and melodic inflections, there has been little focus on timbre, the musical element that perhaps most readily distinguishes jazz from other styles of Western music. This paper focuses on the important role jazz timbres should play in a performer’s interpretation of those works that are significantly influenced by jazz. It includes explorations of the significant differences in concepts of timbre between European classical music and jazz, some of the ways in which these timbral differences are produced, and methods by which performers can develop the skills necessary to produce these varied timbres. Particular attention is paid to the importance of timbre to idiomatically appropriate performances of two significant works from the solo trombone repertoire, Robert Suderburg’s *Night Set (Chamber Music III)* and Richard Peaslee’s *Arrows of Time*. 
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

A significant body of solo literature for the trombone has been written in the last fifty years that draws as much from the jazz tradition as from that of European classical music. While much attention has been paid to these works’ use of characteristic jazz rhythms, harmonies and melodic inflections, there has been little focus on timbre, the musical element that perhaps most readily distinguishes jazz from other styles of Western music. This performance and critical essay and its accompanying lecture-recital focus on the important role jazz timbres should play in a performer’s interpretation of those works that are significantly influenced by jazz. It includes explorations of the significant differences in concepts of timbre between European classical music and jazz, some of the ways in which these timbral differences are produced and methods by which performers can develop the skills necessary to produce these varied timbres. Particular attention is paid to the importance of timbre to idiomatically appropriate performances of two significant works from the solo trombone repertoire, Robert Suderburg’s *Chamber Music III (Night Set)* and Richard Peaslee’s *Arrows of Time*.

This performance and critical essay and lecture-recital also includes information drawn from interviews with Robert Suderburg and Richard Peaslee, information drawn from interviews with several performers who collaborated closely with the composers (either in the writing or in subsequent performances of the works,) examples of and
citations of relevant recordings and information pertaining to timbre drawn from both musicological and anecdotal studies of jazz and jazz musicians.

The Merging of Jazz And European Classical Music

Almost from its beginnings, jazz influenced the work of composers working in the European classical tradition. Works by Paul Hindemith (*Suite ’1922*, 1922), Darius Milhaud (*La creation du monde*, 1923), and Ernst Krenek (*Jonny spielt auf*, 1925) show the influence of jazz, and as early as 1924, George Gershwin was attempting a fusion of jazz and European classical music in his *Rhapsody In Blue*.

Not surprisingly, American composers have continued to be among those most frequently merging elements of jazz and European classical music in their works. This has included everything from Aaron Copland's and Leonard Bernstein's use of characteristic jazz rhythms and harmonies in otherwise classical compositions to works of jazz composers such as Duke Ellington and Charles Mingus that mirror European classical music in form and scope. In the 1950s, Gunther Schuller proposed a fully integrated fusing of the two genres into a new style that he called Third Stream. While the Third Stream label has never gained widespread usage, the past fifty years have seen a significant number of works by American composers that draw heavily enough from jazz and other New World musics—from rock to the many styles of the Caribbean and Central and South American countries—that we can begin to speak of an American (in the broadest sense) classical music. This is a music that owes as much to Armstrong, Ellington, and Cuban music as it does to Bach, Beethoven and the Western European tradition.
Because of the trombone’s strong association with jazz, solo works for the instrument written since the middle of the twentieth century have often been a part of this American classical music. If one accepts the premise that these works are a part of a distinctly American musical tradition, then they should be performed in a distinctly American style, yet the performance style most often brought to these works is based in the European tradition. This is perhaps most apparent in the realm of timbre.
CHAPTER 2

TIMBRE

Definition

Musicians use a variety of different terms when discussing the sound of an instrument. Besides "timbre," the terms "tone," "tone quality," "tone color" and "sound" (the latter being used particularly amongst jazz musicians) are frequently employed. Confusion can arise with each of the four latter terms: "tone" is also used to describe an individual pitch; loudness and pitch are also "qualities" of sound, and "tone quality" can also imply a value judgment; "tone color" implies a connection between sound and sight that exists only for those rare individuals affected by synesthesia; "sound," as jazz musicians use it, includes not only timbre but also melodic, harmonic and/or rhythmic patterns that are a part of a musician's improvisational style. "Timbre" is the term that most clearly represents the aspects of musical sound to be discussed in this paper, and it will be used in the definition agreed upon by the American Standards Association in 1960: "All ways that two sounds of the same pitch, loudness, and apparent duration may differ."\(^1\)

The Acoustics Of Timbre

It is an accepted part of musical acoustics that a sound produced on a trombone (as well as many other instruments) has three parts: the attack; the sustain; and the

release. Each of these parts has an effect on how a listener perceives the timbre of the instrument, and of these three, the attack is perhaps most significant. In order to understand why this is so, a brief explanation of the acoustics of the trombone is necessary. The trombone, like all brass instruments, is a lip-reed instrument. The lips, vibrating inside the opening of the mouthpiece, act as a generator. The column of air inside the instrument is set in motion by that generator and acts as a resonator. There is a brief period of time, however, after the lips have started before the vibrations of the air column reach their full amplitude. This period of time is called the starting transient. There is also transient activity when changing from note to note as the vibrations of the air column change their frequencies, and the type of articulation used and the movement of the slide both have an effect on these transients. These transient effects, all part of the attack, have a major impact on a listener's perception of the instrument's timbre. Studies have been done where the attacks of recorded sounds have been removed, and listeners have had difficulty determining the kind of instrument that produced the sound.2

Trombone Timbre In The European Classical Tradition

A surprising number of the standard trombone and brass texts and methods make little or no reference to timbre. Philip Farkas' *The Art Of Brass Playing* has no mention of timbre. The main body of Emory Remington's *Warm-Up Studies* and Denis Wick's *Trombone Technique* make only passing mentions of "tone" with no elaboration. Philip Bate's *The Trumpet And The Trombone* contains a 39-page chapter on the acoustics of brass instruments, but only a page of that is devoted to timbre.

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When timbre is discussed, the reader is often left with the impression that there is only one "good" trombone timbre, and any other timbres, including those from jazz, are inferior. Donald Hunsberger's introduction to *The Remington Warm-Up Studies* includes this description of Emory Remington's philosophy of timbre: "His approach provided the same foundation for development for everyone--a singing style with a deep, rich sonorous tone--adaptable for any musical circumstance."³ The most extensive writing on timbre in the standard trombone literature can be found in Reginald Fink's *The Trombonist's Handbook*. In the chapter "Developing A Good Tone," Fink echoes Remington's belief in one good trombone timbre (the orchestral): "To learn to hear a good tone, you must listen to the playing of your teacher, listen to the best local trombonists and listen to recordings of professional orchestras and bands."⁴ As he expands on his topic, Fink reinforces the idea of one "best" tone and also casts a subtle aspersion on jazz timbre.

Though there are several possible combinations available, there is probably one combination of lip and breath that will give the best tone. The tone produced on the trombone varies from a quality which is very pinched and quite buzzy (all lip tension and little breath pressure) through the best one (some lip tension and some breath pressure) to a smokey dull tone (little lip tension and a great deal of breath pressure)...The dull smokey sound...is like the tone of the Dixieland tail-gate trombone player who plays this way either because he wants that type of sound or because he has lost his lip and can only produce a tone by blowing large quantities of air.⁵

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⁵ Ibid. 17.
Not only is there a relative lack of information about timbre in these texts, but much of the space that is devoted to timbre focuses on fixing "bad" timbres rather than on what makes for a "good" (by European standards) timbre. For example, The Remington Warm-Up Studies offers only the statement in the introduction referenced earlier and a mention of "purity of tone" as a desired goal. Fink does provide a brief model of "the ideal attack, tone control and release": "The attack is a sharp click at the same volume as the tone which follows. The tone is steady and the release tapers as the breath flow stops." Fink then describes and suggests ways to fix nine different "problems" (deviations from this model.) Six of these "problems"—ending the note with the tongue, an airy attack, a too soft attack, a dirty or fuzzy attack, the pitch falling at end, and the pitch rising at the end—are characteristic parts of a jazz timbre.

This points to what I believe is one of the principle reasons that so many trombonists are resistant to employing a jazz-influenced timbre in works that are clearly influenced by jazz. As Paul Berliner writes in his Thinking In Jazz, "I often hear classical musicians misinterpret the expressive jazz improvisers' deliberate avoidance of uniform tonal quality and articulation as indicating that improvisers lack the control necessary to achieve such uniformity." If classically trained musicians hear characteristic jazz timbres as "bad" timbres that need to be "fixed," then they will be understandably reluctant to employ them, even in jazz-influenced pieces. Thus, trombonists who will be performing

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6 Remington, 32.
7 Fink, 23.
jazz-influenced works must be taught what is involved in a jazz timbre, as well as how to produce those sounds.

**Jazz Timbre**

While it is impossible to write of a single jazz timbre, given the great variety heard in jazz, there are some important timbral characteristics that virtually all jazz players share. These include the basing of instrumental timbre on a vocal model, the wide variety of timbral effects employed, the desire for uniqueness, and the essential percussive quality of the attack. Each of these characteristics can also be found in traditional African music, and it is the essentially African nature of jazz timbre that accounts for the crucial differences between it and the timbre of European classical music.

In her book *The Music Of Black Americans*, Eileen Southern writes, "The most distinctive features of jazz derive directly from the blues. Jazz is a vocally oriented music; its players replace the voice with their instruments, but try to recreate the voice's singing style and blue notes by using scooping, sliding, whining, growling, falsetto and the like."9 The similarities between that and the following two descriptions of African music are obvious. "The African approach to singing includes the use of a large number of ornamental devices, of which two of the most common are the slide up to the first note of a phrase, and the slide down off the last note. Notes are often "bent," and some songs are almost shouted rather than sung."10 "African voices adapt themselves to their musical

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context--a mellow tone to welcome a new bride; a husky voice to recount an indiscreet adventure; a satirical inflection for a teasing tone, with laughter bubbling up to compensate for the mockery--they may be soft or harsh as circumstances demand.\textsuperscript{11} 

There is also a strong connection between speech and instrumental timbre in jazz. "Soloists sometimes actually 'sound like they're speaking words. It's like you're talking when you play. That's what it's about' (Doc Cheatham)...Joe Oliver and other New Orleans musicians were renowned for their ability to use mutes to imitate the timbre and cadence of the stylized speech of sermonizing preachers."\textsuperscript{12} This imitation of speech can range from soloists playing lines that simulate the general contours and inflections of speech, as in countless solos by trombonist Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, to the recreation of actual words, as trumpeter Clark Terry did in quoting Puck's line from \textit{A Midsummer Night's Dream}, "Lord, what fools these mortals be" at the end of Billy Strayhorn's "Up And Down, Up And Down (I Will Lead Them Up And Down)."\textsuperscript{13} Similar relationships between speech and music can be found in African music. The best-known example is probably the talking drums of many tribes in West and Central Africa, which are used to communicate messages, but there are also tribes that use xylophones, flutes, and/or trumpets to imitate speech.

One of the most distinctive elements of jazz timbre is the use of a wide variety of timbral modifications. The extensive use of many different kinds of mutes on brass

\textsuperscript{12} Berliner, 68-69. 
\textsuperscript{13} Duke Ellington, \textit{Such Sweet Thunder}, Columbia COL469140 2.
instruments is the most obvious example of this, but jazz brass players employ a whole host of other timbral modifications as well. These effects include: the growl; "ghosting" notes; an airy timbre; the split attack; half-valving on the trumpet; and the use of different vowel sounds to alter the player's basic timbre. While not, strictly speaking, timbral modifications, such pitch modifications as: the shake; the bend; the rip; the scoop; the slide; the fall-off; the doit; and vibrato can also have a significant impact on the listener's perception of timbre. These timbral effects and the use of mutes are so significant and so varied that they will be discussed in a separate chapter. Their connection to African music is made clear by the earlier quotes concerning the vocal model of instrumental music, and the following observations by Francis Bebey and Alan Merriam. "Musicians everywhere [in Africa] experiment with unusual sonorities because they seek to produce all manner of weird and complex sounds that often strike Western ears as being unpure."14

"As almost a general principle...various devices which result in a buzzing tone are added to [instruments]."15

The jazz musician's quest for a unique timbre is, on one level, rooted in a different reason than the African musician's. The heterogeneous nature of African timbre is based in part on Bebey's observation, cited earlier, that "African voices adapt themselves to their musical context"16 and in part on the fact that, as John Storm Roberts explained, "Singing...is everybody's art...Anybody is a potential singer; a 'fine voice' does not

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14 Bebey, 40.


16 Bebey, 115.
count, because the criteria for choosing a singer are social, not musical. The singer may be the priest, or he may be the oldest man in the age group."17 However, no less an authority than Gunther Schuller18 finds an African basis for the jazz musician's desire for individuality.

One of jazz's great attractions is that it has preserved the typically African open tone and natural quality…The African quality of jazz sonority can be heard, moreover, in the individuality and personal inflection of the jazz musician's tone…Jazz's strength and communicative power lie in this individuality…By contrast, a symphony orchestra player performs a different function in which great individuality is not a prerequisite. Indeed, it is more likely to be a liability…qualities of extreme individuality must be curbed and subjugated to the style of the composer being performed.19

The essentially percussive quality of the attack in jazz and its resultant effect on timbre are qualities that are often overlooked, given the many characteristics of singing that are a part of jazz instrumental playing, including a generally legato approach to the playing of musical lines. A phrase, however, can be simultaneously legato and firmly accented, as the former quality is concerned with the end of note (in this case, being connected to the next) and the latter quality is concerned with the beginning of the note. The percussive quality of the attack in jazz is not only an important factor in producing a swing rhythmic feeling, but given the importance of attack in the perception of timbre, is a significant factor in a characteristic jazz timbre. This percussive quality is the aspect of

17 Roberts, xxviii.

18 A Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, orchestra conductor, and former hornist with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Schuller has also worked with some of the finest jazz musicians of the last half-century, including Miles Davis, Charles Mingus and Joe Lovano.

jazz timbre that is perhaps most clearly connected to African music, given its strong emphasis on percussion and rhythm.

It seems to be the totality of the musical concept which sees rhythm and percussive effect as the deep, basic organizational principle underlying African music. Drums and drumming, the use of idiophones, the forceful and dynamic vocal attack, and other characteristics reflect this principle; it is African music which is essentially rhythmic and percussive in effect, and the devices used simply reflect the principle.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{20}\) Alan Merriam, quoted in Roberts, xxxi.
CHAPTER 3

TIMBRAL MODIFICATIONS IN JAZZ

Timbral Effects

The growl can be produced in three ways: with an actual growl in the throat—this is done by causing the vocal cords to vibrate; by flutter-tonguing—a rapid flapping of the tongue inside the mouth; and by humming or singing while playing. Players will sometimes use two of these methods in combination. Trumpeter Kenny Dorham employs a growl in the first chorus of his solo on his composition "Blue Bossa" on Joe Henderson's album *Page One*. Trumpeters and trombonists often combine the growl with the plunger mute. A well-known example of this is heard on the various recordings of "Black And Tan Fantasy" that trumpeter James "Bubber" Miley made with the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

"Ghosted" notes are pitches so unaccented that they almost don't speak. This effect is achieved on a brass instrument by the player modifying his air flow so that there is just enough air pressure to briefly set the lips in vibration (thus producing the pitch) before the lip vibrations stop and only an air sound (or nothing) is audible. Jazz musicians often speak of these notes as more "felt" than heard. A good example of a ghosted note is the second note of Miles Davis' solo on "So What" from the album *Kind Of Blue*. An airy timbre, at least on brass instruments, is really two different things: an airy

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21 Joe Henderson, *Page One*, Blue Note CDP 7 84140 2

22 Miles Davis, *Kind Of Blue*, Columbia CK 64935.
attack and air heard as a part of the sustain of the pitch. The airy attack begins with the sound of air, rather than a specific pitch. It can be produced through a variety of adjustments to the player's lips, tongue or throat. The airy sustain can be produced by having a less-than-perfect seal between the player's lips and mouthpiece. Good examples of both of these techniques can be heard on Miles Davis' recording of "My Funny Valentine" on the album of the same name.23

The split attack is produced by the player buzzing a pitch somewhere in between the pitch he intends to play and the pitch on the partial immediately adjacent to the partial of the intended pitch. This results in elements of both partials being heard. Miles Davis plays several split attacks in the second half of "Fishermen, Strawberry, And Devil Crab" on the Porgy And Bess album he recorded in collaboration with Gil Evans.24

Half-valving can only be done practically on a trumpet or valve trombone. The rotary valve of a trombone's F attachment does not lend itself nearly as well to the effect as the piston valves of a trumpet because the rotary valve's "more direct and accurate windway"25 makes it very difficult for the player to find with any accuracy the half-closed position necessary to produce the desired timbre. A half-valved note has a timbre that is often described as "choked" or "squeezed." Rex Stewart was quite adept at playing half-valved notes, and Duke Ellington wrote "Boy Meets Horn"26 for Stewart in part to

23 Miles Davis, My Funny Valentine, Columbia C2K 48821.
24 Miles Davis, Porgy And Bess, Columbia CL 1274.
feature the technique. Trombonists will sometimes simulate the effect by the use of a different vowel sound (discussed further below,) as can be heard at the beginning of Robin Eubanks' solo on "Brother Ty" from the Dave Holland Quintet album *The Razor's Edge.*

Many brass players will consciously change the shape of their oral cavity in a manner similar to speaking different vowels to facilitate their playing in different registers, but jazz players also use this technique to modify their timbres. One example of this has already been mentioned, and it is also frequently used along with the plunger mute. "Tricky Sam" Nanton provided an outstanding example of the timbral variety that can be achieved through the use of different vowel shapes in the last chorus of Duke Ellington's "Harlem Speaks." He plays thirty-two bars using only F, Eb, C, and various shadings of a blue note between G and Gb, but he uses eight different and distinct syllables on those pitches to create a solo that could accurately be described as *Klangfarbenmelodie.*

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**Mutes**

The great variety of different mutes used by jazz brass players, and the resulting number of different timbres, is arguably the greatest contribution that jazz has made to timbre. The practice of muting brass instruments did not originate with jazz players, but they have expanded both the frequency of muting and the variety of mutes used far beyond anything in European classical music.

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Despite the name, most mutes are used primarily to affect the timbre of the instrument. It was undoubtedly this function that first attracted brass players in early jazz to mute their instruments, and to begin experimenting with different mutes.

Until the first part of the 20th century, there was only one style of mute in common usage, what is known today as the straight mute. Straight mutes are made out of wood, cardboard, fiberboard, or metal, although only the latter two are in common usage today. Mute manufacturers have also experimented with different metals, with the all-aluminum and the copper-bottom aluminum straights being the most common. Straight mutes are actually cone-shaped, with most metal straight mutes expanding into a slight bulge at the bottom of the mute. The metal straight mutes, which have become associated with European classical music, have a more cutting and "buzzy" timbre than the fiberboard straight mutes, which are more commonly associated today with older jazz styles, where it is more commonly used in big band section playing than by soloists. The straight mute is rarely used in jazz today.

Cup mutes are most commonly made out of fiberboard or plastic. Metal cup mutes are generally regarded as inferior, because they lack the mellow quality that is characteristic of the cup mute. Cup mutes resemble the cone shape of the straight mute, with a bowl attached to the bottom whose diameter is slightly smaller than that of the bell. On the best cup mutes, this bowl is adjustable so that it can be moved nearer or farther from the bell depending on the desired timbre. The adjustable cup mute can also be helpful with intonation (which is problematic with all mutes) and with improving the

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sometimes-troublesome response of low notes that can result from use of the cup mute. A good example of the cup mute in jazz is J.J. Johnson's recording of "Portrait Of Jennie."\(^{30}\)

Joe "King" Oliver was the leading cornet player in jazz before his protégé Louis Armstrong came to the forefront. He used his hand to manipulate his Conn ball mute, moving it in and out of the bell to alter his sound. This is an awkward technique and can wreak havoc with a player's intonation. Tom "Paddy" Harmon, owner of the Dreamland Ballroom in Chicago, a nightclub where Oliver played, developed one solution to this problem. Harmon invented the mute that now bears his name to make it easier for trumpet and trombone players to produce sounds similar to the ones that Oliver was popularizing. The Harmon (or wa-wa) mute eliminates many of the intonation difficulties inherent in the manipulation of a straight mute in and out of the bell or a plunger mute over an open bell. In addition, the timbral changes can be made simply by opening and closing the hole in the stem of the mute with one's hand. The stem can be extended, with different lengths yielding different timbres. The little cup attached to the stem can also be removed on many models, yielding a further range of timbres. The most common use of the Harmon mute in jazz, however, is with the stem removed entirely from the mute. Miles Davis made this timbre famous on countless recordings throughout his career. Unfortunately, the whispery, intimate sound that the stemless Harmon mute produces on the trumpet is not matched by a comparable timbre on the trombone because of differences in the two instruments' acoustical properties. The stemless Harmon mute is used infrequently on the trombone, although it can be heard on J.J. Johnson's recording of

"You've Changed" from his album *Quintergy*. The use of the Harmon mute for "wa-wa" effects is very rare in jazz. It can actually be heard used in this way in a standard piece from the orchestral repertoire, in the trombone part from George Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue*.

The Solotone mute looks very much like a fiberboard straight mute with an additional mute extending out of the bottom of it. A crucial difference between the two mutes, however, is that the cork on the Solotone mute forms a complete ring, sealing the bell and forcing the air through the mute. Both trumpeters and trombonists in Swing Era jazz used the Solotone mute extensively. Its association with that style is so strong that it is rarely used today. A famous recording of the Solotone mute used with the trombone is Tommy Dorsey's "Song Of India."

The hat (or derby) mute is sometimes exactly that, but more frequently it is a stylized hat made from fiberboard and lined on the inside with felt. A trumpet player can manipulate it with his left hand like a plunger, but the size of the hat mute makes this technique extremely awkward for a trombonist. He will most often mount the hat mute on a stand, which makes it possible for the trombonist to move directly from an open timbre to a muted one by moving the bell of the instrument in front of the mute. Hat mutes are most often used by sections of trumpets or trombones in a big band. They were quite common in the Swing Era, and some composers and arrangers still call for them today.

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32 *Big Band Jazz: From The Beginnings To The Fifties*, vol. II, The Smithsonian Collection Of Recordings RD 030-2R.
very effective use of hat mutes by the entire brass section is heard throughout most of Jerry Dodgion's composition "Butter," recorded by the Mel Lewis Orchestra.33

The bucket mute produces a mellow, slightly muffled timbre similar enough to the hat mute that the two mutes are sometimes used interchangeably. The bucket mute is attached to the bell of a trumpet or trombone by the means of three clamps, which hold the bucket, stuffed with cotton or other soft material, about an inch from the bell. A mute with a similar material-filled end that can be inserted into the bell of the instrument like a straight or cup mute is sometimes used to make the process of attaching or removing the mute less cumbersome.

None of the mutes described above, however, are as widely used, either by jazz performers or composers of American classical music, as the plunger mute. As none of these mutes have the technical demands of the plunger, either, the plunger mute is discussed separately in the next section.

The Plunger Mute

Early jazz players added a wide variety of devices, not just mutes, to their instruments to alter their tone. Cornetist Joe "King" Oliver was reported to have used bottles, beer glasses, and plungers, in addition to the Conn ball mute, a small, metal, pear-shaped mute designed for practice use.34 Trumpeter Johnny Dunn supposedly carried around “a mess of trunks filled with pots, pans, flowerpots and other paraphernalia.”35

33Mel Lewis Orchestra, Twenty Years At The Village Vanguard, Atlantic 7 81655-1.


Jack Hatton was a New York contemporary of Dunn’s and a fellow trumpet player. Rex Stewart wrote “part of [Hatton’s] paraphernalia consisted of four kazoo’s held together with rubber bands, a metal chamber pot, and a wooden flower pot.”36 Charlie Irvis, the first trombonist in Duke Ellington's orchestra, reportedly used a bottle cap, a cap, and a bucket covering his bell to mute his trombone.37 Jack Teagarden would sometimes remove the bell of his trombone and insert the end of the slide section into a water glass.38 Of all of these "found objects," only the plunger gained widespread usage.

While at least one mute manufacturer makes hard rubber plunger mutes specifically for trumpets and trombones, a simple rubber toilet plunger (without the stick) is still best for jazz use. A plunger soft enough to be flexible is desired, because squeezing the plunger is a part of advanced plunger technique. The plunger can be used by itself, or in combination with a small metal straight mute. The Humes and Berg Pixie mute is the one most frequently used by trombonists, but the man generally recognized as the finest plunger-mute trombonist, "Tricky Sam" Nanton, used a Magosy & Buscher Nonpareil trumpet straight mute, building up the corks on the mute so that it fit his trombone bell and gave him the sounds he wanted. Magosy & Buscher has long been out of business, but Tom Crown now manufactures a copy of this mute.39 Art Baron, who became a student of plunger playing after joining the Ellington band in the early 1970s,

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38 John S. Wilson, Liner notes to *Jack Teagarden,* Time-Life Records STL-JO8.

says that he can hear a difference between an authentic Nonpareil and the Tom Crown copy, because of differences in the metal, but that the Tom Crown "is 99% of what you need."40

Using a straight mute, whether a Nonpareil or a Pixie, with the plunger has both direct and indirect influences on timbre and an influence on intonation. The acoustical properties of a closed-end pipe, such as a trumpet or trombone, cause those instruments to go out of tune when a mute is inserted into the bell or placed against it. Changing the depth or angle of the mute changes the point where the air column is first impeded and thus alters the pitch. The presence of the straight mute in the bell closes the "pipe" in a consistent manner, thus stabilizing somewhat the pitch changes brought about by opening and closing the plunger against the bell. The straight mute does, however, cause the instrument to blow consistently sharp by more than a quarter-tone. Many players compensate for this by adjusting their tuning slides, but Nanton apparently chose to correct his pitch with his slide and embouchure.41 Art Baron advises other trombonists to do likewise.42

The straight mute also increases the amount of resistance the player experiences blowing into the horn. Placing the plunger over the bell only increases the resistance and the closer the plunger is to completely closing the bell, the greater the effect. This necessitates that the player blow very hard, and playing this way has an audible impact on


42 Bernotas, 232.
the timbre. Barney Bigard, long-time clarinetist and saxophonist with the Ellington band, related a story in his autobiography to illustrate how hard Nanton blew:

"Somewhere we were onstage and Tricky...came to the front to take his solo—he blew so hard that the tuning slide at the back end of the horn flew clean across the stage. He ran back and bent down to pick it up and that broke up the house. They just figured it was a comedy routine."43 Art Baron describes Nanton's airflow in different terms:

What I've learned about Tricky was that he had a high velocity of air going through the horn. Even if he played a simple thing like "East Side, West Side" or a slow ballad, there was a real intensity to it, the air was going through very fast. So there's an urgency about his playing throughout. It's joyful and happy and fun--but intense.44

No matter how one thinks of it, any trombonist who hopes to play with a timbre similar to Nanton's must play with an intensity similar to Nanton's. This can have an adverse effect on the player's endurance and control over soft or high passages, an important consideration for both players and composers.

Whether one plays the plunger with or without the small straight mute, the plunger is held in the player's left hand with the stem between the player's index and middle fingers. While the rear of the bell section rests on the player's shoulder, the bell rests on the heel of the player's left hand. The player can then use the wrist as a hinge to swing the plunger closer and further away from the bell. Traditionally, there are two different positions for the plunger, closed and open. "Closed" position is not fully closed, as this has a quite adverse effect on intonation; rather, "closed" position is as close to the

44 Bernotas, 232.
bell as possible without radically altering the pitch. Al Grey, the man perhaps second only to Nanton in his mastery of the plunger-muted trombone, wrote an entire book on plunger mute technique. He identified five different positions for the plunger, from closed tight against the bell to fully open.\(^4^5\) Gaining control over such subtleties of mute placement is crucial for any trombonist hoping to play with timbres similar to Nanton, Grey or the other masters of the style.

Of even greater importance than plunger position in achieving the rich variety of timbres possible with the plunger is the use of different vowel shapes in the player's oral cavity. The basic plunger sound is usually described as a "wa," but if this sound is slowed down, it is revealed that it is actually a combination of two vowel sounds—"oo" and "ah." Nanton also made extensive use of a "ya" sound, which is actually a combination of "ee" and "ah." Vowel shapes are combined with movement of the plunger (closed to open for the "wa") and squeezing of the plunger\(^4^6\) to produce the desired sounds.


CHAPTER 4

THE USE OF JAZZ TIMBRE IN TWO WORKS FOR SOLO TROMBONE

Robert Suderburg: Night Set (Chamber Music III)

Although the work was published in 1980 under the title Chamber Music III (Night Set), composer Robert Suderburg later decided that he preferred the two parts of the title switched, as in the heading above.

Night Set was commissioned by trombonist Stuart Dempster, who worked closely with Suderburg during the writing of the work, and some of what eventually became part of the piece was derived from improvisations Dempster and Suderburg performed together, the latter playing piano. In addition, Dempster edited and annotated the score. This kind of close collaboration between composer and performer is reminiscent of the working methods of jazz composer Duke Ellington during the time period that Night Set is meant to evoke. This is one of many parallels between Night Set and jazz that reinforce the work's connections to jazz and thus the appropriateness of using jazz timbres during much of the work.

Writing a work for trombone gave Suderburg the opportunity for a musical reminiscence. Suderburg wrote in the "Composer's Note" at the front of the score:

Being the son of a jazz and club trombonist, one recalls a childhood filled with the coming and going of all types of musicians at all varieties of hour. Most of all, however, it guaranteed that the instrument itself and the way R.A. Suderburg played it would produce sound and sight images never to be forgotten. Thus, when commissioned by Stuart Dempster for a Night Set for trombone, the musical occasion was offered to let out those hot-licks and sliding styles which were the jazz trombonist's stock and
trade during the thirties and forties as he wandered from indoor dance hall to outdoor bandstand and from club date to stage show.\textsuperscript{47}

Because of the inspiration for the work, the score of \textit{Night Set} is filled with references, both verbal and musical, to the timbres of Swing Era trombonists, although these are not manifested until the second movement. The short first movement, sub-titled "cry, man," contains nothing in the notation that would indicate a connection to jazz. Dempster calls this movement the most "classical" of the piece,\textsuperscript{48} and, in fact, the trombonist plays the entire movement with a straight mute—the mute most associated with European classical music.

A note to the trombonist at the beginning of the second movement, "its been a long, long time," provides a clear indication that the nature of the music has now changed, and that timbre is an important part of this change. The trombonist is instructed to play "Legato; floating, laid back, yet leading breath accents. Slide or lip vibrato, in 'cool' jazz style. 'Airy' or 'fuzzy' tone would be appropriate." This description includes most, if not all, of the basic components of a jazz timbre as identified in Chapter 2. It is clear that Suderburg wants the trombonist to sound like a jazz player, not a European classical player. The call for hat mute in much of the movement further reinforces the desire for a jazz timbre.

In mm. 49-58, the trombonist is asked to execute a series of "buzzed-lip" glissandos. A detailed description of the effect is written in the score:

These glissandi should begin as a lip-buzz away from the mouthpiece. (The player can drop the head so that the lower lip leaves the mouthpiece

\textsuperscript{47} Robert Suderburg, \textit{Chamber Music III (Night Set)}, (Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 1980).

\textsuperscript{48} Stuart Dempster, interview by author, 17 May 2002.
completely although the upper lip is still touching.) By the time the top note of the glissando is reached, the mouth and mouthpiece should be as normal. This is to be done in the style of Vic Dickenson or, more recently, Phil Wilson.49

This is the second place in the movement where a detailed written explanation concludes with an indication that what is desired is a standard jazz timbre or timbral effect (the instruction "In 'cool' jazz style" at the beginning of the movement is the first instance). Suderburg and Dempster understood that the trombonists most likely to perform Night Set would be trained in the European classical tradition, and timbres and techniques that are second nature to a jazz player might be quite foreign to a classical player. Notation and written instructions in Night Set which at first may appear quite daunting are often simply meant to explain as clearly as possible a timbre common in jazz. Understanding that is one of the keys to a successful performance of the work.

After a fermata in m. 76, the music changes character, and the trombonist needs to keep in mind that Night Set is not just supposed to evoke jazz, but other kinds of music that a "jazz and club trombonist" was likely to play. After three measures of piano, the trombonist reenters, playing an oddly syncopated version of the familiar waltz "Over The Waves." This melody suggests a park band or perhaps a circus, and the extensive use of accents, the non-legato nature of the phrases and the "square" tonguing and slurring combinations that begin in m. 88 all serve to indicate, without any written instructions being necessary, that this passage should not be played with a jazz timbre.

This section of the movement literally comes to a halt with a fermata in m. 109. The trombonist resolves his held A with a smear into Bb that signals a return to jazz style

49 Suderburg, 9.
and timbre. Suderburg specifically calls first for a slide vibrato and then a "wide vibrato" as the movement approaches its dynamic and melodic climax in mm. 124 and 125. After a short fermata in m. 125, the trombonist is asked to execute a quick fall or "drop."

Again, a detailed written explanation of the technique is included. The movement ends with what a jazz player would call a rip covering the range of a ninth. Suderburg calls it a "harmonic gliss," which conveys to a player lacking in jazz experience exactly what sound is desired with only two words.

The third movement, "brother Devil," begins with a slow passage that is perhaps the only instance in the score where style and timbre do not seem to be clearly indicated by notation, written instruction or both. Surprisingly, this is a passage where timbre is apparently quite important to the composer, because Suderburg, Dempster, and Maureen Horgan (a trombonist who has performed Night Set several times with Suderburg playing the piano part) all made reference to it in interviews with me. All of them referred to it with the same term, "big band," and Suderburg said that he believed the key to understanding timbres in Night Set were in recognizing which passages were big band and which were "chamber jazz." 50 After playing through these eight measures of music a few times, however, an astute musician should be able to grasp the desired timbre, for while there is no eye-catching notation or detailed written instructions, Suderburg has so carefully indicated dynamics, articulations, inflections and phrasing that the trombonist is almost forced to play with the proper style and timbre.

After the slow introduction, the tempo doubles and Suderburg begins, tentatively

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50 Suderburg, interview by author, 21 May 2002.
at first, to explore the timbral possibilities of the trombonist using different vowel shapes while playing. By m. 25, Suderburg has the trombonist playing with these alternative timbres almost exclusively. While no specific words are formed between m. 25 and m. 35, the speech-like character of this passage prepares the listener for mm. 43-54, where the trombonist speaks what appear to be nonsense syllables through the horn in a kind of Sprechstimme. The pianist responds in a semi-whisper with similar syllables. However, this passage actually is a musical in-joke between Suderburg and Dempster. During the time that Suderburg was composing Night Set, Dempster frequently told a joke whose punch line was a priest screaming, "Fuck me?! Fuck you!!" Hence the syllables "thuk-ee" and "thuk-oo." Underneath this, the pianist plays the "Dies Irae" melody so slowly that it is almost unrecognizable.

This passage, with its simulated cursing, resembles a Charles Mingus recording, "What Love," during which Mingus' bass and Eric Dolphy's bass clarinet seem to carry on an argument, with the bass "speaking" several times the same epithet evoked in the Suderburg. All of this is within the jazz tradition of "talking" solos, which can be traced back to talking African instruments, as discussed in Chapter 2.

After a brief recapitulation of themes from earlier in the movement, the trombonist inserts a Harmon mute (stem in) and begins simulating laughter by using the hand to "wa-wa" over the opening in the mute on almost every pitch. The pianist soon joins in with laughter of his own and the two performers sound as if they are sharing a laugh over the recently-told joke. Eventually, the laughter dies away, and the trombonist puts down the Harmon mute and picks up the plunger mute.
Suderburg instructs the trombonist to play a brief cadenza "in the style of 'Tricky Sam' Nanton." Because the passage immediately following the cadenza requires the trombonist to play both plunger-muted and open notes in rapid succession, it is not possible for the trombonist to use a small straight mute in conjunction with the plunger during the cadenza. This limits the trombonist's ability to play with a timbre similar to Nanton's, but other aspects of Nanton's style can certainly be employed, including the use of different vowel shapes to modify the timbre.

The movement ends with a return to the material of the first movement, but this time, the trombonist is instructed to use "very tight plunger mute" instead of the straight mute called for in the first movement. Stuart Dempster confirmed in an interview with me that what is desired is the plunger all the way against the bell for a distant, mysterious effect. Because of the severe effect this has on the trombone's intonation, the player must adjust pitch with the slide to ensure that this passage is in tune.

The two trombonists who have worked closest with Robert Suderburg on Night Set, Stuart Dempster and Maureen Horgan, both regard the work as one with strong jazz elements, rather than as a jazz work per se. For an effective performance of the piece, though, the performer must have a real understanding of jazz style and jazz timbre. The notation, as complex as it can appear at times, is in almost all cases designed to assist the performer in creating sounds that jazz trombonists play routinely. A player who gets too involved in the literal realization of what is notated will miss the spirit of the work. Night Set is not a vehicle for improvisation—the performer should not change rhythms or

\[51\] Dempster.
pitches—but like a jazz musician playing from a lead sheet or written arrangement, a performance of *Night Set (Chamber Music III)* should ultimately be judged by the performer's ability to transcend the notation and capture the styles and sounds the piece was written to evoke.

*Arrows Of Time*

When Richard Peaslee's *Arrows Of Time* is compared to *Night Set (Chamber Music III)*, two things are revealed. The first is how much had changed in jazz between the Swing Era jazz of the 1930s and 1940s (which inspired *Night Set*) and the modern or progressive jazz of the 1950s, one of the inspirations for *Arrows Of Time*. The second is how much changed in the trombone world in the 25 years between *Night Set*'s composition in 1972 and the writing of *Arrows Of Time* in 1997.

In his note "About The Music" at the front of the score, Peaslee writes, "One of my main influences has been Bill Russo's trombone writing for the Stan Kenton Orchestra spearheaded by Frank Rosolino's spectacular solos." While the Kenton Orchestra had an instrumentation similar to the big bands that "Tricky Sam" Nanton and Vic Dickenson were members of in the Swing Era, its sounds and style were very different from the 1930s and 1940s bands that inspired *Night Set*. Modern jazz, which began with bebop in the early 1940s, was generally concerned with harmonic and rhythmic complexity and virtuosity, while earlier jazz styles were generally concerned with a swinging rhythmic feeling and touching, or at least entertaining, their audience. "Progressive Jazz" was a style of modern jazz that emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

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1950s, and Stan Kenton was one of its leaders. One of the goals of progressive jazz was to combine the harmonic and rhythmic complexity and virtuosity of bebop with the formal complexity and seriousness of purpose of European classical music. As progressive jazz and other modern jazz styles moved further away from the African roots of jazz, many of the African-influenced timbral characteristics of earlier jazz styles became less prominent, and some began to vanish altogether.

This helps to explain why Arrows Of Time lacks almost all of the timbral modifications found in Night Set. Arrows Of Time calls for no mutes, no vowel shapes are specified, and the only timbral or pitch modifications of any kind that are indicated on the score are a small number of harmonic glissandi (or rips) in the second and third movements. A visual examination of the score for Arrows Of Time reveals a piece of sheet music with the look of European classical music, a marked contrast with Night Set.

Beyond the previously cited note at the front of the score, the jazz influence in Arrows Of Time is revealed through articulations and a few short written instructions. The first of these is at the beginning of the first movement, where "Jazz feeling" is indicated. This is an ambiguous marking, which could be interpreted as anything from a swing rhythmic feeling to the overall style of the movement. My own feelings about the nature of the work lead me to interpret the marking in the latter way, a view that is supported by the marking of the more specific "jazz eighths" at m. 64.

At m. 83, Peaslee marks both "straight eighths" and "tongued legato," a style of articulation much more prevalent in European classical trombone playing than jazz. These markings reinforce a concept that Peaslee implies in his "About The Music" note at the beginning of the score, where he writes that Joe Alessi, who premiered Arrows Of
Time, "was the ideal player for this work in that he can seamlessly combine both a
classical and jazz technique in his playing."\textsuperscript{53} Peaslee clearly conceives of Arrows Of
Time as a piece with both classical and jazz elements, and an idiomatically appropriate
performance of the work should include timbres from both styles. Since Peaslee provides
nothing more than articulations to guide the player in choosing appropriate timbres, it is
crucial that anyone performing Arrows Of Time have enough familiarity with both styles
to recognize which one is dominant in a given passage, and then be able to play that
passage with an appropriate timbre. When playing those parts of Arrows Of Time that call
for a "jazz" timbre, I believe it is most appropriate that the player be guided by Peaslee's
reference to Frank Rosolino in the preface. Rosolino had a timbre that, while it lacked
many of the African-influenced elements of "Tricky Sam" Nanton's or Vic Dickenson's
timbres, was still clearly a jazz sound. I believe this is due in large part to Rosolino's
attacks, which have the same kind of percussive quality that virtually all jazz players'
attacks have.

The second movement of Arrows Of Time contains almost no markings that
would indicate the style or timbre desired. The music itself, however, with its syncopated
rhythms and thick but consonant harmonies (with frequent use of seventh and ninth
chords), seems to indicate a strong jazz influence. I approach this movement as a jazz
ballad in the smooth style of such Kenton trombone section features as "Here's That
Rainy Day" and "But Beautiful."

The third movement, despite the presence of the aforementioned harmonic
glissandi (or rips), is the least jazz-like in its rhythmic, melodic and harmonic content. I

\textsuperscript{53} Peaslee.
believe this is the one movement of *Arrows Of Time* that calls for a European classical timbre.

It was stated earlier that, in addition to its reflection of the progressive jazz style of the late 1940s and 1950s, *Arrows Of Time* is indicative of changes in the trombone world in the past 25 years. While the work, like the Suderburg, is clearly aimed at the classical trombonist, Peaslee felt very little need to explain or even notate the jazz elements that he explicitly states are a significant part of the piece. This indicates a level of trust in the jazz knowledge and skills of prospective performers of the work that was clearly not shared by Robert Suderburg when he composed *Night Set* in the 1970s. It is noteworthy that Peaslee mentions in his preface to the score two trombonists who were of assistance to him while he was composing *Arrows Of Time*. Joe Alessi is principal trombonist of the New York Philharmonic, and he has also participated in several jazz recordings, both for his own and others' albums. Jim Pugh, the other trombonist Peaslee acknowledges, is best known as one of the top jazz and studio trombonists in New York City, but he also performs both chamber and orchestral music in the European classical tradition. Alessi and Pugh are just two of many trombonists of the past quarter-century who are comfortable and proficient in both the European classical and jazz idioms. It is for such musicians that Robert Suderburg composed *Night Set (Chamber Music III)* and Richard Peaslee composed *Arrows Of Time*. Hopefully, the growing number of such musicians will encourage the composition of even more works that draw on the richness of both the European classical and jazz traditions.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Jazz-influenced works for solo trombone have become a significant part of trombonists' repertoire. The primary purpose of this paper was to argue for the importance of timbre in idiomatically appropriate performances of these works, but a by-product of this argument was a considerable body of evidence that the production of characteristic jazz timbres involves some important differences in technique from the European classical approach to playing the trombone. It follows that if jazz-influenced works are to be performed in an idiomatically appropriate style, then jazz technique must become a part of classical trombonists' education. This has proven to be one of the biggest obstacles in achieving idiomatically appropriate performances of jazz-influenced works.

Despite the positive development of the growing number of trombonists comfortable in both the European classical and jazz idioms, there is still much progress to be made in the training and education of trombonists and other musicians in this country. Most music schools, whether large or small, have been very slow in transforming themselves from a nineteenth-century European conservatory approach into schools that embrace the incredible flowering of music that took place in the twentieth century outside of the European classical tradition. It is hard to say whether this is a cause or an effect of the still very small amount of material that is available for the teaching of trombone playing outside of the European classical tradition. Only a few of the traditional trombone
texts and methods even acknowledge music other than the European. Robin Gregory's *The Trombone* has a positive, albeit short, section on the contribution of jazz and other twentieth century music to the development of trombone technique. Edward Kleinhammer's *The Art Of Trombone Playing* is the only traditional method book I could find that even mentions in a positive way an approach to trombone playing other than the orchestral, and then it is only in passing.

This situation would not be so bad if there were more texts and methods that addressed trombone playing outside of the European classical tradition. Stuart Dempster's *The Modern Trombone* remains the definitive text in this regard, although it addresses jazz only as it has influenced the classical avant-garde. David Baker's *Contemporary Techniques For The Trombone* is out of print. Bill Watrous' and Alan Raph's *Trombonisms* remains the best jazz trombone method available, although it is slim and tends to focus on extended techniques more than conventional jazz technique. There are several jazz trombone methods that address one aspect of playing, including Al Grey's *Plunger Techniques*, Bob McChesney's *Doodle Studies and Etudes* and Steve Wiest's *Take The Lead*. Unfortunately, all of these books are either self-published or are published by small companies and have limited distribution. A recent, and most welcome, addition to the literature is Sam Burtis' *The American Trombone*, but it too is self-published. Perhaps the most positive recent development in jazz trombone pedagogy has been the recent publication of several jazz etude books that come with compact disc.

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recordings that include rhythm section accompaniment on one track and the etudes performed by a top jazz trombonist on the other. The best of these is Jim Snidero's *Jazz Conception* series. These etude books are important because they emphasize aural learning and imitation.

Because of the central place that improvisation holds in jazz, and because the development of jazz roughly coincides with the development of the phonograph, recordings, rather than written scores, have always been the central “texts” of jazz. These recordings have been crucial not only to the dissemination of jazz, but also to the training of jazz musicians. Listening to and imitating recorded performances have been a part of the training of every jazz musician since the first jazz recordings were issued in 1917. Countless jazz musicians have spent hours painstakingly learning not just the pitches and rhythms, but every nuance of recorded jazz solos. This process has clearly played a crucial role in the development and continuance of a characteristic jazz timbre. As a result, it should also play a role in the training process of musicians performing in the American classical style.

Given timbre’s importance in differentiating jazz and other kinds of American music from European classical music, it should be a significant part of a performer’s interpretation of those works that are significantly influenced by jazz. It is the hope of this writer that this paper will lead to more informed and idiomatically appropriate performances of those works, which draw from the worlds of both jazz and European classical music.
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