Bassoon Fundamentals

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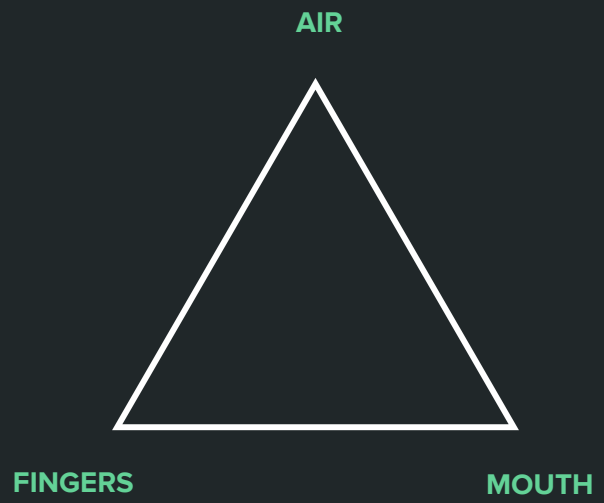
Special Topic: Intonation

How do we play in tune on bassoon?
What affects pitch?
What is in our control?

Tone Production

the triangle of performance



Air: Our bassoon relies on quality air to produce quality sound. Make sure you are taking a breath that fills your whole torso from the bottom of your lungs up to the top, like a water balloon sinks and expands when it is filled from a faucet. Then, support outward with the lower muscles of your abdomen. Faster airstreams can raise the pitch of flat notes, prevent slurs from cracking, and open up the sound in upper registers.

Fingers: Sometimes alternate or resonance fingerings are necessary to fix issues with intonation or tone quality, especially in the upper register. Similarly, fingerings used for trills can be applied in quick passages or embellishments as technical options. Today we will cover special fingering considerations of half-holing and flicking, as well.

Mouth: The embouchure is the way your lips and face muscles work with the reed, but the shape inside of our mouths also affects our sound in many ways. This concept is called “voicing.” Softening the embouchure or thinking about having more space inside the mouth (say the syllable “oh”) can lower pitch and open up tone, while firming up the embouchure and raising the tongue (say the syllable “ay”) can raise pitch and support thin notes. Embouchure support combined with voicing are the third point of the triangle.

Tongue Position

Front - Middle - Back:

Front

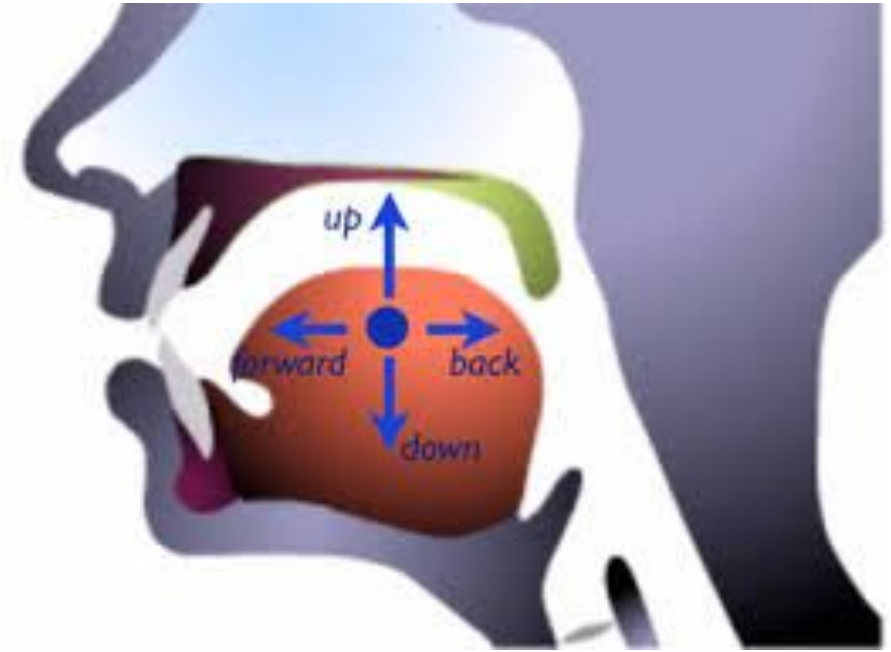
- *Near teeth*
- *Tip of tongue “flick”*

Middle

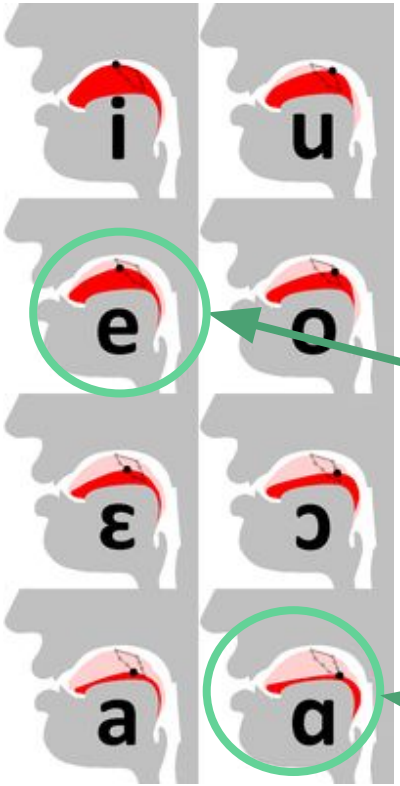
- *Distance to roof of mouth*
- *“Resonant” vowel*

Back

- *“Throat position”*
- *“Open”ness*

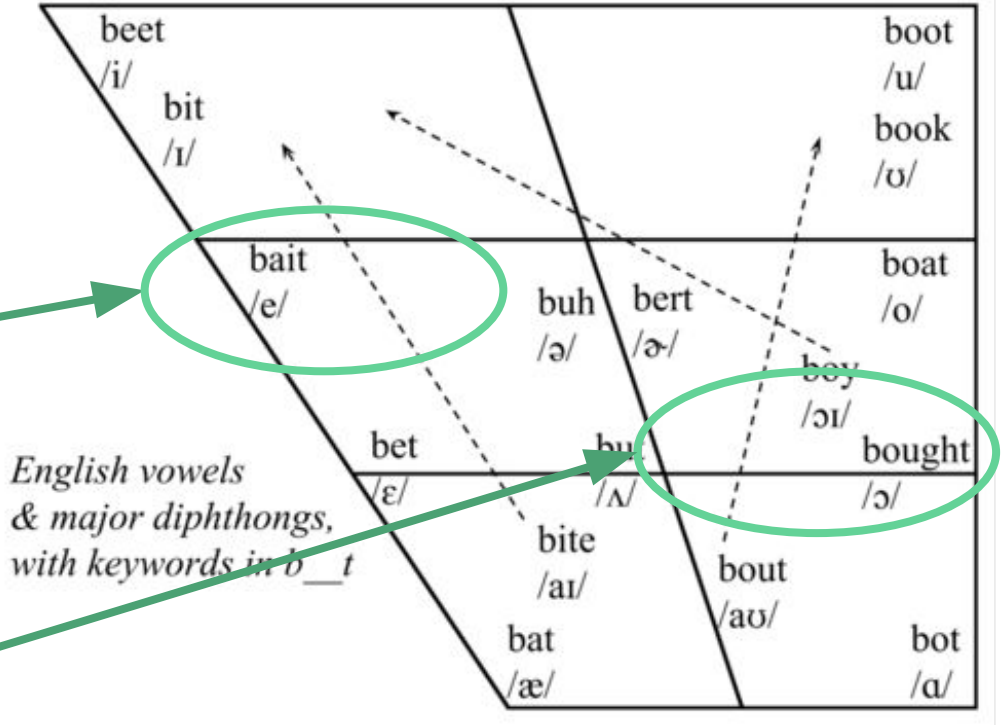


Voicing



Tenor

Bass



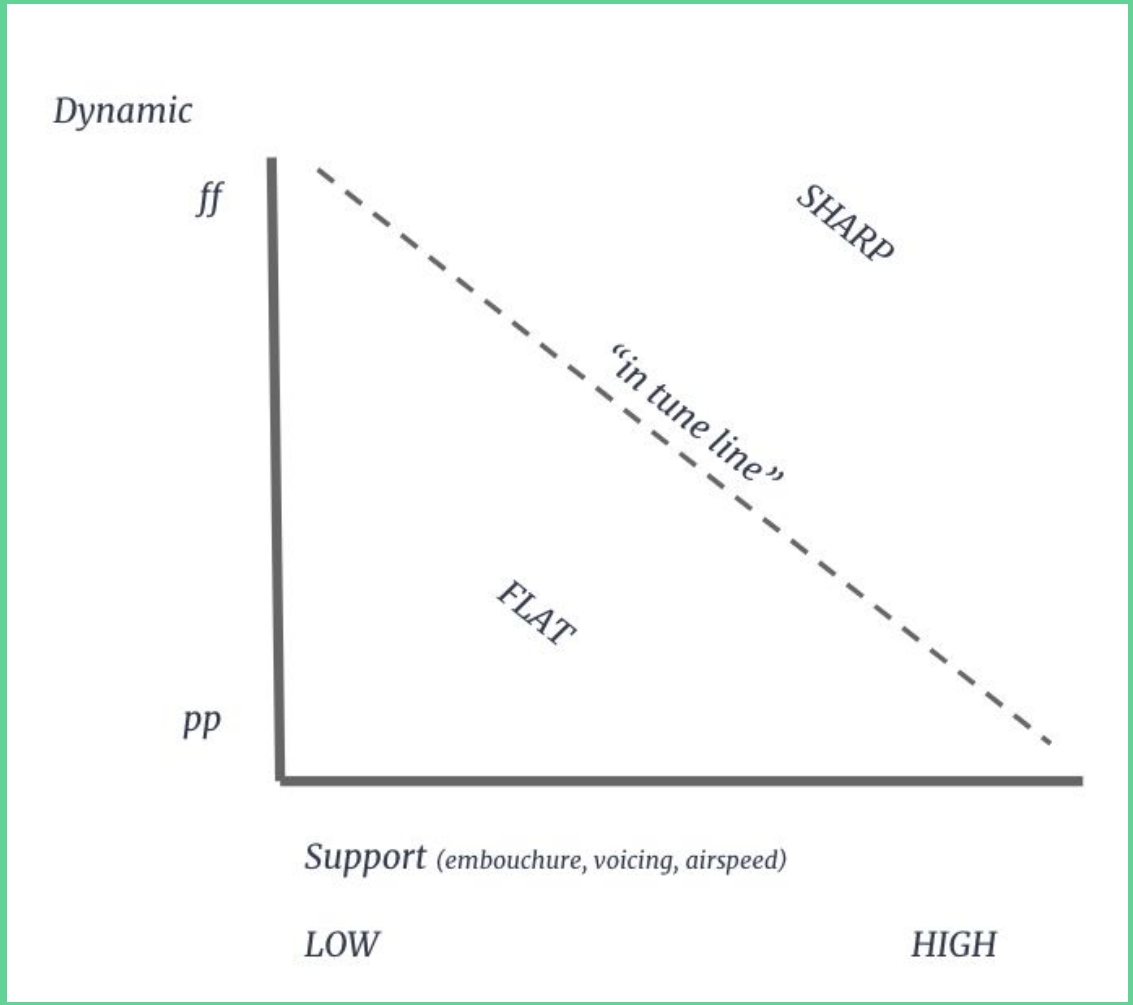
from

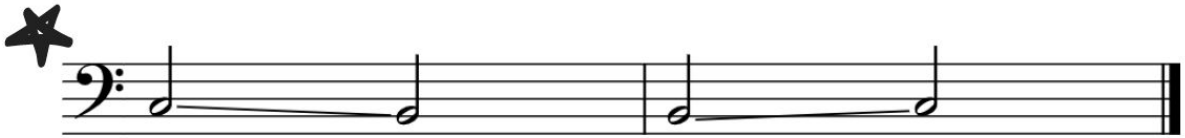
Daily Routine

for control and technical development

Book available soon.

Upcoming volumes about contrabassoon, reed making, and technique building.


Dynamic
ff
pp
SHARP
"in tune line"
FLAT
Support (embouchure, voicing, airspeed)
LOW
HIGH

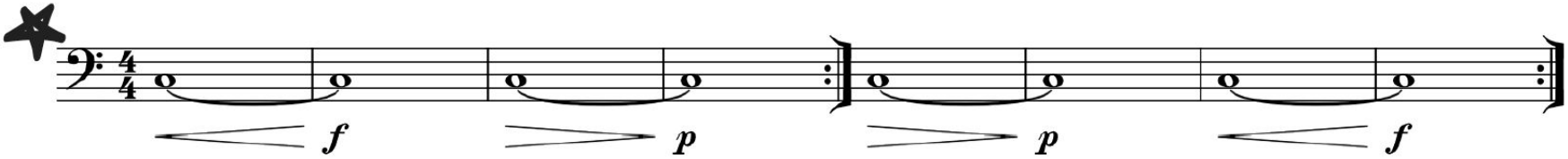


Remember, the ★ indicates a "key session" that should be done everyday as part of your general warm-up.

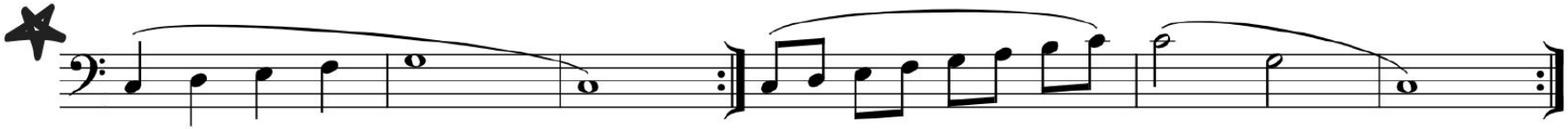
This "C-drop" exercise may be done on the reed alone or on the reed+bocal instrument.

1. Play a stable pitch, either approximately an F on the reed or C-C# on the bocal,
2. Release all embouchure muscles until the pitch lowers at least a half step.
3. Engage the muscles in your abdomen to speed up the airstream, raising the pitch back to its original starting point. (Note: early in this exercise, the pitch will increase in dynamic, as well.)

This exercise should **feel** like a slight tingling or shaking in the muscles at the corners of your mouth then the sense of pushing out or down with your core muscles. You will **hear** a downward glissando followed by an upward, slightly crescendoing glissando. It will **look** like a softening of the facial muscles during the "drop" portion that remains soft when the support is transferred from embouchure to air.

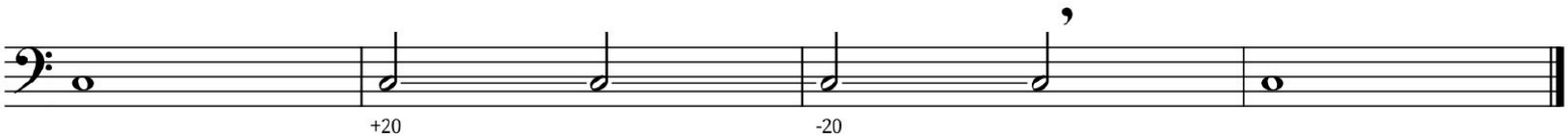


The goal of this exercise is to establish consistent, linear growth and decay with identical dynamic peaks and valleys through crescendos and decrescendos, all while maintaining a stable sound and center of pitch. Listen closely for wavering or shaking and address the balance of your embouchure, air speed, and air pressure to stabilize the tone. Repeating this exercise over decreasing numbers of beats will reinforce effective tapers, forte-pianos, and sforzandi.



Repeat these patterns in all accessible octaves and at extreme dynamics.

Where do you **feel** the more resistant intervals, and what do you need to do as you move between notes to **hear** reliable response with uniform dynamic and a consistently resonant tone?



This is a pitch bending exercise. First articulate the pitch with your habitual setup, then alternate from a very specific amount sharp through in tune to specifically flat then back up to in tune before re-articulating with your new, in tune setup.

Start this exercise with a 20 cent intonation range then decrease to 15, 10, and 5 cents as your control and ability to make minor pitch adjustments improve

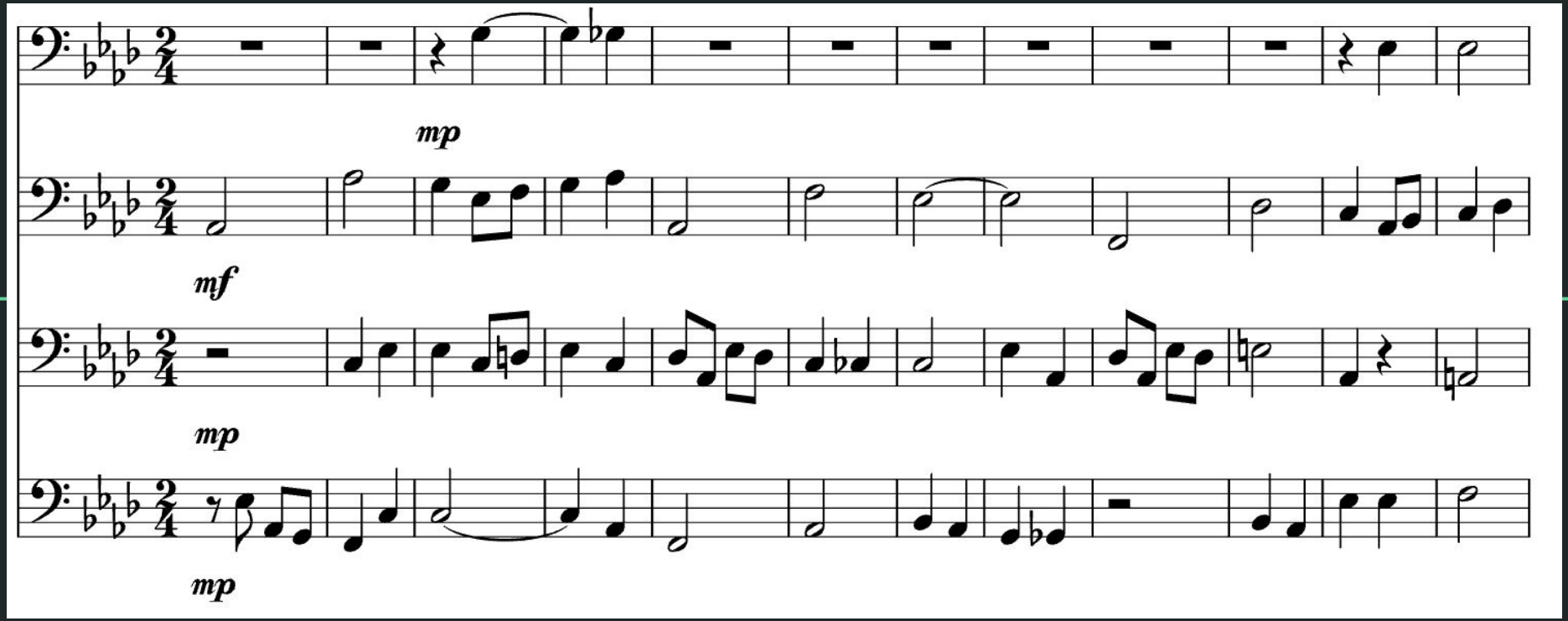
In Context

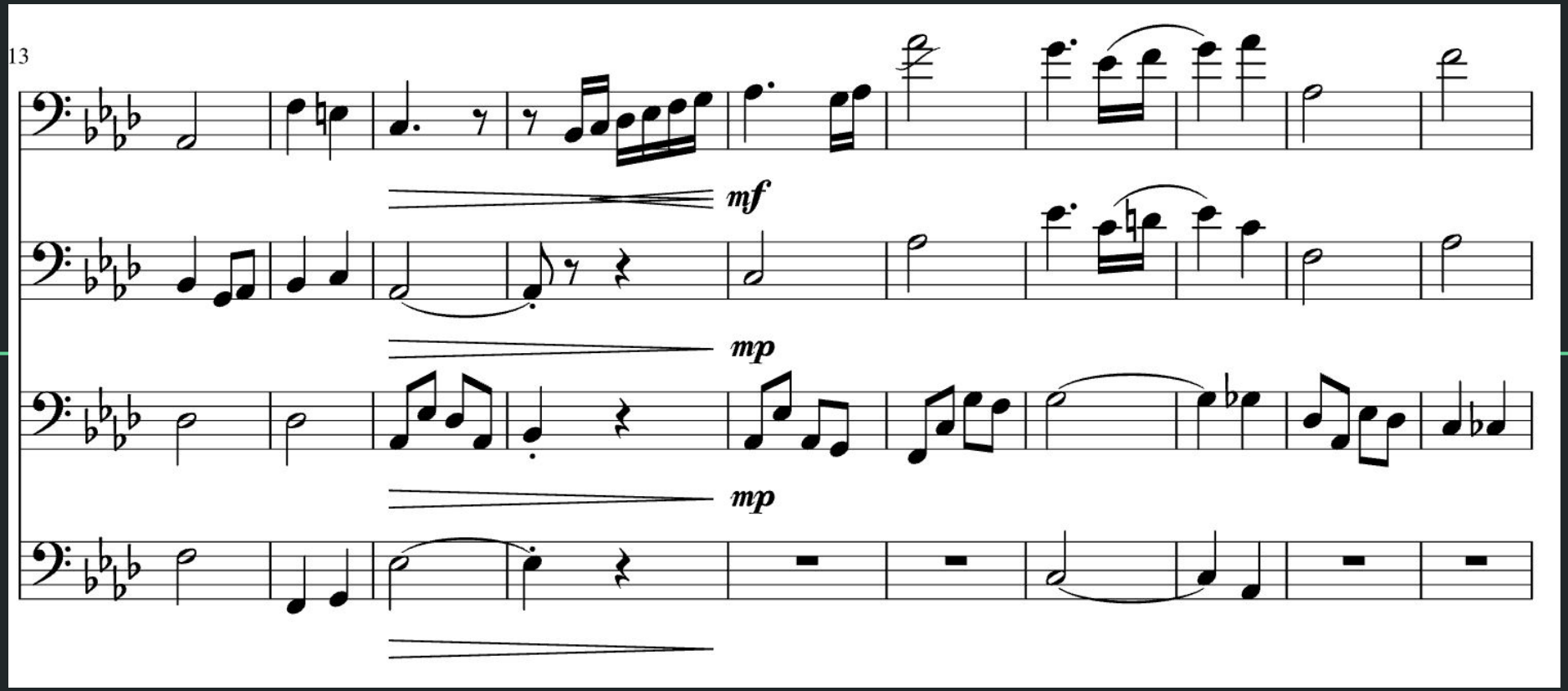
apply your skills of tone production in ensemble settings

Don’t forget the “side effects!”

Most noticeably, air affects dynamic, fingerings affects tone, and voicing/embouchure affect intonation.

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

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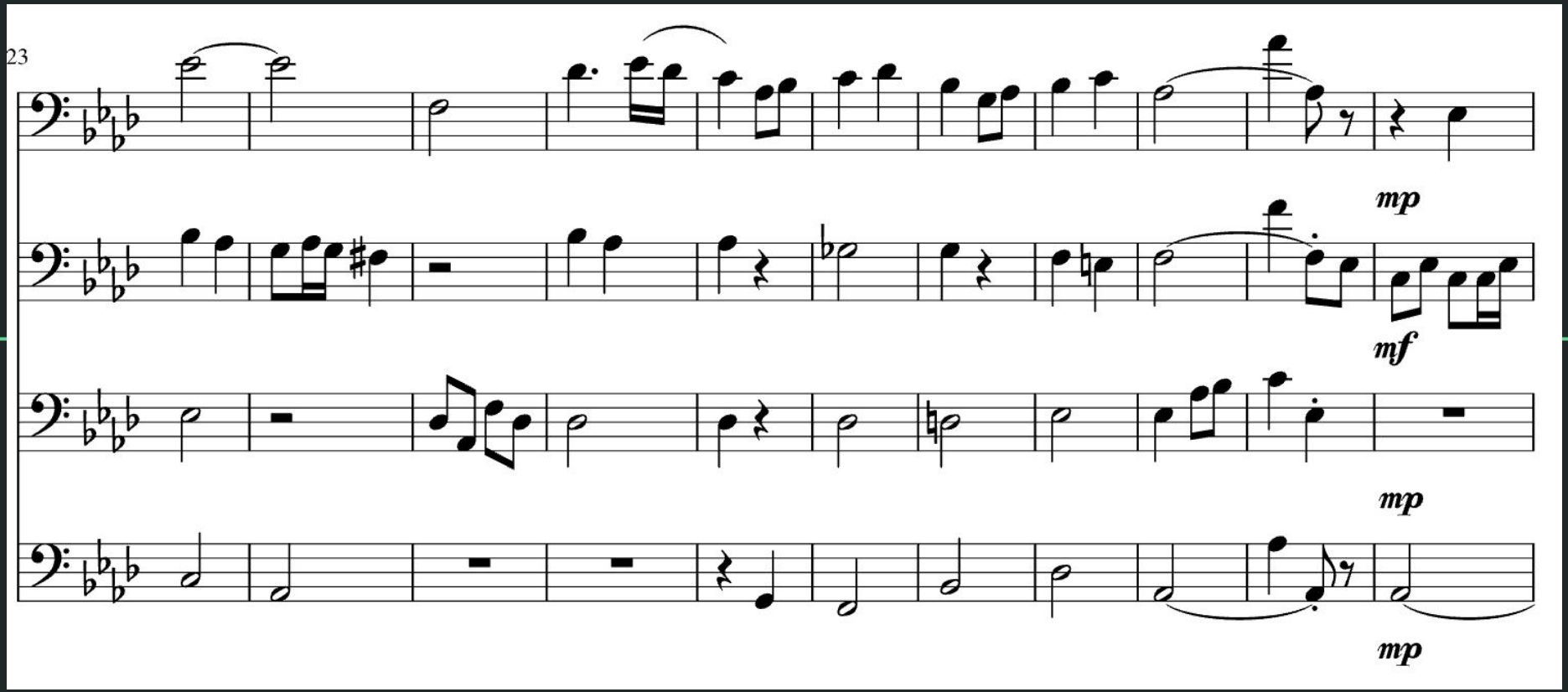
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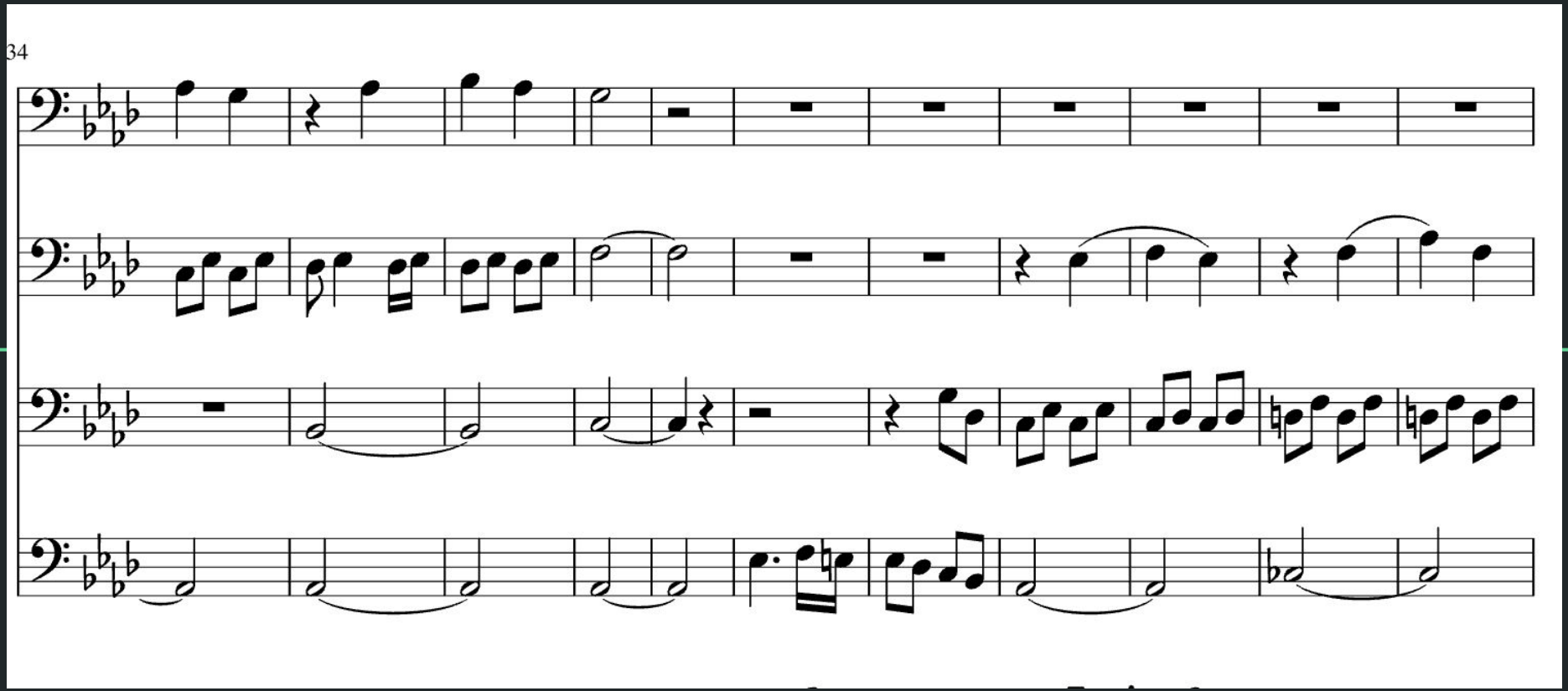
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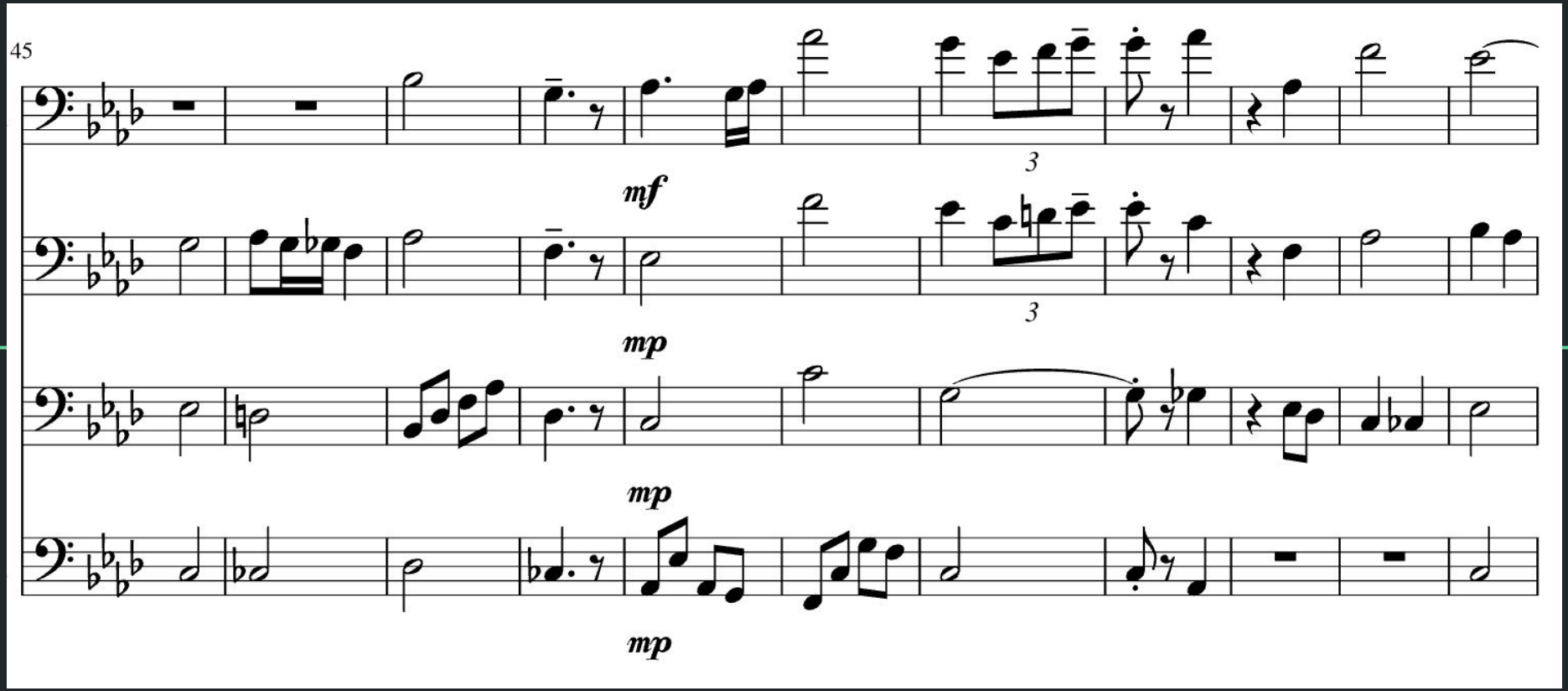
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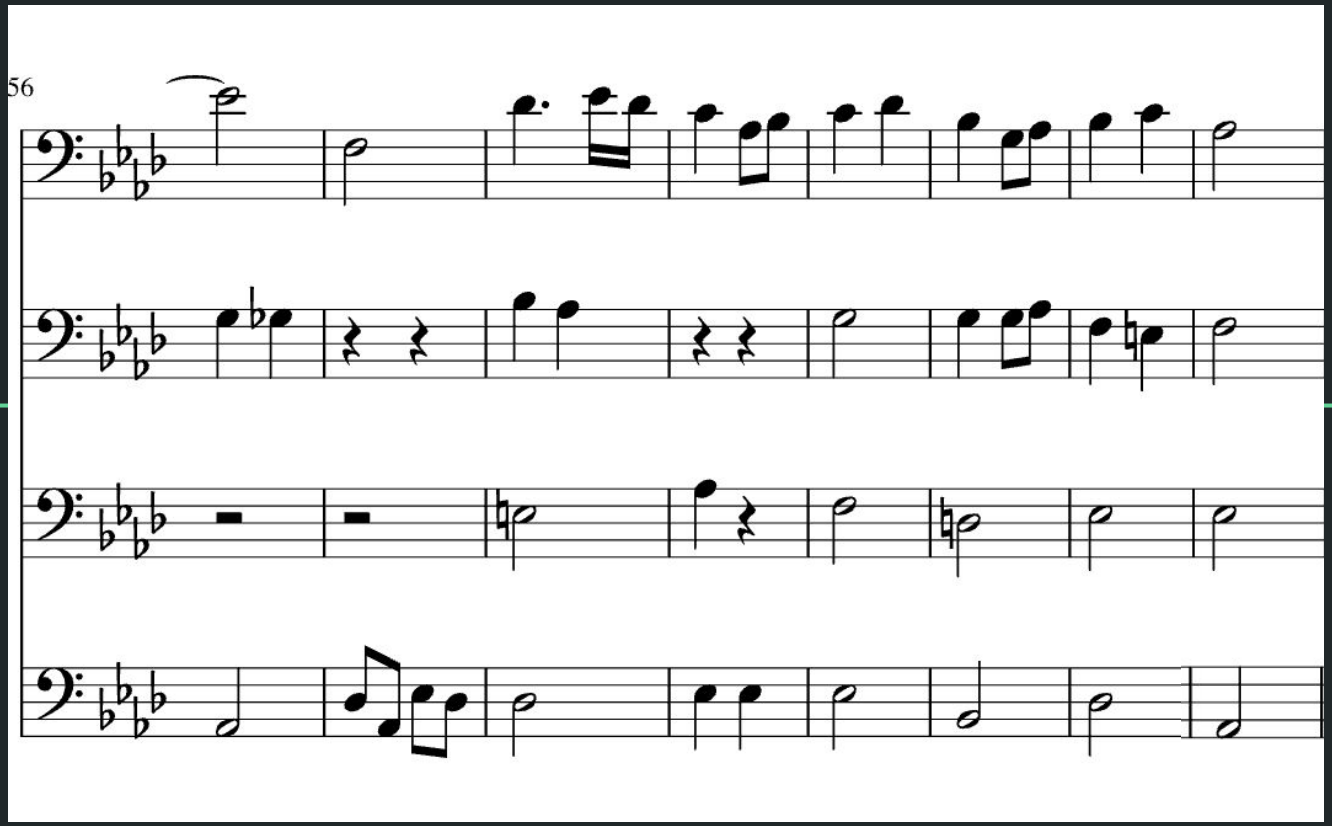
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Contact Me

questions, advice, and fun

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