

A PREPARATION GUIDE FOR SELECT RECITAL REPERTOIRE FOR THE ADVANCED  
BASS TROMBONIST AND MIXED CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

A CREATIVE PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
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MASTER OF MUSIC

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Much of the most popular recital repertoire for the classical bass trombonist involves solo bass trombone and either orchestra or piano. However, in plain sight, there are numerous pieces that display the advanced bass trombonist with many different mixed chamber ensembles. This project will provide advanced bass trombonists with preparation information concerning Howard Buss' *Zoom*, Steven Verhelst's *Capriccio*, and Eric Ewazen's *Pastoral*, and how to prepare them.

Using selected method books for the trombone and bass trombone, I will help guide the performer's practice of the individual works. I will select excerpts of etudes and exercises from the various method books that directly correlate to the most challenging sections of the solo pieces. In order to help both the teacher and the student, I will also assign a difficulty level for the solo piece. Due to the lack of a standardized grading system for solo bass trombone works, I will simply designate the work appropriate for either undergraduate or graduate performers.

Although this project is primarily aimed at performers, this guide will be of use to teachers as well. Teachers may use this guide in a slightly different manner, assigning students the etudes prior to learning the solo material.

**Title: *Zoom*, for bass trombone and harp**  
**Composer: Howard Buss**

**Grade: Strictly Graduate**

**Recommended Recording:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqMy46E7jlk>, no studio recording available at time of publication

Howard Buss' *Zoom* is one of the most challenging pieces for solo bass trombone. The primary obstacles for the performer in this piece are blend, pitch, and rhythmic precision in duple versus triple meter. The harp is an instrument that does not perform with the solo bass trombone often and the performer must take this into account. In order to blend properly with the harp, the performer must take dynamics as guidelines instead of hard rules. Because the harp can only play so loud, it is up to the bass trombonist to widen the dynamic on the piano side of the instrument versus the forte side. Because the harp is quite at home in flat keys, I will also provide musical examples in mostly flat keys.

“The Descent to Ameland” starts with a slow melodic figure with wide leaps in the bass trombone part, see Fig. 1A. Try the exercises from Charlie Vernon's book *The Singing Trombone*, p. 47, see Fig. 1B. These particular segments from Vernon's book are recreations of a popular Bordogni vocalise. The author's instructions to play in all keys will help with the key centers present in *Zoom*, and to help the performer seamlessly connect pitches of a wide intervallic range.



Fig. 1A: *Zoom*, mm. 5-9<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1B: *The Singing Trombone*, Bordogni Exercise<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Howard Buss, *Zoom* (Lakeland, FL: Brixton Publications, 2011), 1.

From measures 20 to 39 in *Zoom*, the performer must play in a recitative style for an extended period of time in the lower register of the instrument, see Fig. 2A. Breathing is key in this section, and the performer must be precise in not cutting the end of phrases by planning breaths accordingly. In playing in the lower register for a longer period of time, I suggest etude no. 10, mm.1-16 in Aharoni's *New Method for the Modern Bass Trombone*, see Fig. 2B. This etude is in the same key as the piece, as well as in similar dynamics. Take this exercise slow and sustained, and it will help your understanding of the section leading up to and including "Ameland Panorama." Take care to listen for pitch and practice with a D-flat drone for precise consistency.



Fig. 2A: *Zoom*, mm. 27-30<sup>3</sup>



Fig. 2B: *New Method for the Modern Bass Trombone*, etude no. 101, mm. 1-3<sup>4</sup>

The "To the Mainland" section is the first rhythmically intense section of this piece, and subdivision is key to understanding how the solo part interacts with the harp part, see Fig. 3A. Tommy Pederson's *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone* provides excellent etudes that deal with many different rhythmic challenges, and I suggest learning and playing through etude no. 2 in its entirety, see Fig. 3B. This etude provides challenges in rhythmic accuracy and transitions between sixteenth notes and triplets of various lengths. Pay special attention to mm. 18-25 as the internal pulse changes often from duple to triple. Measures 27-36 of this etude directly correlate

<sup>2</sup> Charles Vernon, *The Singing Trombone* (Atlanta: Atlanta Brass Society Press, 2012), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Howard Buss, *Zoom* (Lakeland, FL: Brixton Publications, 2011), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Eliezer Aharoni, *New Method for the Modern Bass Trombone* (Jerusalem: Noga Music, 1996), 112.

to mm. 73-76 of *Zoom*. Play the lower register notes full value, blow through the notes and let the notes ring at a solid mezzo-forte to end the phrase.



Fig. 3A: *Zoom*, mm. 68-70<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 3B: *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone*, etude no. 2, mm. 18-20<sup>6</sup>

The measures leading up to “The Approach to the Coast” provides many challenges to the performer. The wide ranges of intervals challenge the performer along with continuous sixteenth notes in lower registers, see Fig. 4A. Again, Pederson’s book provides excellent strategies for dealing with these challenges, in particular etude no. 3, see Fig. 4B. The extreme ranges in this etude will prepare the performer for the lowest pitch required in *Zoom*, as well as the G flat in this section. The last five measures of the etude provide an accessible way for the performer to navigate multiple octaves, which correlates with mm. 107-108 of *Zoom*. In order to make the contour similar, retrograde the pitches in mm. 81-82 of the etude, see Fig. 4B for modified bars. This will allow the performer to easily traverse the span of nearly three octaves in this section of *Zoom*.

<sup>5</sup> Howard Buss, *Zoom* (Lakeland, FL: Brixton Publications, 2011), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Tommy Pederson, *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone* (Belwin Mills, CA: Belwin Mills Publishing Corp, 1974), 3-4.

Fig. 4A: *Zoom*, mm. 107-108<sup>7</sup>Fig. 4B: *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone*, etude no. 3, modified, mm. 81-84<sup>8</sup>

The “Overland Journey” section returns to a slower tempo with a transition back to running sixteenth notes. This is the most technically challenging section of the piece, and serves as a guide to whether this piece is playable by the performer, see Fig. 5A. In preparation for this section of the piece, practice Vladislav Blazevich’s *70 Studies for BB flat Tuba*, no. 35, see Fig. 5B. This etude covers a wide range and features many running sixteenth-note patterns. Consistent slide accuracy and pitch accuracy will either make or break this section for the performer and must be handled with extreme caution and preparation.

Fig. 5A: *Zoom*, mm. 146-148<sup>9</sup>Fig. 5B: *70 Studies for BB flat Tuba*, etude no. 35, mm. 11-12<sup>10</sup>

The final section of *Zoom*, “Amsterdam”, is a groovy section. While challenging, this can be the most rewarding section of the piece. Correctly learning the repetitive rhythms will help the

<sup>7</sup> Howard Buss, *Zoom* (Lakeland, FL: Brixton Publications, 2011), 3.

<sup>8</sup> Tommy Pederson, *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone* (Belwin Mills, CA: Belwin Mills Publishing Corp, 1974), 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Howard Buss, *Zoom* (Lakeland, FL: Brixton Publications, 2011), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Vladislav Blazevich, *70 Studies for BB flat Tuba* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 2002), 38-39.

performer lock into the combined groove with the harp part, see Fig. 6A. For this last section, the first 18 measures of etude no. 1 from the Tommy Pederson etude book are most helpful, see Fig. 6B. Although the etude is in 9/8 and the solo is in 3/4, it bears similarity to the solo part in terms of grooving style. Let the repetitive rhythms keep the music flowing without allowing it to drag.



Fig. 6A: *Zoom*, mm. 183-186<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 6B: *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone*, etude no. 1, mm. 1-3<sup>12</sup>

Due to the complexity and difficult challenges presented in *Zoom*, I am rating it as strictly graduate level, and suggest it should not be performed underprepared.

**Title:** *Capriccio*, for bass trombone and trombone choir

**Composer:** Steven Verhelst

**Grade:** Advanced Undergraduate

**Recommended Recording:** <https://youtu.be/TEXtt9nE1j8>, Ben Van Dijk, Never Alone, BVD Musical Productions

Steven Verhelst's *Capriccio* is a quality selection for the advanced bass trombonist.

While covering a large range and many different musical styles, it still remains very accessible to most proficient performers. Like much of Verhelst's music, his introductions are meant to be bombastic and should be a joy to play. The introduction should be played triumphantly and in response to the accompanying trombones setting the landscape. Pay careful attention to the difference in eighth-notes and eighth-note triplets. The triplets must always drive forward to

<sup>11</sup> Howard Buss, *Zoom* (Lakeland, FL: Brixton Publications, 2011), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Tommy Pederson, *Advanced Etudes for Bass Trombone* (Belwin Mills, CA: Belwin Mills Publishing Corp, 1974), 1.

complete the thought. To help prepare the introduction to letter C, practice etude no. 26 from the Blazhevich book, first half only. The fast rhythmic changes of duple to triple and vice versa will be helpful in keeping the rhythm strict. Play this etude in a similar manner as *Capriccio*.



Fig. 7A: *Capriccio* mm. 6-10<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 7B: *70 Studies for BB flat Tuba*, etude no. 26, mm. 1-3<sup>14</sup>

In the two notable recordings of *Capriccio* by Ben van Dijk and James Markey, there is an unwritten ossia in the measure two before C. If the student simply cannot play the notated rhythm or wishes to imitate the recordings, I have included an ossia that was played by both professionals that was not notated in the original part, see Fig. 8.



Fig. 8: *Capriccio*, ossia mm. 29-30<sup>15</sup>

Letter F presents a few new ideas and challenges for the performer, mostly in the form of chromatic scales and chords in a triplet patterns, see Fig. 9A. In order to tackle these challenges, refer to the staple *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone*. Note that while *Arban's* is a universally acclaimed method, the page numbers for the sections vary between the many different editions, however the section titles usually remain unchanged. The “Studies for the Slur” section, no. 43-48 will be most helpful in consistency of the triplet rhythm in conjunction of the

<sup>13</sup> Steven Verhelst, *Capriccio* (Muzix, 2010), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Vladislav Blazevich, *70 Studies for BB flat Tuba* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, 2002), 25.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Verhelst, *Capriccio* (Muzix, 2010), 1.

articulations marked in *Capriccio*, see Fig. 9B. “The Perfect Chord in Major and Minor Keys” section, p. 151, no. 48-49 will build pitch consistency within the chordal structure of the triplet rhythmic patterns, see Fig. 9C. The “Chromatic Scales” section, p. 80, no. 3-4, provide an optimal way of dealing with the chromatic scalar passage in conjunction with the triplet rhythmic pattern, see Fig. 9D.



Fig. 9A: *Capriccio*, mm. 59-61<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 9B: *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone*, “Studies for the Slur,” no. 46<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 9C: *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone*, “The Perfect Chord in Major and Minor Keys,” no. 48<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 9D: *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone*, “Chromatic Scales,” no. 3<sup>19</sup>

The Andante section in measure 84 brings new material to the performer in the appearance of a slow and lyrical section in a new meter. The “Lip Slur Melodies,” no. 3 in Brad Edwards’ *Lip Slurs*, is a great tool to begin recognition of natural slurs when possible to maximize fluidity and legato. As with any lyrical section of a piece, there are many ways to maximize the legato technique. If the student needs to first learn the notes, play it tenuto before proceeding to the next step. The next way to maximize legato is by playing with no tongue and relying on the air column to produce the sound, while moving the slide and allowing glissandi to

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Charles L. Randall and S. Mantia, eds., *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone* (New York: Carl Fischer, 2008), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 80.

occur during playing. When adding back the legato tongue, rely on the air column to do the work for you, and use natural slurs when possible to minimize the use of the legato tongue.



Fig. 10A: *Capriccio*, mm. 122-125<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 10B: *Lip Slurs*, "Lip Slur Melodies," no. 3 mm. 34-38<sup>21</sup>

Letter N to the end is the final section to add new material to the piece. The first two measures of letter N reprises triplet chordal material from earlier in the piece, however the running sixteenth notes in the next two bars are an altered rhythm based on the fifth and sixth bars of N, see Fig. 11A. If the performer is unable to double tongue, the performer needs to practice the double tonguing technique from the *Arban's* method, see Fig. 11B. A slow and steady approach to this skill will yield successful progress. If the performer can already double tongue, practice exercises no. 81-86. These exercises will provide the performer with many opportunities to practice double tonguing with groups of two on individual pitches. After proper practice, augment the rhythms to four, six, and eight groupings per pitch, which will make the groupings of two much more feasible.



Fig. 11A: *Capriccio*, mm. 176-177<sup>22</sup>

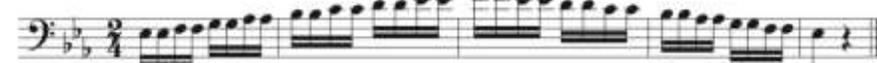


Fig. 11B: *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone*, "Doubling Tonguing," no. 86<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Steven Verhelst, *Capriccio* (Muzix, 2010), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Brad Edwards, *Lip Slurs* (Ithaca, NY: Ensemble Publications, 2006), 66.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Verhelst, *Capriccio* (Muzix: 2010), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Charles L. Randall and S. Mantia, eds., *Arban's Famous Method for Trombone* (New York: Carl Fischer, 2008), 187.

Measures 181-184 is perhaps the most challenging section of this piece and requires accurate rhythms and pitch accuracy. An etude book is not necessary for proper practice of these measures. Practice the arpeggios three different ways: no tongue, staccato, and tenuto. Practicing them in more octaves than indicated will also make the measures easier for the performer. In measures 185-188, if the performer is unable to produce a fortissimo glissando from pedal F to pedal D, the glissandi can be displaced by an octave with no change to the musical effect, see Fig. 12.



Fig. 12: *Capriccio*, 8va ossia, mm. 184-188<sup>24</sup>

All of the material covered in this piece is attainable for an advanced undergraduate bass trombonist, and therefore I am rating it as such.

**Title:** *Pastorale*, for bass or tenor trombone, trumpet, and piano

**Composer:** Eric Ewazen

**Grade:** Advanced Undergraduate

**Recommended Recording:** <https://youtu.be/krZdvfJkKtU>, Yossi Itskovich, Eric Ewazen: *Music for Bass Trombone*, Albany Records

Eric Ewazen's *Pastorale* for bass trombone, trumpet, and piano offers the performer the unique timbral quality that is typical of Ewazen. Although this piece is not

<sup>24</sup> Steven Verhelst, *Capriccio* (Muzix: 2010), 5.

technically demanding, it is very challenging musically. In *Zoom*, the bass trombone had to play sensitively to blend well with the harp; in *Pastorale*, the performer must not only blend with piano, but with the solo trumpet as well. Often times the trumpet and bass trombone perform in an imitative style and it is crucial that the trumpet player also prepare this piece in a similar fashion.

Because of the instrumentation, an orchestral sound would be the most desired sound for solo duet with trumpet. In the introduction of Charlie Vernon's book, he calls for the death of "twa," the ballooning of sound after the initial attack. These exercise help produce the best sound possible, with legato tongue without sound between the notes, see Figs. 13A and 13B.



Fig. 13A: *The Singing Trombone*, "The Death of Twa" exercises<sup>25</sup>

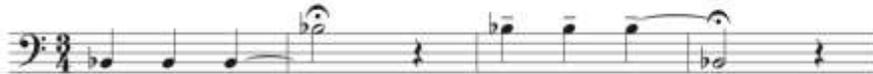


Fig. 13B: *The Singing Trombone*, "The Death of Twa" exercises<sup>26</sup>

The first statement of the melody in *Pastorale* is of the solo bass trombone. Make the best legato sound possible by using the aforementioned exercises, as well as no. 25 from Joannes Rochut's *Melodious Etudes for Trombone, vol. 1*. Play this etude in its entirety, at half tempo or slower. Focus on connecting the groups of four sixteenth notes to the next downbeat with the best legato sound you can produce. Always imagine the sound that you want hear before you produce it.



Fig. 14A: *Pastorale*, mm. 2-6<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Charles Vernon, *The Singing Trombone* (Atlanta: Atlanta Brass Society Press, 2012), 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 8.



Fig. 14B: *Melodious Etudes for Trombone*, no. 25, mm. 2-5<sup>28</sup>

There are extended lyrical passages in this piece that require great endurance. You can address these challenges with the study of excerpts that Vernon has provided in his book. Vernon's third variation of Schumann's *Symphony no. 3*, "Rhenish," provides the ultimate endurance test, with the eighth note marked at 52 bpm, see Fig. 15. Play this orchestral excerpt with the fewest breaths possible, and only at the ends of phrases. This will allow you to play longer phrases with the trumpet without interruption.



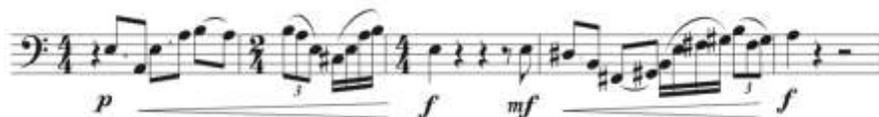
Fig. 15: *The Singing Trombone*, "Rhenish," no. 3, mm. 1-4<sup>29</sup>

Measures 54-60 provide the most challenging excerpt of *Pastorale*. The focus of these few bars is to play as sustained as possible, while maneuvering into different subdivisions of the beat in a legato style, see Fig. 16A. I suggest clapping the rhythms before playing, ensuring the difference between duple eighth-notes, triplet eighth-notes, and sixteenth-notes. Note the changing time signatures and count accordingly. The first variation of *Fountains of Rome* from Vernon's book provides the performer with nearly identical rhythmic patterns and tempo, see Fig. 16B. Do not deviate from the notated tempo of quarter marked at 72 bpm. Practice the excerpt first with tongue, then with no tongue, breath attacked, and finally legato.

<sup>27</sup> Eric Ewazen, *Pastorale* (San Antonio: Southern Music Company, 2002), 1.

<sup>28</sup> Joannes Rochut, and Alan Raph, ed., *Melodious Etudes for Trombone* (New York: Carl Fischer, 2011), 35-36.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Vernon, *The Singing Trombone* (Atlanta: Atlanta Brass Society Press, 2012), 92.

Fig. 16A: *Pastorale*, mm. 54-58<sup>30</sup>Fig. 16B: *The Singing Trombone, Fountains of Rome*, no. 1, mm. 24-28<sup>31</sup>

The last set of new material in *Pastorale* begins at the anacrusis to measure 75. The wide dynamics must be taken into consideration, and practicing them with more even more contrast will allow the music to flow more freely, see Fig. 17A. The “Sarabande” from Bach’s *Cello Suite no. 5* provides an opportunity to play strategically with dynamics and odd intervals similar to the *Pastorale*, see Fig. 17B. Being creative in the dynamics and phrasing will provide more room for musicality. An alternative etude to practice for the same skills needed is Vernon’s first variation of Haydn’s *The Creation*, see Fig. 17C. Play this excerpt as sustained as possible while seamlessly transitioning into different ranges of the instrument. Adhere to the notated tempo of quarter equals 40 bpm. Feel free to take any section down the octave for more relevance to *Pastorale*.

Fig. 17A: *Pastorale*, mm. 74-77<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Eric Ewazen, *Pastorale* (San Antonio: Southern Music Company, 2002), 1.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Vernon, *The Singing Trombone* (Atlanta: Atlanta Brass Society Press, 2012), 74.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Ewazen, *Pastorale* (San Antonio: Southern Music Company, 2002), 2.

Fig. 17B: *The Singing Trombone, Sarabande, A minor, mm. 1-4*<sup>33</sup>



Fig. 17C: *The Singing Trombone, Creation, no. 1, mm. 1-2*<sup>34</sup>

Through the use of these example etudes, Ewazen's *Pastorale* is highly accessible to an advanced undergraduate bass trombonist. For further practice with the ensemble of the trumpet and bass trombone, practice additional duets to achieve a matching tone color.

My objective is that this project is used as a pedagogical tool for the teacher of these pieces and for the performer as a learning tool for learning these pieces independently with their teacher, or in tandem with their own studies. I feel this project, has provided a simple way of understanding and undertaking these works for bass trombone and mixed chamber ensemble. Of course this is not the only way to undertake these works, but my specific pedagogical process is a port of entry for future study.

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Vernon, *The Singing Trombone* (Atlanta: Atlanta Brass Society Press, 2012), 51.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

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