

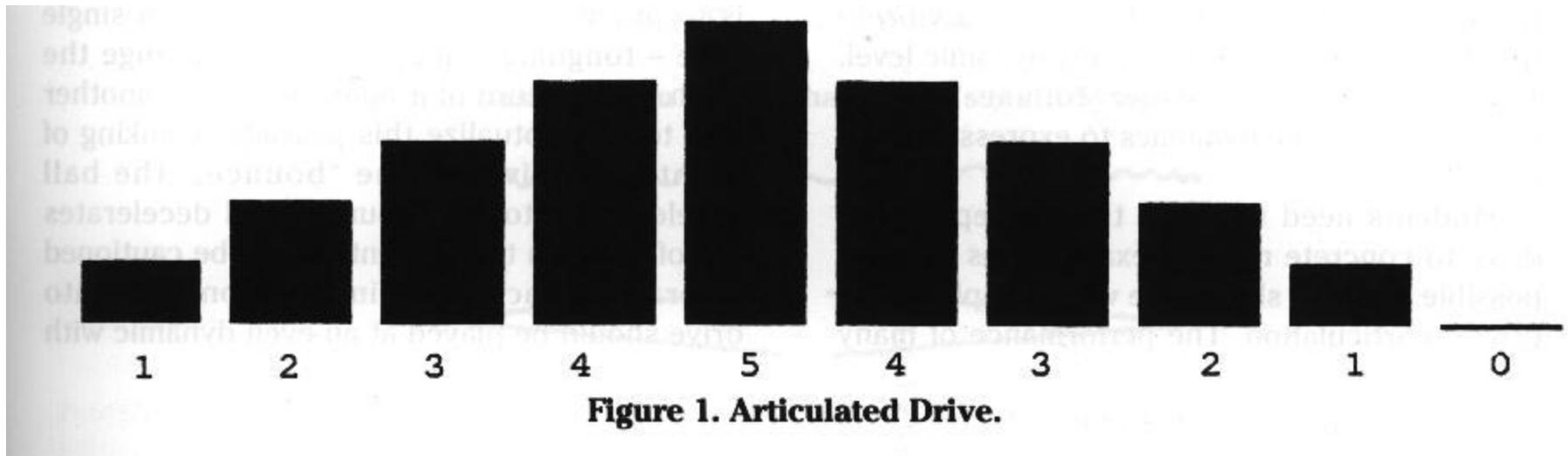
A Bassoonist's Expansions upon Marcel Tabuteau's "Drive"

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Marcel Tabuteau might well be regarded as America's foremost oboe teacher. His long and productive association with the Curtis Institute of Music influenced the lives of many young musicians. As a result his students and pupils of his students now occupy chairs in most if not all of our nation's principal orchestras. Despite the kinship existing between the oboe and the bassoon, little from his pedagogical method has been transferred to bassoon instruction. This article presents the exercise he called the "drive" and expands upon the drive showing some of its pedagogical and musical applications.[1](#)

The drive, as used by Tabuteau, can be defined as a scaling of intensity or color on one or more pitches. Always Tabuteau used a number system to convey this scaling. One or zero indicated the lowest intensity, and higher numbers signified higher levels. Figure 1 represents a drive using tongued blocks of sound starting from number one moving to five and then ending on zero. Often Tabuteau would ask the student to end the drive by playing a long held note at intensity "0." This forced the student to practice pianissimo attacks: a difficult thing to master for double reed performers.



In the most simplified context, Tabuteau's drive may be played on a single note or even apart from the instrument itself. In a past issue of *The Double Reed*,² Joseph Robinson recollected his first experience with the drive. Tabuteau took away Robinson's oboe, and sent him away to "peep" on an oboe reed affixed to a tube of cane for hours on end. Similarly the bassoon reed affixed to the bocal may be used to introduce students to the drive and fundamentals of articulation. A forthcoming issue of the NACWPI Journal contains an article written by me on this subject.³ The article discusses a number of ways teachers can instruct students in the fundamentals of articulation, embouchure, and proper air support. Used in this way, the bassoon bocal also may serve as a useful diagnostic tool. The student is able to hear pitch fluctuations caused by incorrect articulation etc. more easily on the bocal than on the fully assembled instrument.

Tabuteau considered breath control the most fundamental skill to master for the wind performer. It is not surprising then that the drive is foremost an exercise in breath control. Although the drive was used by Tabuteau in varied forms,⁴ it can be reduced to two basic types: a legato scaling of intensity, and a scaling of intensity through articulated notes. A legato scaling of intensity takes the form of a long crescendo followed by an equal length decrescendo. The articulated scaling might take the form of a long crescendo followed by an equal length decrescendo. The articulated scaling might take the form of "blocks of sound," as in figure 1.

Tabuteau preferred to use the term "intensity" when describing the scaling of the drives. In this paper, the term "intensity" will not be used, rather components of intensity (dynamics, timbre, vibrato, etc.) will be discussed in relation to the drive. A "dynamic drive" refers to a scaling of dynamics on a sustained pitch (or pitches). An "articulated dynamic drive," as given in figure 1, is the tongued

version of the dynamic drive. When the numbers 1 to 5 have been mastered, drives may be scaled from 1 to 7, 1 to 9, or 1 to 11. Tabuteau made some of his Curtis students perform drives with up to 13 gradations.

The drive may be applied to timbre as well as dynamics. By adjusting one's lips on the reed - moving closer or further away from the wrapping - a double reed performer can vary the timbre of the sound. For the bassoon, timbral differences on a sustained tone are more difficult to produce than on the oboe. The reed is larger; therefore a greater embouchure shift must be made. In this way, an analogy can be made that the oboe is to the bassoon as the violin is to the 'cello. An octave shift on the G string of the violin covers a much smaller distance than an octave shift on the C string of the 'cello. Likewise, timbral differences made on a bassoon reed require greater embouchure shifts than on the oboe reed. This does not mean that timbral differences are impossible on a sustained note for the bassoon, rather that they are more difficult. A fuller range of timbral differences can be made if the bassoonist resets the embouchure.

The drive can also be used to master a flexible vibrato. "Vibrato drives" involve varying the speed of the vibrato from slow to fast or fast to slow. Students should be cautioned to vary only the vibrato during the vibrato drive. Too often a crescendo accompanies an increase in the speed of the vibrato. The goal is a vibrato which can be varied at will at any dynamic level. This frees the performer to use vibrato independent of the dynamics to express musical motion.

Students need to relate the concept of the drive to concrete musical examples as early as possible. Figure 2 shows one way of applying the drive to articulation. The performance of many works by Vivaldi, for example, will benefit from the practice of varied articulations. In the opening statement in Vivaldi's Concerto in A minor (F. VIII, No. 7, PV 72, first movement), one could use the articulations given in Figure 3. The numbers "1," "3," and "5" represent short, medium, and long sixteenth note lengths respectively. This articulation produces light offbeats and strong downbeats. Often bassoonists will bring out certain notes in an Alberti Bass figure by "huffing" or "pulsing" the air on certain notes. This method of accentuating notes is legitimate and useful. The varied articulation given in figure 3, however, brings another option to the performer which is worth mastering. Using articulation instead of air to emphasize notes in an Alberti Bass frees the air to do other things, like shaping the phrase with dynamics. Too often performers convey motion and repose only by means of their dynamics. In figure 4 part of an articulation drive is applied to measure 40 of the concerto. Motion to the end of the phrase is signaled by the increasing sixteenth-note lengths progressing towards the downbeat of measure 41.

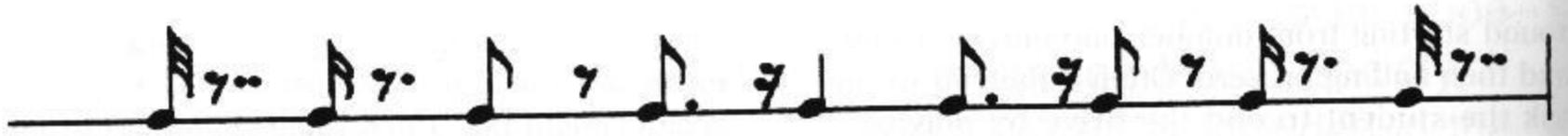


Figure 2. Articulation Drive.

5 1 3 1 3 1 5 1 3 1 3 1 etc.

Figure 3. Vivaldi's Concerto, F. VIII No. 7, mm. 33-35.

5 1 2 3 4 5 (6)

Figure 4. Vivaldi's Concerto, F. VIII No. 7, mm. 40-41.

2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4

Figure 5. Bassoon Solo from Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, II.

One may also master rubato through rigorous practice with the drive. It is important, however, to subdivide the beat when practicing "rubato drives," a scaling of tempos. The bassoon solo from the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony is an excellent passage with which to discuss rubato (figure 5). Although the melody is strictly in eighth- notes, the duration of each eighth-note cannot be equal if one is to play musically. There must be gradations of length among notes, similar to a string of pearls which has the largest pearls at the bottom and gradually smaller pearls towards the top. An excellent exercise in rubato is to practice portions of this solo on a single tone - tonguing where one would change the pitch. The picture of a bouncing ball is another way to conceptualize this passage. Thinking of points of arrival as the "bounce," the ball accelerates into the "bounce" and decelerates out of it. Again the student should be cautioned to practice each drive in isolation. A rubato drive should be played at an even dynamic with no variation in vibrato or articulation. Only when each drive is mastered alone will it then be profitable to combine drives.

Consider the many dimensions involved in a performance. By the word "dimension" I mean parameters such as dynamics, timbre, vibrato, articulation, and rubato. All of these dimensions may function independently. Great artists have control over many aspects of their craft and to a larger extent they can vary these dimensions in tandem or in opposition. "Multiple drives" are one way of practicing varying parameters at will. For instance figure 6 shows two drives in opposition: the dynamic drive is varied from I to 5 to I and the vibrato drive is varied from 5 to 1 to 5.

One might argue that bassoonists have been able to give musical performances of Vivaldi's A minor Concerto, Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony etc. without ever knowing about or practicing drives. Certainly the drive is not a replacement for musicianship. Rather the drive is a congenial forum in which to apply musicianship, discuss its essence, and master its nuances. The number system is a suitable tool for showing relationships within phrases *only* when applied in a manner sympathetic to the music.

To illustrate this "congenial forum," I close with a study used in bassoon lessons with my students. The first line of #20, p. 48 of *Rubank Advanced Method, Bassoon Vol. 1 5 (fig. 7)* contains a charming little melody made up of two phrases, each of which is divided into two segments by the dotted quarter-notes. I ask questions like: "How do you play this musically?"; "What notes do the phrases move towards and away from?"; "Where are the goals in this melody?" Most students reply that the dotted quarter-note "F" is the note upon which the tension of the first phrase reaches its climax. Then I ask, "How will you show this to your audience?" Invariably dynamics are discussed, and we practice dynamic drives on a single tone using the articulations printed in the first four measures. Later we apply the dynamic drive to the music as printed. When this is completed, I ask, "Now, if you were playing this on a harpsichord, an instrument with little or no dynamic contrast, how would you still show the musical goal? Are dynamics the only way to musically express yourself?" Then we discuss rubato drives, practicing them on a single pitch. The rubato need not be overt, but it must be varied in a smooth manner, carefully subdivided with eighth-note values. The long held notes must participate in the shape of the rubato just like they would in dynamic shaping. Many times this mental subdivision needs to be reinforced by practicing the entire passage with every eighth-note value tongued. Then I ask, "Are there any other ways to express the musical motion?" The

vibrato drive is inappropriate here because of the fast moving notes. Timbre is difficult to use apart from dynamics. This leaves us with articulation, which may be applied in a fashion similar to figure 4. A subtle increase in note length (not tempo!) towards the second measure "I" and a decrease in length up to measure 4 can impart the feeling of motion towards and away from "F." The discussion could continue with observations on how these three drives (dynamic, rubato, and articulation) could be combined.

Marcel Tabuteau's drive is useful not only for mastering control of the embouchure, breath, and tongue, but also for the way it can bring musical issues into focus. Use of the drive itself does not insure musicality, rather it is a method by which the skills of musical expression can be developed. Careful application of the drive will empower the performer with greater control over the nuance of his craft. The drive should be viewed as a microcosm of musical phrasing. The musician breathes life into the music by shaping and sculpting the sounds. Above all, the drive is an exercise in musical motion. 71

About the writer ...

Terry B. Ewell is Assistant Professor of Bassoon and Music Theory at West Virginia University. He was Principal Bassoon of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra for seven years. Under the baton of Gerard Schwarz, Jahja Ling and others, Mr. Ewell has performed as soloist with the Seattle Symphony, Seattle Youth Symphony, and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1981 Mr. Ewell won first prize in the International Fernand Gillet Competition held in Lubbock, Texas. He studied bassoon with Arthur Grossman at the University of Washington, and currently he is completing his Ph. D. in music theory at the same institution. He has recorded for Musical Heritage Society, Hong Kong Records, and Pickwick Records.

Endnotes:

1. The author gratefully acknowledges Laila Storch, Joseph Robinson, and Arthur Grossman, all of whom have aided in the development of this article.
2. Daniel Stolper, "A Conversation with Joseph Robinson," *The Double Reed* 4/1 (March 1981):19.
3. "Using the Bassoon Bocal as a Diagnostic and Pedagogical Tool."
4. For a more complete discussion of Tabuteau's varied use of the drive see: Donald L. Hefner, "The Tradition of the Paris Conservatory school of oboe playing with special attention to the influence of Marcel Tabuteau" (Ph. D. diss. Catholic University of

America, 1984), pp. 158-168; and Dominique-Rene' de Lerma, "Toward a Concept of Tabuteau's Phrasing," *The Instrumentalist* (March 1974).

5. H. Voxman and Win. Gower, authors (Chicago: Rubank, Inc., 1942).