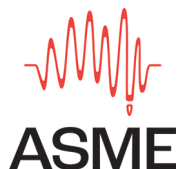


Why can't I play my tenor horn?

Brass band instruments in Australian education



Veronica Boulton

Abstract

There are many young people playing brass band instruments in Australia, yet there is generally an expectation in secondary education, and almost always in higher education, that students will play orchestral brass instruments. This article explores how schools and tertiary music educations in Australia are equipping students to be 21st century musicians, with a focus on players of brass band instruments. Secondary school students playing brass band instruments are often misunderstood by music teachers and can have trouble fitting in to school music programs. Currently, the only university in Australia that offers a specific brass band subject and lists brass band instruments is Griffith University in Queensland, therefore many dedicated brass band instrumentalists choose to travel overseas for tertiary study. This article seeks to highlight a broader picture regarding music education in Australia, and encourages educators (and institutions) to step out of the conservatory-style specialisation regarding brass instruments.

Key words: brass band, music education, orchestral brass

Introduction

What should school (and tertiary) music teachers be doing when students who play brass band instruments arrive in their classroom? Music teachers in Australia may question whether there is a place for brass band instruments in contemporary music education, and whether brass band instruments offer a viable career pursuit. There are many young people playing in community brass bands, as well as growth with the Salvation Army Just Brass program, therefore it is inevitable that they will find their way into music classrooms. As a framework for considering music education in Australia, this article explores the concept of what it means to be a contemporary musician, and how schools, and subsequently tertiary music educations, are equipping music students to be 21st century musicians, with particular consideration of players of brass band instruments. In addition, this paper explores higher education opportunities in Australia and overseas for brass band musicians. There is a

strong orchestral tradition when it comes to brass instruments and only one university in Australia that specifically accepts brass band instruments. The narrow orchestral focus has meant that many prominent Australian brass band musicians have pursued studies in music overseas. There does not appear to be any literature specifically pertaining to the acceptance of brass band instruments in higher education in Australia, and my main sources of information in this area were university websites and personal communication. This article closes with some reflections on higher education and career opportunities for brass band musicians.

British-style brass bands

British-style brass bands were a flourishing phenomenon within schools in Australia up to the 1970s, yet very little has been written in scholarly literature to acknowledge the role that brass bands played in shaping music education in Australia. Educational institutions in Australia currently have a focus on orchestral brass instruments, and

the main band setting used is the concert band or wind band, made up of brass, woodwind and percussion instruments. The term 'brass band' used in this paper refers to the British-style of brass band that was formalised in the late 19th Century: one soprano cornet in E flat, eight or nine cornets in B flat, one flugel horn in B flat, three tenor horns in E flat, two euphoniums in B flat, two baritone horns in B flat, two tenor trombones in B flat, one bass trombone, two basses (tubas) in E flat, two basses (tubas) in B flat, and percussion as required in the musical score (Herbert, 2000). There are some instruments used within a brass band that are played in other ensembles: the trombone, baritone horn, euphonium and tuba are also played in concert bands and orchestras, the difference being that in the brass band these instruments read transposing treble clef. An exception to this in the brass band is the bass trombone, which remains in bass clef. The cornet and flugelhorn are played in the brass band, but are also used in other ensembles, particularly jazz. Exclusive to the brass band is the soprano cornet, a small high-pitched cornet in E flat, and the tenor horn, also pitched in E flat. The tenor horn has an upright bell and resembles a small euphonium or tuba.

The dilemma faced by many students who play a brass band instrument, is the convention and expectation of playing orchestral brass, particularly in secondary school, and almost always in higher education. Students playing brass band instruments are often misunderstood by music teachers and can have trouble fitting in to school music programs. One reason for this is that low brass instruments in the brass band are played in treble clef. In addition, the tenor horn is often quite unknown. However, brass bands are not completely extinct: the Salvation Army's Just Brass program is making a mark in primary schools around Australia, and there are some other schools embracing the brass band setting. Additionally, there are many young people around Australia who play in community brass bands.

What defines a contemporary musician?

Having a concept of what it means to be a musician is important for framing conversations about brass band musicians within music education in Australia. Educational institutions make decisions about what should be included in the curriculum in order to 'educate' for a perceived future, however it is not always clear that education is keeping up with the realities or progress of 'the real world'. Bennett and Bridgstock (2015) note that "admissions processes and course-related marketing should alert potential music students to the realities of the profession and the need to develop broad musician selves in order to emerge as prepared, resilient, and employable graduates" (p. 268). Passing down the tradition of orchestral music through the generations has not always sufficiently equipped students as 21st century musicians. Technology has placed music at our fingertips, and current performing musicians face a rapidly evolving and changing environment where flexibility is essential. This is especially so for classical musicians, where the music industry and demands of consumers has meant that the market for their niche skill is shrinking.

For a musician to pursue a career, being multi-genred and multi-instrumental are often assets, and many professional musicians undertake a wide range of activities in order to survive. Ondracek-Peterson (2020) comments that contemporary musicians need to be 'chameleons' (able to do many may different things), as well as flexible and multidimensional. According to Cloonan and Williamson (2016), a career in music necessitates an understanding of the workings and realities of music industries, "music is a business, so music students should make it their business to understand it as such" (p.126). A career in music also very rarely fits the traditional model of a regular, salaried, permanent role, and according to Ondracek-Peterson (2020) sometimes it can be just "being in the right place at the right time" (p.2). Most musicians will engage in portfolio careers,

and rather than being employed in a full-time position with a single employer, will engage in multiple concurrent roles (Bennett, 2016a). In addition, Weller notes that musicians do not follow typical steps on an advancement ladder, and are not usually limited by age or level of education, as illustrated by the following examples: “at the end of a long musical career, concert pianist Alfred Brendel gave a stunning series of concerts on his ‘final’ tours at age 76; and guitar legend Les Paul had a popular weekly gig in a New York jazz club right up until his death at age 94” (Weller, 2012, p. 49). Employment opportunities for contemporary musicians are perhaps not what music students initially hoped for after graduation, however it is likely that they will engage in entrepreneurial activities within and beyond the creative industries (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015).

Higher education

Having a better understanding of the characteristics of music as a career in the 21st century also raises questions about higher education, and how institutions are meeting the changing landscape to prepare music students for this fluid environment. For example, university music courses have tended to have an emphasis on performance skills. Perhaps this is to be expected given the competitive nature and high standards of the music profession, particularly in classical music performance. The reality is, however, that only a very small proportion of graduates will sustain a career solely in performance, and even then, this will probably not be for their entire career (Bennett, 2016b). Heile, Rodriguez and Stanley (2016) note that in UK universities, there is less of a focus on the western classical tradition than in the past, and a larger proportion of courses in combinations of music technology, popular music and non-western music. A browse of music courses on offer in Australian universities points to some widening of the curriculum, but only one specifically lists brass band instruments. Most tertiary music

performance courses in Australia are generally based on western classical music at the time of writing.

Performance degrees on orchestral instruments have a focus on solo performance and a particular emphasis on learning orchestral excerpts. Students are prepared for careers as soloists and orchestral musicians, and there is pressure to achieve perfection, “and a cut-throat sense of competition among students who are encouraged to outdo one another as performers” (Miksza, Evans and McPherson, 2021, p. 51). Undergraduate music degrees with a performance focus are no longer valid; preparing students solely for performance does not prepare them for the realities of employment as a musician. An emphasis on performance occurs not only in higher education, but begins quite early for students as they move through practical examinations. The Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) has been offering examinations in music since 1887, when it commenced in the universities of Melbourne and Adelaide (Wikipedia, 2021). Orchestral excerpts are required in their classical syllabus from Grade Five, however in 2019 the AMEB introduced a new style of examination titled the Repertoire Exam (Australian Music Examinations Board, 2022). This style of examination allows students to perform repertoire from a range of styles, and omits the necessity for technical work and orchestral excerpts. While the AMEB is progressive in recognising the need for more diversity, it is hard to break the historical practices of music performance. The emphasis on preparation for orchestral audition is a sustained expectation in the educational community, and as noted by Miksza and colleagues, mock auditions form part of university music programs, ‘helping’ students to develop a sense of competition (Miksza et al., 2021). The time spent on perfecting solo performance and orchestral excerpts may be more appropriately ascribed to learning other skills that will help a musician to gain employment. Despite recognition of the ever evolving and changing career of a

musician, higher education is slow to react, and perhaps too caught in tradition.

Very few graduates on orchestral instruments become full-time performers. The Australian study *Making Music Work: Sustainable Portfolio Careers for Australian Musicians* interviewed 592 musicians between 2016 and 2019, mapping the creative, social, cultural and economic realities of their music careers (Bartleet et al., 2020). The results of this study revealed the following: 47.71% of the musicians interviewed held two, three, four or five current roles, with only 28% being in performance, and the next most common role being music teacher (23%); the most common mode of employment was 'self-employment' (44.35%), and only 18.71% of the participants were being paid a continuing salary; from these, the majority of the musicians worked only in contemporary genres (59.03%) and just 14.98% worked exclusively in classical genres. Perhaps the most concerning finding of the study was that non-music work accounted for approximately 90% of musicians' income (Bartleet et al., 2020). If employment for music performance graduates looks so bleak, why is there such a focus on orchestral musical instruments and performance practice in our educational institutions? The findings of the study mentioned here point to new opportunities for Australian educational institutions to be more accepting of other instruments and genres, including brass band instruments.

Brass instrumental teaching

Most musicians teach. Results from the Australian study *Making Music Work: Sustainable Portfolio Careers for Australian Musicians* (outlined above) indicate that "music teaching in schools and studios represents a substantial source of income for Australian musicians, with close to two-thirds of musicians and 80% of composers engaged in teaching and training" (Bartleet et al., 2020, p. 17). Unfortunately, most undergraduate music performance degrees do not include any teaching pedagogy, and students are not necessarily

prepared for teaching. It is a sad reality that teaching is often seen as a 'fall back' career, and often temporary (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2015). This leads back to considering the traditional orchestral emphasis in music education in schools in Australia, and the opportunities that can exist for players of brass band instruments. If most performance graduates are going to spend the majority of their career teaching, it is not necessarily relevant to be a specialist on one instrument and within one genre.

Brass instrumental teachers usually find themselves teaching a variety of brass instruments, and therefore brass performance graduates will most likely be required to have skills on more than one brass instrument. In my personal experience as a brass instrumental teacher, I have taught a variety of brass instruments, from trumpet to tuba. The basic technique required to play a brass instrument is similar for all, therefore having expertise on one can provide a foundation for teaching other brass instruments. There are, of course, individual instrument differences that need to be understood, however most university brass graduates should be equipped to at least teach beginner students across a range of brass instruments. For example, Everett (2013) notes that being as proficient as possible as a low brass teacher and performer, rather than a specialist on one instrument, can greatly enhance employment prospects.

The idea of a multi-instrumentalist has actually been the norm for musicians for centuries. Renaissance musicians, for example, would switch between recorders, brass and strings frequently (Hammer, 2022). In the musical theatre pit orchestra, it is common for orchestrators to write Reed 1 and Reed 2, covering up to six or so instruments in a part for one instrumentalist, and Guitar may include banjo, mandolin and ukulele; each instrument family can be covered in a book or two (Hammer, 2022). James Morrison is a multi-instrumentalist who plays trumpet, trombone, piano, saxophone and double bass (James Morrison Enterprises, 2021). Despite this, it seems

that teachers and professional musicians do not always approve, perhaps considering that this will diminish a player's abilities, as per the expression 'jack of all trades, master of none'. In the brass band world, it is not unusual for a B flat cornet player to shift onto soprano cornet or flugelhorn if required. Euphonium players can easily move to baritone horn, trombone or even tuba. Brass band sheet music is notated in transposing treble clef so that the valve fingering is the same, with the exception of bass trombone. This goes back to a time when British brass bands were associated with industry, and the intention was for players to be able to easily move between instruments, and therefore cover missing parts as required. Brass band musicians have always been multi-instrumentalists.

There are undoubtedly advantages to being able to play more than one instrument when seeking employment as a teacher. For this reason, a brass player entering university to study music with a brass band background may well be better placed for future employment than the average high school orchestral brass player. However, the typical undergraduate performance degree in Australia calls for specialisation on one instrument, and graduates are not necessarily equipped to be versatile and flexible in their teaching practice. The idea of multi-instrumental teaching being able to offer broader foundations of musicianship certainly challenges the traditional conservatory model of music education (Huovinen & Frostenson Lööv, 2021). There are distinct advantages to being a multi-instrumentalist when it comes to employment as a musician. As a teacher, the advantages include the ability to secure further work due to being able to teach more instruments, a capacity to organise and direct ensembles and better understanding of instruments and therefore an ability to understand and write arrangements for ensembles and soloists (Aleknavičius & Urniešius, 2020). In Australia, employers are generally looking for more flexibility when seeking to appoint brass instrumental teachers, therefore graduating brass musicians need to be

versatile with a broader skill set. The traditional conservatory-style of music education that specialises on one instrument and in one genre will not be sufficient to equip these students for teaching. As noted earlier in this paper, the majority of performance graduates will become teachers, even if this is not their initial goal. The practicalities of this broader picture highlight the importance of music education in adequately preparing students for future employment as teachers by encouraging them to study a range of instruments.

Brass instrument specialisation in higher education in Australia

The prevalence of orchestral brass instruments in school music education has inevitably flowed through to higher education, where performance courses involving brass predominately focus on orchestral brass. This paper has argued that the traditional institutional approach of training orchestral musicians is no longer viable on its own for future employment. Therefore, the notion of opening the door to brass band instruments is more than plausible, particularly given the overwhelming evidence pointing to diverse portfolio careers.

Currently, the only university in Australia that offers a specific brass band subject and lists brass band instruments is Griffith University in Queensland. A course is titled *The Brass Band Movement and its Repertoire* and is noted as "An introduction to the repertoire and literature of Brass Bands and their music from historical, cultural and stylistic perspectives, with particular focus on the Australian perspective. A representative range of repertoire and performance styles will be studied" (Griffith University, 2022). Despite this course offering, Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University still has a strong orchestral brass focus. This was particularly evident when I attended the Queensland Conservatorium Brass Weekend, 4-6 November 2022. The weekend educational program comprised masterclasses, performances and workshops. I took my tenor horn

and joined the euphoniums. When I played in a larger ensemble with all instruments, I was given an E flat horn part that double the French horns. For the smaller ensemble, I joined the euphoniums and tubas, and played bass clef euphonium sheet music. There was another young student in attendance who played a tenor horn, and she was placed with the French horns. I chatted with this young player, and she told me that she played tenor horn in a community brass band, but had to play trumpet in the Griffith University State Honour Ensemble Program (SHEP), and French horn in her school band. In addition, at the weekend program there were two commercial brass instrument trade displays which presented only orchestral brass instruments.

An online search in late 2022 of Australian universities offering undergraduate music performance degrees revealed 34 available courses. Most of the courses did not specify instruments that may be chosen for performance majors, however some of the larger and more traditional (older) universities listed specific orchestral brass instruments. If universities in Australia seek to offer a course of music education that will maximise graduates' options for employment, it seems logical for them to refer to brass band instruments in websites and other promotional materials, and to embrace them in brass music education. A student entering an Australian university to play cornet or tenor horn is likely not going to be considering a career as an orchestral performer, however accepting brass band instruments will ultimately be of great value for Australian music education. Matthew van Emmerik sums it up in these comments: "if these people are fantastic players on their instruments and continue on the path of a performance degree, then merge back to an education-type degree...when they go back into the community, they're teaching at a level well beyond what they [potentially] received as youngsters. What we start to have is this concept of...the revolution of people going back in [to the

community] and offering experiences that haven't been there before (personal communication, 27 September 2022).

Overseas brass band courses

An option for dedicated brass band instrumentalists is to travel overseas for tertiary study. There are certainly more relevant courses available overseas than in Australia, particularly in the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA) and Europe. The narrow focus towards orchestral instruments and performance that is frequently evident in Australian tertiary music education is not as evident in the rest of the world.

In the UK several universities offer distinct brass band courses, as well as many university extra-curricular brass bands. Four of the most prominent include:

- The University of Salford in Manchester, which offers a four-year music performance course, with bespoke studies in brass band.
- The Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, which offers studies in the following brass instruments: French horn, trumpet, tenor trombone, bass trombone, tuba, tenor horn, euphonium and cornet.
- The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, which is part of the University of South Wales in Cardiff, and offers a Master of Music in Brass Band Conducting.
- The Birmingham City University offers both a Master of Music and Post Graduate Diploma in Brass Band Conducting. This university also offers Brass Band Studies, and the brass band itself rehearses twice a week and has a partnership with the Tredegar Town Band as a brass band in residence.

In addition to these courses, there are 34 university brass bands across the UK that rehearse as extra-curricular ensembles. Most of them compete in the annual University Brass Band Championships of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is an entertainment contest which is

run by students under the banner *UniBrass*. The aim is to keep young brass musicians involved in live music while at university (UniBrass Foundation, 2022).

While British-style brass bands are perhaps expected in universities in Britain, it is somewhat surprising to learn that the US has many university brass bands, and the British style of brass band is a fairly recent growing trend. Up until the middle of the 20th century, brass bands in the US were found almost exclusively within the Salvation Army, which operates in that country (Taylor, 2016). The interest in British-style brass bands was largely initiated by J. Perry Watson, the director of bands at North Carolina State University, who founded a student brass band in 1965 (Taylor, 2016). The North American Brass Band Association was formed in 1983, and many community brass bands have been formed since. Through online searches, I was able to identify nine university brass bands that are part of music courses in the US.

The following information about the James Madison University Brass Band (Virginia US), comes from personal communication. Professor Kevin Stees spoke with me about the development of the brass band at his university and outlined the reasons for the formation of a British-style brass band as a distinct ensemble elective (Kevin Stees, 25 October 2022). The seed was planted for Stees when he played in a brass band for two semesters at the University of Illinois as an undergraduate student. The University of Illinois Brass Band in Champaign, Illinois, is currently conducted by Professor Sean D. Smith, and is “open to music majors and non-majors by audition, during the Spring semester” (University of Illinois, 2022). In 1985, Stees was employed at the James Madison University, and as part of his role was required to direct a symphonic brass ensemble.¹ Stees directed this ensemble for about 15 years and would occasionally divide the ensemble into two groups

to cater for larger numbers of brass students. He would also sometimes bring in additional players and use brass band repertoire, such as Holst’s *Moorside Suite*, and Gregson’s *Connotations*. However, the instruments in the ensemble still included French horns and trumpets.

From about 2003, Stees changed the format of the brass ensemble at the James Madison University to a British brass band with standard instrumentation, except for the E flat and B flat basses. Stees became ‘hooked’ on brass band literature after attending a North American Brass Band Association Championship held in Washington DC. He had almost exhausted the repertoire for symphonic brass ensemble, and brass band repertoire offered new and challenging pieces: “the repertoire is constantly growing, whereas with brass ensemble new pieces are few and far between” (personal communication, 25 October 2022). Stees commented that the transition for the university was easy, as there was already a brass ensemble course listed, and eventually the name of the class was altered to ‘Brass Band’. The James Madison University is obviously proud of the brass band and the website outlines the many successes of the brass band (James Madison University Brass Band, 2022).

In addition to this brass band at James Madison University, and the University of Illinois Brass Band mentioned above, other brass bands in the US include:

- The East Central University British Brass Band (Ada, Oklahoma)
- The University of Florida Brass Band (Tallahassee, Florida)
- The University of Georgia British Brass Band (Athens, Georgia)
- The Jacksonville State University Brass Band (Jacksonville, Georgia)
- The Mansfield University Brass Band (Mansfield Pennsylvania)
- The University of North Texas Brass Band (Denton, Texas)
- The Oakland University Brass Band (Rochester, Michigan).

¹ A symphonic brass ensemble comprises approximately 10 brass instruments and is made up of orchestral brass – typically trumpets, French horns, trombones and tubas.

The formation of British-style brass bands in higher education in the US points to potential growth in other countries. Brass bands are also growing in continental Europe, and the biggest brass band competition in the world is run by the European Brass Band Association. This competition was founded in 1978 and has grown to become an event that attracts brass bands from the UK, Europe and indeed, all around the world. The 2022 competition included entrants from Wales, Switzerland, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Scotland, Sweden, Austria, Italy, Northern Ireland, and Lithuania (European Brass Band Association, 2022). The Championship section is open only to the winning band from each European country, and includes the winning band from the previous year (European Brass Band Association, 2021).

Brass band instruments are generally accepted into higher education courses in Europe. The classification of specific instruments at the higher education level in Europe is much broader than is available in Australia. A wind player will commonly undertake a study in HaFaBra, a term used for different types of wind bands which is a combination of Harmony, Fanfare and Brass Band (Ha refers to wind band, Fa to fanfare orchestra, and bra to brass band). A fanfare orchestra is a wind ensemble comprising saxophones, trumpets, trombones, euphoniums, baritone horns, flugelhorns, tenor horns or French horns, and percussion. The combination of instruments gives the fanfare orchestra a sound that is halfway between a concert band and a brass band (Wikipedia, 2022a). A harmony band is the same as an Australian concert band and comprises woodwind, brass and percussion (Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music, 2019). A brass band in Europe follows the British style, with the same instrumentation. Students are able to complete a bachelor or master's degree in HaFaBra conducting, which essentially equips them to conduct a variety of wind ensembles. An online search of HaFaBra reveals music publishers, conducting courses and

many personal profiles of HaFaBra conductors across Europe.

Until or unless the Australian higher education opportunities for brass band instruments expand, pursuing a course of study overseas may be the best option for dedicated Australian brass band instrumentalists. There have been many prominent Australian brass band musicians who have pursued further studies in music in the UK. This has been occurring for over 100 years, and still continues today. Historical examples include Percy Code and Frank Wright. In 1910, Percy Code (1888-1953) was invited to play cornet with the British brass band *Besses o' th' Barn* when they were touring Australia, and subsequently completed musical training in the UK (Bythell, 2002). Frank Wright (1901-1970) was one of Australia's leading cornet players who travelled to the UK in 1933 to pursue an opportunity to play at a higher level, and did not return (Royal South Street Society, 2022). There are many recent examples of Australian brass band instrumentalists who have similarly followed this path. One example is Professor David King, who travelled to the UK to study cornet at the University of Salford in 1982. He is currently the International Chair in Band Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music, UK, the Director of the National Australia Brass Academy, and the Musical Director of the National Youth Brass Band of America (King, 2022). Another person to pursue higher education in the UK is Dr Matthew van Emmerik, who attended the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester in 1997. There are many other Australian brass band instrumentalists who have studied overseas, which supports the need for changes surrounding brass band instruments in higher music education in Australia. The narrow focus on orchestral performance for brass musicians in higher music institutions restricts or prohibits the enrolments of quality brass band instrument players in the degree programs of those institutions, as well as limiting the educational and career prospects for players of brass band instruments.

Summary

The discussion in this paper should be understood in the wider context of music-making: many musicians do not pursue a career in the field, and “far from making a living by making music, the majority of musicians finance music making by making a living” (Bennett, 2016, p. 121). Most music courses for brass players in higher education in Australia still have a strong focus on orchestral instruments and orchestral performance. If so few music graduates become professional performers, and so many become teachers, the narrow specialisation model that emphasises training in one instrument and one genre seems outdated and does not keep up with the likely realities of being a musician. In general, an employable musician in the 21st century is one who is multi-genred, multi-instrumental and flexible. This paper has argued that educational institutions could make more inclusive decisions about the curriculum, with greater consideration for how graduates on brass instruments will sustain careers. Brass band musicians may well be better placed than orchestral brass musicians for future employment as instrumental teachers, due to their broader skills and experiences.

Brass band musicians pursuing a course of study in Australia are generally required to adapt to playing orchestral brass, or take up study overseas. The UK has long been the focal point for the brass band movement in Australia, and Australian brass band musicians have travelled to Britain for study for over 100 years. Other parts of the world also have strong brass band movements, and they are growing. The European Brass Band Association hosts an international competition that attracts bands, and indeed audiences, from all around the world. The classification of specific instruments at the higher education level in Europe is broad and offers wind players flexibility with studies in HaFaBra. The USA has seen rapid growth in their brass band movement, as indicated by the formation of British-style brass bands in higher education. The final section of this paper has provided examples

of Australians who have pursued brass band studies overseas. This trend is likely to continue until Australian institutions offer more flexible opportunities for brass band musicians at all levels of music education.

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