

The I Tromboni Study Guide

***“Whatever you do, do not look at the trombones,
it only encourages them.”***

- Richard Strauss

Five trombones ... one extraordinary experience.

I Tromboni is the dynamic and always entertaining group of five of Canada’s finest young trombonists. This ensemble has dedicated itself to the promotion and performance of live music for trombone quintet. The initial concept behind I Tromboni was to create a virtuoso ensemble capable of reaching diverse audiences by combining unique arrangements of both well-known and new music with stylish and often humorous delivery. The group incorporates music of all genres and styles into their performances including baroque, classical, jazz, romantic, contemporary and popular.

The group’s name – I Tromboni (Italian) – can quite literally be translated as the trombones, but it has another connotation. The Italian translation can more crassly be interpreted as the comics or pundits. However you choose to interpret the name, it is a pun intended to give some false sense of prestige to what is simply a group of five trombonists. Mind you, this is a talented group that has earned a reputation as The Team Canada of Trombones!

While trombone quartets are fairly common and have an established repertoire, the quintet is a relatively unexplored ensemble. This allows a great deal of flexibility in compositions and arrangements since I Tromboni has no choice but to put together music from scratch; everything from Vivaldi to the Simpsons. This new ensemble is raising the bar when it comes to combining artistry with education and entertainment.

The trombone is not an only child.

I Tromboni takes full advantage of the visually stimulating nature of their instruments and the musical diversity available with the entire family of trombones. That’s right, the trombone is actually a group of instruments that differ in size and timbre. Even the music clef changes for these different family members. To describe these differences is much like describing the different voices in a choir. You have high, middle, and low voices and each voice has its own unique qualities. Listed below are the members of the trombone family ** with distinctions of each instrument.

Alto trombone – This is the smallest member of the family and therefore has the least amount of tubing. It plays in the middle and high registers and has a distinctly bright sound. Music for the alto trombone is written in the alto clef (like the viola) and it is considered a specialty instrument that requires much practice. It is an instrument that has been around for many centuries and even Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's father, Leopold, wrote music for this elegant sounding instrument.



Tenor trombone – This is the instrument everyone sees and hears in their school band (below and left). A slight variation on this trombone can have a little more tubing (an F-attachment with trigger in picture below and right) which allows more technical possibilities. It is a versatile instrument played in jazz, classical, salsa and contemporary idioms. The tenor trombone can play low growling notes or soar into the upper stratosphere but mostly it is very comfortable sitting right in the middle. Compared to the alto trombone it has more tubing and also a larger bell (opening) and a bigger bore (tubing diameter). Therefore its sound is described as more mellow and stately than the alto trombone. Music for the tenor trombone can be written in the treble, bass, tenor and alto clefs.



Bass trombone – This is the largest member of the trombone family. It has at least as much tubing as the tenor trombone and in many cases more. Generally, the more tubing there is in an instrument, the lower the sound. The bass trombone also has a larger bore, bigger bell, and thicker metal than the rest of the family. All of these factors give it a darker and fuller sound that supports the rest of the instruments very well. Due to its low range, music for the bass trombone is written in the bass clef.



** Although there are a few other instruments which fall into the trombone category (i.e. bass trumpet and contrabass trombone) they are considered extraneous and not used frequently.

How does it work? Back to the basics.

The trombone creates sound through the combination of three elements.

Wind - Most textbooks do a disfavor to this first fundamental element by calling it air but since air without movement does you no good on the trombone, we will call it wind. The basic breathing technique for brass playing is not much different than that of yawning. Good but comfortable deep breaths are essential for having any chance at making a proper sound on the trombone.

Buzzing - The moving air, or wind, exits through your mouth but in order to generate sound you must buzz your lips together. The sound created with your lips is then amplified when you place them against the mouthpiece. Your trombone acts as speakers do on your home stereo. Whatever sound you generate with your lips buzzing gets propelled through the trombone by your supporting wind. After this, it is a matter of practicing subtle changes in tension of facial muscles, lip shape, and using your tongue for articulation or definition.

Slide movement – Once you've done all the work getting the air moving and are buzzing properly, the trombone becomes a unique instrument from the rest of the brass family. The extendable slide is what makes the trombone different from all of its brass instrument cousins like trumpets, French horns, and tubas. There are seven positions on a trombone slide each making the tubing longer and lowering the pitch. Quick and accurate movement between these positions is the goal of every trombone player.

Additional techniques like multiple tonguing, glissandos, and lip trills add to the complexity of playing the trombone but it starts with these three basic elements. I Tromboni have many years experience teaching beginners through to advanced players and will set up times for master-classes, section coachings, or private lessons for all brass players upon request.

A long time ago in a place far, far away...

The trombone has been around for a very long time. It was first used during the Renaissance in Italy, around 1460, and is considered to be one of the oldest of the orchestral or band instruments. The trombone's ancestor, the sackbut, was very much like the modern instrument you see in every school band except for having a smaller, less flared opening, or bell. A lack of major changes to any instrument is quite unusual. Most other brass, string, and woodwind instruments have seen significant changes in their construction (due to the industrial revolution), materials, and an increase in note range throughout the years.

In the early years of the trombone, it was used primarily for civic ceremonies, entertainment, religious functions, and later by the military. It was highly regarded in most of Europe for having the flexibility to be heard both outdoors and inside. Although the trombone almost went the way of the dodo in the 18th century, it made a strong comeback during the early 19th century with the rise of the modern orchestra. Composers like Berlioz, Brahms and Schubert helped bring the trombone into the limelight of orchestral repertoire. The 20th century saw the trombone's role increase from being just a classical instrument to being a versatile player in the contemporary, film, world music and jazz scenes. Big band trombonists such as Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller brought the trombone to new heights of fame in North America. Now, the solo trombone repertoire includes diverse pieces from composers like Mozart and Saint-Saens to Bernstein and Berio.

If five trombones can do it, why can't I?

I Tromboni school presentations are not about learning how to play the trombone. The group believes it is important for everyone to learn the value of listening to live music and to take part in making music. Students should be encouraged to make their own music on any instrument they enjoy and not be confined to certain repertoire. Use your imagination. One of the best and most memorable school shows I Tromboni presented involved over 150 elementary school students playing along with them on recorders. When was the last time you saw that?

Songs do not have to be difficult in order to spark enthusiasm. Below is a traditional Yiddish song that is an example of what I Tromboni would be glad to do with any of your students whether it is played on kazoos, recorders, violins or what have you. If you have any ideas, please don't hesitate in asking if they might be possible – we take pride in doing the improbable.

Ale Brider

Traditional



The Composer's Toolbox

I Tromboni presents different elements that are essential in the construction of music. Just like carpenters and mechanics have tools they use to help them do their jobs, composers have tools they use to help them make music. This is the interactive section of I Tromboni's school presentation specifically designed for Grade 1 to Grade 10 audiences. Length and complexity of the Toolbox change to best suit age ranges of the students at each show but the concepts remain the same. Listed below are some definitions of key elements presented in the toolbox.

- **Musical Form** – The structure and design of a piece of music. Form helps create a sense of balance or symmetry for the listener and is one of the composer's primary methods of keeping the interest of his or her audience.
- **Ternary Form** – This is one of the most commonly used forms for a short composition. It consists of a first section or tune (which is self-contained and complete) followed by a 2nd section (almost always in a new key and which differs in material), and then the first section again. It is often referred to as ABA form.
- **Fugue** – This form presents a theme for the listener in which different parts (or voices) successively repeat the theme. The theme is often referred to as the subject and it is used alone, in a single voice, or to accompany one or more of the other voices.
- **Musical Affect (Emotion)** – We all know music can make us feel certain ways whether it's happy, sad, angry or even frustrated. Composers use different devices such as tonality (major or minor), note length, and dynamics to create an emotional response from the listener. Think about how effective a movie would be without appropriate music in a moment of tension or celebration?
- **Tempo** – In Italian it simply means time but in musical terms it is the speed at which a piece of music is performed.

What we expect from you, our audience.

I Tromboni presentations always involve audience participation but like a painter needs a blank canvas on which to work, a performer needs an attentive audience to communicate effectively. We believe in educating the future generations of concert-goers and this includes the audience learning proper concert etiquette like knowing when to clap, keep quiet, laugh, or ask questions. Young listeners must learn to discern what they like about a piece of music (and why that might be) but the only way they can do this is by being attentive.

The Team Canada of Trombones is...

Neal Bennett (D.M.A.) – from Langley, BC. Plays alto and tenor trombone.

Volkan Mutaf (B. Mus) – from Vancouver, BC. Plays alto and tenor trombone.

Jim Tranquilla (B. Mus) – from Fredericton, NB. Plays alto and tenor trombone.

Greg Passmore (B. Mus) – from North Vancouver, BC. Plays alto and tenor trombone.

Kenneth Pearce (M. Mus) – from Arborg, MB. Plays bass trombone.

We need to hear from you.

I Tromboni is constantly striving to improve the show, its content, and their delivery so if you would like to contribute, now is your chance. We welcome any feedback you might want to offer whether it be criticism, suggestion, or compliment. Comments from students, teachers, and parents are all encouraged. Please take the time to fill out the attached form or simply drop us an e-mail at feedback@itromboni.com. If you have hired us through ArtStarts in BC, we suggest you also tell them what you thought of I Tromboni by visiting them at www.artstarts.com.

Feedback Form for I Tromboni
(You can also email us at feedback@itromboni.com)

Place of performance (name of school and location).

Date of performance.

Things you liked about the presentation.

Things you would like to see improved or incorporated into the presentation.

Your name and capacity (student, parent, teacher, etc.) would be appreciated.

Would you recommend this group to other schools or consider bringing I Tromboni back to your school again?

Thank you for taking time to tell us what you think of our presentation. Please mail this form to:

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