

The name Franz Schubert does not typically come to the forefront of most trombonists' minds when considering the notable passages in orchestral repertoire. Thinking back over the thirty-something auditions I have taken, Schubert was rarely a required excerpt. However, I argue that without Schubert, the trombone would have not gained traction as a suitable melodic instrument and we would have remained in the relative 'Dark Ages' of trombone writing until another champion arose to the task. Of course we have the challenging chorales and passagework of Mozart masses, and the grandeur of Beethoven 5 and 9, but not until Schubert did we experience more consistent, and involved, writing for our instrument. Schubert is one of my favorite composers to perform because he includes the trombones in the music-making, rather than just for background chords or as "an extension of the percussion section", to quote Jay Friedman.

### **Style, Articulation, Sound, and Dynamics**

Before dissecting the passages of Schubert Symphonies No. 8 & 9, I'd like to highlight the fact that Schubert was foremost a song and chamber music composer. This alone should serve as a starting point for trombonists beginning to study his orchestral repertoire. The approach is that of large chamber music: trombones never overpowering the orchestra and clarity trumping volume. When taking an audition, one must be able to demonstrate this knowledge through sound, articulation, dynamics, and phrasing. Another point I'd like to make is that Germanic music is often mistakenly approached with more concern to density and breadth of sound, with the clarity of articulation falling by the wayside. The German language is a highly articulate language that uses much consonance, and must be spoken with the utmost clarity. Germanic music should be no different – I suggest listening to Schubert lieder cycles for examples, especially those recorded by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Thomas Quasthoff.

Articulations need ease and immediacy ('ping'), while being void of pesante and any sluggishness. This holds true for all playing, but is more so evident when lacking in lighter Romantic works, such as Schubert. Air attacks are a fantastic way to practice your sound's immediacy, in all dynamic ranges. Schubert provides enough gentle entrances that you want to be completely comfortable with response, without dependency on bursts of air and the tongue to start sound. The use of sforzando is prevalent in Schubert, and care must be taken to develop a concept of accent and resonance without percussiveness.

With regard to sound, warmth and clarity are essential. Remember, Schubert was a vocal composer and the sound should reflect this fact.

The tone should be clear, beautiful, and resonant. Our individual manifestations may differ, but at least fall within those descriptive categories. When playing in the louder dynamic range, think of inflating the sound, rather than playing 'hotter' or angrier. Remember that resonance trumps volume, and the ease of your sound production will be evident in a ringing, beautiful sound.

Dynamics may differ orchestra to orchestra, often depending on ensemble size and the conductor's taste. In general, keep dynamics relative to the early Romantic period: Schubert ≠ Wagner ≠ Mahler ≠ Mozart. The excitement of forte and above will come from the timbre, not from sheer decibels. I will elaborate on that when discussing instrument selection.

### Instruments

Here is where I could get myself in trouble with the purists AND the stalwarts that will only play their 'main' trombone – and that's OK! There have been numerous publications on the proposed use of ATB, and various trombones' applications to the time period in question. My personal preference is to use what Schubert intended: alto, tenor, and bass trombone. There is a magical quality and color to the section sound when these voices are employed, and Schubert is one of the first to truly use it as a section voicing rather than just doubling vocal lines. Here in Buffalo, we use a Thein Kruspe alto, a 1970s Bach 36, and a 1940s Conn 70H. Not exactly the combination you would imagine to work, BUT IT DOES! They create a wonderfully warm, homogenous sound in unison, with excitement and brilliance in the triumphant passages. Be sure to try numerous combinations, ultimately using what sounds the best.

One of the advantages of downsizing equipment (besides doubling pay!) is the quality of sound in the louder dynamics. To achieve the timbre of *f* or *ff* on modern symphonic instruments, we must often play at a volume level excessively loud for the repertoire. Smaller trombones achieve the timbre at a lower volume, meaning you can play comfortable dynamic contrasts, without overpowering the orchestra. For my segment of this feature, I'll be speaking about alto and tenor, leaving Jared to discuss bass.

Regarding the alto trombone, an instrument that can blend into the tenor voice is ideal. There is much unison in Schubert, and the alto voice needs to blend without sounding like a large trumpet. Some players prefer an alto with a trigger (oh, ye purists' scorn!) to facilitate some of the lower passages, but it is not necessary as long as you can play an in-tune E in 7<sup>th</sup> position. For auditions, never use the alto unless you have MASTERED

it! The alto is more likely to detract from the committee's impression than add to it. My advice would be to use it only if there are other required alto excerpts on the repertoire list.

For tenor trombone, anything that can bridge the gap between the alto and bass is appropriate. In an effort to be somewhat historically accurate, I like to play a straight-tenor on 2<sup>nd</sup> when alto is being used on 1<sup>st</sup>. I find that the sound is more buoyant and can better blend with the alto, while lacking the heft of an F-attachment instrument. Large tenors often tend to sound dull on early Romantic repertoire, so experiment with bore sizes and/or bells. My choice for Schubert, Schumann, and even Beethoven and Mozart is my Bach 36. It is an extremely flexible instrument that can sound huge or compact and nimble, so it is a joy to play as a secondary tenor trombone.

My last point should be obvious, but deserves mention: practice your secondary trombone! You need to have intimate knowledge of its intonation and timbre qualities, and you mustn't rely on a quick cram-session the week of a performance to reacclimate. Also, be prepared to switch if the conductor wants something different. While they probably don't know as much about the trombone as you do, you must humor the boss!

### **Schubert No. 8 "Unfinished"**

The 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony is a treat, albeit a short one, to perform for two reasons: 1) the trombones actually play, and 2) you experience beautiful melodies all around you. In the first movement, letter D (**Example 1**) is where the trombones have their melodic moment. This passage must demonstrate a strong and stern sound, without sounding pushed. Let resonance and the blend of all three voices do the work. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Trombonist must be aware of when they are in unison with the 1<sup>st</sup> or Bass, as the part jumps between pairings and you will likely need to adjust for timbre discrepancies. I also find it appropriate for the 2<sup>nd</sup> player's sound to lead when in unison with the alto's lower register, as to avoid the alto having a crass or 'laser' tone in that dynamic. This idea will return when discussing Symphony No. 9.

Be sure to observe the diminuendo in bar 178, as the woodwinds answer the trombones and it clears the way for the strings' passagework. Also, beware the Trombone 1 & 2 unison in bars 194-197: C, B, A#. These four bars offer an excellent opportunity for alternate positions on the alto (4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>) and tenor (3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>), so that the alto and tenor are both moving slides in the same direction, which helps to keep pitch uniform. I would suggest letting one voice be stronger and the other fitting inside.

The second movement is gratifying especially for the Bass trombonist, as Schubert provides melody and a wonderful bass line for our oft-neglected colleague. For the bulk of this movement, the bass trombone is paired with low strings, and again, I will let Jared elaborate on that responsibility. As for alto and tenor, the entrance at letter A (**Example 2**) should be regal and sostenuto. The third bar of each phrase includes an accent on beat 2, which should be executed mostly by air rather than tongue. Remember to keep a vocal approach – this is not band music! Alto players may find the 5<sup>th</sup> position D# to be handy, especially when used as a passing or neighbor tone.

The final E major chord can be challenging, due to the tight voicing and dynamic. Spend time finding this chord with your colleagues, and be sure to practice those soft chops! This is one of those moments that no one notices the trombones unless they speak late or out of tune, so preparation and confidence is essential.

### Symphony No. 9 “The Great C Major”

This work is an absolute joy to play, and is one of the most engaging and musically rewarding for the trombones. “The Great” requires much refinement in all the aforementioned categories, and rewards our efforts with some fabulous moments.

When preparing this piece for an audition or concert, I always keep the words ‘regal’ and ‘elegant’ in mind. Let’s dig in.

The first movement is the most likely to be asked on auditions, but it is important to know the complete symphony. The distant horn call of the beginning sets up our approach to the entire movement: stately, full, unforced sound with linear direction of phrases. We must establish our Schubert fortissimo, keeping in mind the early Romantic period. Remember, blend and resonance will provide the volume, so don’t even think about adding the heat! The accents in the opening passage should be of weight, not sharpness of tongue strike; Air > Tongue.

The popular excerpt begins the 14<sup>th</sup> bar of letter F (**Example 4**), often marked ‘solo’. The bulk of this passage is in unison, so individual pitch study and precision of articulation is paramount before sitting down with your colleagues. In this register, I have always found that the tenor and bass voices can lead, while the alto blends into them. It is common practice to hold the half notes a full bar, perhaps even over the bar line. The effect of the line disappearing back into the texture can be quite

captivating and draw the listener's ear ever closer. Pace the crescendo into letter G, without giving it all away at once. I like to add some 'zip' to the sound starting 4 bars before G to prepare the ff at G, which also adds to the momentum without accelerando. This is where the excitement of ff on smaller instruments can be fully employed. Once arriving at letter G, the individual voices can be stronger when in harmony. The crescendo/diminuendo on the arpeggios after G is quite an effective device by Schubert, but they are somewhat counterintuitive and awkward to execute. I suggest practicing the <> technique on scales, arpeggios, and long tones away from this passage.

The section 12 bars before H through 6 bars after H (**Example 5**) requires weight on the downbeats without smacking them. The 8<sup>th</sup> notes tend to be 'kicked out', which detracts from the downbeats, so strive to keep the phrase flowing forward two bars at a time. The 'solo' theme returns after letter M, but be aware that it is not 100% unison this time. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Trombone jumps between unison pairings, so as in Symphony No. 8, you need to be aware to make the appropriate adjustments.

The second movement requires absolute control of the soft dynamics, but does not offer as much thematic content for the trombones as movements I, II, and IV. The Bass trombone gets a few short, but important, moments to serve as a solo bass line. The passage that needs the most attention as a section is 22–31 bars after K. Be sure to know the chords and your role in tuning them.

The Austrian dance (ländler) style of movement III demands section uniformity of sforzando so as to not overpower the orchestra or "bog down" the dance. Be sure to keep in mind that ff is relative to your ensemble size and early Romantic style. The Trio in this movement affords the trombones an opportunity to play horn-like accompanimental figures in a chamber setting: be light, buoyant, and clear. The Trombone 1 ostinato 24 bars after letter F gives the chance to show off a beautiful, light, lyrical Schubert sound. Listen to the clarinet and bassoon to match style and weight of accents.

The fourth movement is a triumphant rush of energy, and for me, it paints the picture of a celebratory royal feast; complete with nobles, clergy, patrons, jesters, and tumblers parading about the court. Be sure to differentiate between ff and fz: I prefer more 'ping' and decay on sforzando, which propels musical momentum and keeps the trombones from over-sustaining.

35 bars after letter F, tutti trombones play the movement's secondary theme (**Example 6**). Keep this melody moving forward, in 8 bar phrases,

with a buoyant style. Referring to our “royal feast” depiction, you can almost envision the court jester mocking a pompous priest, while the priest simultaneously scolds him. When the melody repeats, the Bass trombone is soli with bassoons and low strings, so put out some sound! The half note arpeggios between letters L and M warrant chord analysis, so spend the time working out intonation and balance.

My closing suggestion returns to something I mentioned earlier. Find words that characterize these symphonies – noble, regal, triumphant, elegant, etc – and use them to define your approach. With diligent practice and listening, you can put yourself in the performance mode and musical style with one ‘trigger’ word. Lastly, enjoy the melodies around you, and be thankful that Schubert gave us some of our own!