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Relationship of Jazz Trombone Performance to Composing and Arranging: Interviews With Four Notable Trombonist/Composers

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE RELATIONSHIP OF JAZZ TROMBONE PERFORMANCE TO
COMPOSING AND ARRANGING: INTERVIEWS WITH
FOUR NOTABLE TROMBONIST/COMPOSERS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Arts

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College of Performing and Visual Arts
School of Music
Jazz Studies

December 2013

This Dissertation by: Adam Eric Bartczak

Entitled: *The Relationship of Jazz Trombone Performance to Composing and Arranging:
Interviews With Four Notable Trombonist/Composers*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Arts
in College of Performing and Visual Arts in School of Music, Program of Jazz Studies

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ABSTRACT

Bartczak, Adam Eric. *The Relationship of Jazz Trombone Performance to Composing and Arranging: Interviews With Four Notable Trombonist/Composers*. Published Doctor of Arts dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2013.

This dissertation explores the relationship between jazz trombone performance and composing/arranging through interviews with four notable current jazz trombonist/composers. These include John Fedchock, Paul McKee, Fred Sturm, and Steve Wiest. The study attempts to draw conclusions regarding the relationship of the two disciplines based on material gathered from interviews with these jazz trombonist/composers. A brief biographical sketch of each interviewee, which details his professional contributions to the field, precedes each interview. A series of basic questions presented to all interviewees has been augmented by follow-up questions and other thoughts on the topic that the subjects have chosen to contribute. These additional questions have been informed by research into the subjects' work in the fields discussed. This inquiry has the potential to inform and influence trombonists, composers, and any other persons interested in the topic. It may also serve as a starting point for a continuing course of dialogue on the subject.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between jazz trombone performance and composing/arranging through interviews with notable current jazz trombonist/composers. Historically, there are a great number of adept composer/arrangers who are also heralded trombonists, particularly within the jazz idiom. Some of these include J.J. Johnson, Bob Brookmeyer, Slide Hampton, Paul McKee, Steve Wiest, Fred Sturm, Don Sebesky, Sammy Nestico, Rayburn Wright, John Fedchock, and Robin Eubanks.

Interviews with participants attempt to gain insight into the relationship between the two disciplines through a discussion of selected topics, which include: the idea that trombonists compose and arrange out of artistic or economic necessity; whether the physical position of the trombone section within a jazz orchestra, the placement of the trombone in the orchestration of this ensemble, or the traditional role of the trombone in a jazz orchestra influences these artists' composing/arranging; what differences or comparisons they see in the influence of being trombonists on their composing/arranging for small jazz combo and large jazz orchestra (big band); and finally, what artists and musical experiences influenced their playing and composing/arranging.

Need for Study

Though authorities on the topic, including those interviewed as part of this study, have noted the propensity of many great jazz trombonists for composing/arranging, little to no research has been carried out with regard to the subject. The opinions and thoughts of the figures interviewed here have the potential to inform and influence both trombonists and composers working in the jazz idiom, as well as other persons interested in the subject. The interviews may also serve as a launching point for an expanded course of dialogue on the subject.

Scope and Limitations

Though there have been many outstanding trombonist/composers in the history of the jazz genre, this study is limited to information gathered from interviews with selected living subjects. Information on other historical trombonist/composers may be included as part of these subjects' accounts. This limitation allows for a dialogue that involves the current authorities on the subject.

This study began with a selected list of notable living jazz trombonist/composers with whom interviews may have potentially been conducted. These included: Paul McKee, Steve Wiest, Fred Sturm, Slide Hampton, Don Sebesky, Sammy Nestico, John Fedchock, and Robin Eubanks. The initial list of eight subjects was narrowed to include only three to five. Criteria for participation in the study included availability and interest.

Interviewees were presented with the same basic set of questions, which yielded a variety of opinions on the subject. Follow-up questions, or questions specifically

designed to address the experience and expertise of the subjects were presented in addition to the basic questions. This allowed for a level of parallel structure in the interviews, but also an opportunity for elasticity in the dialogue.

This investigation is not an in-depth study of either the subjects' playing or composing, but rather the relationship between the two disciplines. Elements of each discipline have been included as they relate to the specific topic. As each subject is unique in their performing and composing/arranging experience, and in particular, to what extent each discipline defines their career, the relationship of the two disciplines is the unifying factor in the study.

The subjects selected for this study have composed and arranged extensively in the context of the jazz orchestra, or big band (these terms are used interchangeably). Though their playing and composing in the smaller jazz combo forum will be presented as a contrasting subject, their work as composer/arrangers in the larger ensemble setting functions as a focal topic and a unifying factor among the subjects. Related to this concept is the distinction between composing and arranging, which in the context of the jazz orchestra are closely related enough to be considered interchangeable.

Finally, terms, language, styles, and figures considered commonplace in the areas of jazz performance, composing, and arranging are not defined in detail, as this study assumes the reader to have an existing knowledge of these subjects.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Sources listed as references have been categorized as either those that are cited and have directly informed the study, or sources consulted in researching the interviewees or the topic. The dearth of existing information regarding the specific subject of this dissertation is the rationale for inclusion of a separate listing of consulted sources. Information gathered from these sources has served to inform the interview questions, particularly with regard to each subject's individual experience as related to the topic. Additional pertinent information that supports the interviewees' accounts and the related discussions is included and cited.

Research began with a search of Boolean terms in numerous databases, including: the University of Northern Colorado's music library catalogue, *The Source*; catalogues of other libraries, such as *Prospector*; and various indexes and databases, including the *International Index to Music Periodicals (IIMP)*, *RILM Music Abstracts*, and *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. Searches included various combinations of the terms 'trombone,' 'composition,' and 'jazz.' These terms were also input into online search engines such as Google.

The names of the final interviewees selected for participation were also input into these various searches. As they are all current artists, much of their biographical

information, as well as interviews and articles are available on the Internet. General biographical information on the interviewees was compiled from their personal websites, but also using information from other sources, including interviews, journal articles, and books. Types of sources consulted in researching these subjects that are not necessarily directly cited in this study include their recorded output as performers and composers, reviews of these recordings by journals and magazines, scores of their compositions, interviews in which they have participated, and articles they have authored. The information gathered from these sources informed their biographies, as well as the interview questions that addressed their specific experience in the field. All interviewees were initially contacted via email, and were asked of their knowledge of existing studies of a similar nature to this one. Paul McKee participated in a spoken interview via telephone on August 17, 2013, and John Fedchock, Steve Wiest, and Fred Sturm responded via email to provided written interview questions on September 11-12, September 27, and September 29, 2013, respectively.

In addition to those interviewed as part of this study, other notable jazz trombonist/composers, both living and deceased, were similarly researched. These included J. J. Johnson, Slide Hampton, and Bob Brookmeyer. Information on these authorities is also included in support of this study.

Existing interviews with the subjects proved an invaluable resource in informing this investigation. Paul McKee's interview with David Wilkin¹ provided detailed biographical information, as well as illustrating some of McKee's thoughts on the topics

¹ David Wilken, "An Interview With Trombonist/Composer Paul McKee," <http://www.wilktone.com/?p=1098> (2010), accessed 20 December 2012.

of jazz trombone performance and composition. Bob Bernotas' interview with Slide Hampton² provided similarly useful information on the subject, as did Barbara Gardner's interview with Hampton,³ as cited in Kurt Dietrich's comprehensive text *Jazz 'Bones: The World of Jazz Trombone*.⁴ This book was a resource for general biographical information, as well as illustrating the various influences between and lineages of jazz trombonists.

Ben Ratliff's interview with Bob Brookmeyer in the New York Times was the source of that notable trombonist/composer's words on the subject.⁵ Finally, instructional videos posted by Steve Wiest on "Steve Wiest – The Trombone Zone" informed research on that interviewee.⁶ These sources that were directly cited are listed in the references, followed by a listing of additional sources consulted in this study. These additional sources are organized according to interviewee.

² Bob Bernotas, "An Interview With Slide Hampton," <http://www.trombone.org/articles/library/slidehampton-int.asp> (1994), accessed 14 Oct 2013.

³ Barbara Gardner, "This Is Slide Hampton," *Down Beat*, January 1961, 14-15.

⁴ Kurt Dietrich, *Jazz 'Bones: The World of Jazz Trombone* (Germany: Advance Music, 2005).

⁵ Ben Ratliff, "Bob Brookmeyer: Raging and Composing Against the Machine," http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/12/arts/music/12broo.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3 (2006), accessed 21 September 2013.

⁶ Steve Wiest, "Steve Wiest – The Trombone Zone," <http://www.jazzeveryone.com/teachers-corner/steve-wiest/> (2010), accessed 28 April 2013.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The artists selected for participation in this study represent a spectrum of jazz composer/trombonists with emphases in different areas, such as performing, composing, and education. Initial research on these subjects consulted sources such as their scholarly writings, interviews in which they have participated, interviews they have conducted, articles and reviews of their playing and composing/arranging, and recorded output of their playing and composing/arranging. Media included books, journal articles, online articles, liner notes to recordings, and recordings in a variety of media. Information gathered in this research informed the interview process, in particular those questions tailored to the individual subjects. It was also used to provide biographical information on the participants and their relationship with the topic of the study.

Potential interviewees were contacted via either email or telephone. The four final selected interviewees were provided with a consent form for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before interviews were conducted (see appendix for documentation). Interviews were conducted via telephone and email correspondence. The transcription of one recorded interview and the written responses of others via email constitute much of the discussion of this dissertation. Though the interviews are presented in their original form, only information relevant to the study is included in the

brief summaries that follow each interview. The primary discussion is followed by a chapter that compares and discusses the interviewees' answers to the same basic set of questions with which they were each presented, and finally by a chapter that presents conclusions regarding the topic.

The interview questions presented to each subject are listed here. The order of the questions, as well an explanation for the inclusion of each in the interview is described in detail. In addition to these questions presented to each interviewee, follow-up questions, or questions specifically designed to address the experience and expertise of the individual subjects were included.

1. Would you say that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists or group leaders (especially of small group formats) than many other instrumentalists in modern jazz? Has being a trombonist 'driven' you to pursue composing/arranging, for either economic or artistic reasons?

The interview opens with a question that presents one of the primary ideas behind the close relationship of jazz trombone performance and composing/arranging, namely the idea that many trombonists pursue composing and arranging out of necessity. The question is two-part in addressing possible economic and artistic reasons for this theory.

2. How has being a trombonist influenced your approach to composing/arranging? How much of your composing do you do on the trombone vs. other instruments (e.g. piano)?

This first part of the question is intentionally broad, allowing the interviewee to expound on their personal experiences and thoughts about the matter, and possibly to provide

additional insight with regard to the first question. The second part of the question addresses the specific use of instruments in composing and arranging.

3. Do you think the physical placement of the trombone section, the trombone's place in the orchestration, or the traditional role of the trombone in a big band influences your approach to composing/arranging? If so, how?

This question focuses on the context of the jazz orchestra, or big band, and how the factors mentioned might affect trombonists' decisions as composer/arrangers in this particular setting. Interviewees may also expound on other matters related to composing and arranging for jazz orchestra.

4. What differences do you see in the influence of being a trombonist on your small and large ensemble composing/arranging?

Related to, but in contrast to the previous question, this one explores the role of the trombonist as composer/arranger in a small jazz group (combo) setting. These trombonists' experiences as performers and soloists may be discussed here as well.

5. How have your teachers or influences led you to pursue composing/arranging?

This question explores the teachers, artists, and experiences that have informed the subjects' work. It is based in part on the idea that trombonist/composers might pursue

both disciplines because the people they studied with, or were influenced by, directly or indirectly, did the same.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Paul McKee: Brief Biography

Perhaps best known for his long tenure with the Woody Herman Orchestra, Paul McKee is a versatile trombonist, composer, arranger, and educator, currently teaching at Florida State University. He has also taught at DePaul University, Northern Illinois University, Youngstown State University, and the University of Missouri, Kansas City. Before joining Woody Herman's band in 1984, McKee earned a Bachelor of Music in Music Education from the University of Northern Iowa and a Master of Music in Composition from the University of Texas at Austin. His 1999 recording *Gallery* showcases his talent as a player and composer/arranger, and features guest appearances by Tim Ries, Bobby Shew, and jazz trombone icon Carl Fontana. Though McKee's playing displays a strong Fontana influence, he has nonetheless developed a unique sound as both a player and composer. He cites J.J. Johnson, Frank Rosolino, Slide Hampton, Curtis Fuller, Bill Watrous, and Hal Crook as other favorite trombonists, and Wayne Shorter, Thelonious Monk, Gil Evans, Bill Holman, Bob Brookmeyer, and Bob Mintzer as composing and arranging influences. McKee is in frequent demand as a guest artist and clinician throughout the country.

Paul McKee: Interview

The following questions were presented in writing to the subject. The spoken interview, conducted over the phone, was based on these questions, but allowed for an elastic, conversational dialogue.

1. Would you say that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists or group leaders (especially of small group formats) than many other instrumentalists in modern jazz? Has being a trombonist 'driven' you to pursue composing/arranging, for either economic or artistic reasons?

2. How has being a trombonist influenced your approach to composing/arranging? How much of your composing do you do on the trombone vs. other instruments (e.g. piano)?

3. Do you think the physical placement of the trombone section, the trombone's place in the orchestration, or the traditional role of the trombone in a big band influences your approach to composing/arranging? If so, how?

4. What differences do you see in the influence of being a trombonist on your small and large ensemble composing/arranging?

5. You've said (in an interview with David Wilken) that composing and arranging are two separate things. Does being a trombonist influence these disciplines in different ways? If so, how?

6. How have your teachers or influences led you to pursue composing/arranging? Were Woody Herman and his great arrangers a significant influence on you in this regard?

AB: Would you say that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists or group leaders (especially of small group formats) than many other instrumentalists in modern jazz? Has being a trombonist 'driven' you to pursue composing/arranging, for either economic or artistic reasons?

PM: Well I agree absolutely with the statement that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists. I think that comes from the fact that the trombone is, I like to say, a 'differently enabled' instrument than some of the more prominent instruments like saxophone and trumpet. Some of the technical challenges of playing (primarily you're talking about bebop and post-bop styles like hard bop)—if you look at the number of great trumpet soloists, saxophone soloists, and then the number of great trombone soloists, and if you put similar criteria to each of those instruments, which are agility, technical prowess, harmonic conception and things like that, there's a smaller proportion of successful trombone players, a smaller circle of players that really excel in that genre.

I think that sometimes trombonists feel like a second-class citizen, especially in the small group situation. Obviously, the role of the trombone section in a big band is pretty critical, as far as a proportion of the harmonic range that they occupy, but very often in small groups you'll see many fewer trombonists being included. A lot of that is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I think trombonists have to learn to deal with a lot of the same things that saxophone and trumpet players have had to deal with. For example, one thing I focus on with my students, one of my mantras that I put out there a lot is that all roads lead through bebop. I believe the disciplines of playing the bebop style are the things that allow you to become more able to stand up there with trumpet players and saxophone players and play that style of sound, like you belong there. The challenges of playing bebop specifically involve a lot of agility, a lot of precise intonation, a lot of articulation challenges, a lot of harmonic knowledge, and I think that once people focus on that, and gain a sense of mastery of playing the bebop style, they're basically prepared for, as far as I'm concerned, pretty much anything that followed chronologically. I think that the challenge of playing lots of chord changes at a fast tempo—once you can do that, you can start to handle situations that come after that, so obviously that's a lot of specific demands that a lot of players have been unable to achieve, so I think the small proportion of trombonists is a very obvious thing.

As far as the second half of the question, some of the first jazz concerts I attended were big band concerts. I think the Stan Kenton Band was maybe the first one I ever went to, and I remember just being blown away by the power and the beauty of that band. Of course, in that band, the trombone section had a very prominent role too, more than some of the other bands, carrying the weight, as far as some of the chorale kind of things, so I remember the feeling and the excitement that I experienced from hearing that band. That was something I decided that I would like to be able to learn how to do.

As I started becoming interested in being a soloist, I decided that I didn't want to just play other people's arrangements or just get plugged into an existing feature. I wanted to start writing my own features, and that feeling of wanting to create the entire world around you, as a soloist—you want to write the kind of tune that you want to play on, and something that exploits your strengths. I think that very often (and this is a real typical

complaint) trombone parts are boring: lots of whole notes, lots of remedial.... They don't challenge them, so they don't get any better; a kind of circle of limiting the trombone section and their contribution. When you feel like everyone else is getting to carry the ball, and you're basically serving the function of the offensive line in a big band, you kind of want to get into the game a little bit more. And I think part of that is writing music, so you can start to have more of a role in the overall creation of the music, other than just as a soloist. So besides writing music for myself as a soloist, I'm also trying to write music for the entire group and to try to elicit some of that response that I had when I first heard the bands. You want to try to create that for other people to experience, and that was a big motivating factor for me. Really it was never anything about, 'well as a trombone player, I don't play enough gigs, I need to make money in the business, so I'm going to write music.' That really wasn't a motivating factor. That was maybe a positive outcome from the composing/arranging. Mostly it was something I felt interested me and I wanted to learn how to do it.

Writing for specific groups within the constraints of ranges or doubling limitations, or all the things that you have to do to try to create something interesting that doesn't necessarily have screaming high trumpet parts and every double in the saxophone section, I think that's a challenge. And I think that gets into something that we'll probably hit upon in another one of these questions, so I'll stop there.

AB: That's interesting; your response about carrying the ball and feeling a need to kind of contribute more in that setting too, that makes a lot of sense.

PM: I think that when you talk to all the rest of your interviewees, you'll hear that same sort of thing, that you feel like the trombone is kind of restricted in the way that, 'well, I don't really trust the trombone to catch the long ball, so we're just going to let them play some thirds and sevenths for the other folks.' If you never challenge them, they're never going to get any better. People are afraid that they can't write this kind of melody for the trombone because they won't be able to do it, and I think that there's other ways to feature trombonists that doesn't necessarily require them to play with the vertical arpeggiated skills that are idiomatic to saxophone. I think there's a lot of ways to compensate for that without having to go the other extreme of not giving them anything to do.

AB: So like any other instrument in the band, you have to write idiomatically for them.

PM: It also depends on the range of where things happen and the range of the instruments. Sometimes you want something that's down in the range that might be handled best by tenors, baris, trombones, and then sometimes you give something to somebody else in the trumpet range. If you look at a lot of the famous arrangers, you often see the brass players will be handling harmonic voiced out chords, and then the saxophones might be playing a unison counter line, and that's a real common way of writing. And the saxophone players have the agility of being able to have that and have it be heard.

Very often you might hear the opposite thing, which is the saxophones playing a voicing, and maybe the brass, maybe octaves, playing a tenor line, unison line. You hear that. Thad [Jones] does that a lot. It's something that has a different level of power than the first scenario that I described. You have to try to make the right choice for the right moment, and I think sometimes it's about the trombones. Let them carry the ball for the moment and give them something to do. This has really, as far as a concept of composing and arranging, led to some really positive results and feedback of my charts—the importance of giving everybody something melodic and getting everyone something to do in the arrangement.

Especially when you're writing harmonized parts, making sure that your inner parts have melodic content—I think this is probably one of the biggest thing I carry—well this is kind of getting into the second question a little bit: 'how has being a trombonist influenced your approach to composing and arranging?' Obviously, economy of effort, and write good melodies that lay well. That's a universal thing. That's not just a trombone issue, but that's something that applies to every single person in the band. There are certain elements that are universal in what creates a good melody: a certain amount of angularity, interesting chord tone choices, the element of swing that's created by the shape of the melody, the combination of small versus large intervals. You get into some idiomatic things when you get into larger leaps, and sometimes that is better handled by various instruments. The way I contribute as a soloist is to try to play solos that are melodically engaging, and I think that of all the players that have inspired me the most, that is one of the first two or three things I would say about them. Obviously, you talk about the quality of having a unique and individual sound and the concept of swing. But also, just writing and playing melodically to me is so important. Those are the players I go back to and listen to repeatedly, as opposed to players who tend to throw a lot of chord changes and things out there all the time. Obviously, having that knowledge of harmony is important, but the players who I really focus on have distilled that down to the essence, which is just a good melody. You think of J. J. Johnson.

AB: And he cites Lester Young as one of his great melodic influences too. He's a really melodic, lyrical player too, so that makes perfect sense.

PM: I think that getting everybody something to do, meaning when you take a piece of music into a big band, you want everybody to feel like they're contributing to it. You don't want to have some arbitrary, 'well I'll just give the trombones whole notes and keep them out of trouble.' If you're playing in the trombone section and you see, 'oh this guy does that with the trombones all the time, I don't really dig playing his music that much.' You want to want everybody to play your music and that's what makes them play better. There's so many things that you can do when you bring in a chart to a band that puts them in your corner, and I think that if everyone feels like, 'well I know that in the sax soli, the second alto and the second tenor parts are still going to be melodic even though they're not the top,' everyone's going to have something melodic to contribute. I'm sure everyone's played charts that have these really awkward, chromatic, random inner parts that don't really make much melodic sense. They're just getting all the leftover notes of the chord voicing. If you are trying to write melodically for everybody, for one thing, the music is going to sound better sooner because they're playing a logical

melody and it reads down easier, and also it's just more fun. The whole thing about this is it's got to be fun: it's got to be fun to play, it's got to be fun to write, and it's got to be fun to perform. And a lot of music, for the amount of fun you get out of it, is way too much work.

It's one thing to challenge people. Every chart I write, I try to do something I haven't done before, and not get any kind of formulaic complacency in my writing. But the charts I like, or even the program of writing a concert—it's got to have a combination of education and entertainment. And I think you want to teach the audience something by trying something new, some harmonic variations and alternate changes, or some different orchestration, or something that challenges you and maybe gives the audience something they haven't heard before. It's also got to be in the context of something that's musically and horizontally interesting to hear, and not just about your resume, as far as everything you've studied crammed into one chart. You want to make it an enjoyable trip with a few surprises along the way, if at all possible. And that's for the players, as well as the listeners.

AB: Not to digress, but I just wanted to go back to something you talked about a minute ago and that was range, and specifically the range of the trombone. How much of that figures into its prominence or lack thereof, especially in the small group formats in modern jazz?

PM: I think it's one of the [Sammy] Nestico books; he talks about the overall range and then the practical range. You have trombone players that can play really high, like up in the trumpet range, but obviously it's not practical to write that way. A lot of the charts I write are guest artist charts and they're played by a variety of different bands. And sometimes if you write something that's really specifically tailored to the player, you have this trombone part with a bunch of high Fs in it. It's going to really limit the amount of people that can play that.

The thing about Nestico, I like the way he talks about practical range. [The trombone] is down in the tenor saxophone, not quite as high as the top of the tenor saxophone, but it's kind of the timbre of the tenor. If you think about what the piano player's doing as far as comping, trumpet, alto, and even higher tenor sounds are going to be up where the right hand of the piano player is often playing, so you're up in the extensions. That sometimes has more of a natural sonic presence. If you look at bari or trombone, it tends to be down in the bass clef hand of the range. You're going to be playing the same extension choices, but they're going to be heard closer to maybe what the left hand is playing. Now, I don't think that's a huge deal, because it's all about the horizontal context again and the melodic momentum that a good melody creates.

With trombone, the higher up you get in the range of the instrument, the closer all the positions get, so you have access to more notes, and that's why most trombone players solo in that octave up from middle C. That's where most players tend to focus, because you have more choices. But I also think that a lot of the meat of the instrument lies in the octave below that middle C too, the darkness and the full sound. I think very often trombone players are so focused on trying to become saxophone or trumpet players that

they overlook some of the beauty of the instrument, as far as timbre, tone quality, and the beauty of just playing a slower melody and having it be more about the sound than the technique or the range. So, to answer your original question, I definitely think the range of the instrument has some influence on some of the limitations of its use.

AB: Since you were just talking about that, do you think the physical placement of the trombone section (that is where the trombone section is between the saxophones and the trumpets) or the trombone's place in the orchestration (like you said, usually holding down the chord tones and having the more supportive role of the higher voices), or that the traditional role of the trombone in general in a big band influences your approach to composing and arranging?

PM: The physical placement question, I've thought about that, and I don't really think that's an issue to me. If you're thinking that, 'well the trombone parts have a lot more rests and whole notes and so there's more time to listen to what's going on,' I guess that could be true, but I really think a lot of it is that in playing trombone, you're dealing with a fretless instrument and you have to use your ear to tune. And very often in the trombone section, you have a lot of chord voicings. Typically, when I write a four note voicing for trombone—this is using the bass trombone as a comping voice and not playing the root or anything like that, basically like the left hand of a piano player—usually there's going to be thirds and sevenths, but I also try to stick a couple extensions in there, just so that the trombone section has something that gives an idiomatic representation of the voicing, and not just the bland chord tones. So in doing that, you have whole-steps and half-steps that happen between the inner voices within the section, and that also happens in relationship to the trombone voicing and the saxophones. Someone might have an A and a Bb right next to each other. As a trombonist, when you have that half step, you have to be really able to hear that and hear where that other Bb is, if you've got the A. You want to make sure that that half step is in tune, so you become really aware of 'oh, I've got a thirteenth of the chord now, and I'm up against the seventh, so I need to make that in tune.' You really get a refined sense of using your ears, as opposed to just a triad or something, which is a different situation.

In some of these jazz voicings, a lot of the density happens in the range that the trombones exist, so a lot of that has to do with me becoming aware of 'oh, this is an interesting voicing,' or 'this half-step creates an interesting clustery sound.' Then sometimes I'm up there after the rehearsal looking at the score, seeing, 'what was that?'

The traditional role of the trombone in the big band, it does influence how I arrange, because I try to avoid being overly predictable with 'well the trombones are going to have the remedial static parts.' I try to think of other ways to incorporate them and give them a chance to do something. You know, it doesn't take a whole lot to make a trombone player happy, but you give them a couple moments in a chart to be exposed and have the most prominent voice, and it goes a long way of making them feel like they're participating in the process.

AB: How much of your composing do you do on the trombone versus other instruments, like the piano?

PM: When I'm composing or arranging, a lot of my melodic ideas come from just my practice sessions where I'm playing. I might be working on a tune, or playing with a play-along, or playing with students, or something, and I play something that 'oh, that's kind of melodically satisfying.' And very often I might write it down—I have a lot of little snippets of melody that I keep that I find uses for sometimes. Definitely, the trombone has some impact on that. As far as the piano, the piano for me is more of a harmonic instrument. I use that to work on voicings and changes and things like that. I don't have high-end technical skills on the piano, but I use it a lot to get harmonic density and things like that worked out.

For me, the main source for working on composing and arranging is in my head. I remember several years ago I was getting ready to do a trip with the Woody Herman Band and Frank Tiberi called up and said that he wanted an arrangement of "Naima." This was like a week before we were going to leave, and I was like 'Frank, you couldn't have told me a month ago?' And so my first thought was, there's no way I can get this done. But of course, he planted that seed, and I started thinking about it, and so I ended up doing the whole arrangement, basically on the trip in Europe. It was on a bus, on a plane, and I didn't have any access to a keyboard, and I was just writing stuff down on manuscript paper. I actually did the whole chart in my head. There were times when we would get to a gig and I might have a couple minutes to play through a couple voicings on the piano, just to check out some things, but this was mostly thinking out this chart in my head. I was thinking, 'well, this is really hard,' and I was thinking, 'well, if I don't do it, it won't get done, and I'm going to regret not having done it.' And it worked out really well. I was really happy with the chart.

AB: I think we've played that chart with Lab One at UNC a couple years ago at the jazz festival, does that sound right?

PM: With Donny McCaslin, maybe?

AB: Yep, that's the one.

PM: So there's nothing incredibly amazing about that chart, but it was just interesting to do that whole thing, especially a tune like that, without any keyboard or computer. I find that, for me, really meditating on a project helps me figure things out. Very often, if I get stuck on something, like I don't know what to do after this point in the chart. I'll just try to sit there and I'll close my eyes, and I'll think about the chart—I almost put myself in the audience, listening to a performance of this chart—and I try to kind of hear it in real time, everything I've done. And very often, I get to the point where I'm stuck, if I just relax, and allow it to happen, usually something very obvious will reveal itself that I was overlooking. You try so hard wanting to write something that is different and hip, and sometimes you really miss the obvious solution to a problem.

I do this all the time when I'm working on a tune. I get obsessed with it, I'm hearing it in my head, I try not to walk into traffic, you know, because you're thinking about this stuff. And sometimes when I'm laying in bed at night, I start thinking about it. Sometimes I'll figure out something in my sleep, and sometimes I'll actually get up and write it down.

Or sometimes I'll wake up in the morning, knowing that I found the solution and I can't remember it, which is very frustrating. I really think for me it's about visualizing the music in your head first and foremost, and then once I get something, a general shape of a melody—sometimes it will be an abstract kind of a shape—then I'll get out my horn and play around with it and try different ordering of the notes and such until it gets to the point that I feel like it's appropriate.

So it's really imagination first, trombone second, piano third, as far as composing. Composing without a piano, I don't like to do that, and I really don't ever want to do that again.

AB: It sounds really hard. I would not be able to do that.

PM: Well, it wasn't the first chart I'd ever written, so I had an idea of, 'well this will work.' I knew things that would work. Of course, you're also writing for the Woody Herman Band, so you don't want to throw something in there that's not going to be great. It was a challenge.

AB: I remember playing that arrangement. It was a strong one. I enjoyed playing it.

[The next question] is kind of related to what you were talking about: writing melodies on the trombone, approaching melodic composition from the trombone, and harmony from the piano. You said in an interview with David Wilken that composing and arranging are two separate things.⁷

PM: You know, I don't remember saying that and I'm not sure if that was taken out of context or something, because I don't separate those as much as that quote implies. I think of composing/arranging and playing as two sides of the same coin.

AB: And that is in that interview as well—maybe that's more along the lines of what you were going for. Those three disciplines or those two disciplines together, how does the trombone affect each of those separately, or does it?

PM: It would be really hard, if not impossible, for me to chose between playing and writing and arranging and composing, because they really are complimentary. As an improvising trombonist, I try really hard to create melodies that are interesting and appealing.

The skills of having to write voicings—that really informs the harmonic side of the trombone player. So they're really mutually complimentary disciplines. This is why I encourage all my students, whether or not they're taking an arranging class, to write music, whether it's just writing a contrafact on a chord progression that they're working on, or arranging a tune for combo, or going to the next step and arranging a tune for big

⁷ David Wilken, "An Interview With Trombonist/Composer Paul McKee," <http://www.wilktone.com/?p=1098> (2010), accessed 20 December 2012.

band. This is a skill that's going to make you marketable, professionally, certainly, and it's also fun. It's fun to do. When I talk to my students about a career in music, you know you're not going to be able to make a living just going out and playing Wayne Shorter tunes at a gig. You've got to have some different callings.

I found that, for example, when I moved to Chicago, you kind of start as an apprentice when you move to a new scene and you're playing different gigs. All the skills on your instrument become critical, like sight reading and playing chord changes well—you know, your jazz skills and your skills sitting in a section and blending, and all those things are important. But also, I got some work arranging, and it might be transcribing something off of a recording for somebody, or it might be, somebody says 'I need a Basie blues chart for my high school big band, my trumpet player can't play above an A, I want to feature my tenor player.' So you write something that's constructive for students. It's like a commission. All of a sudden you start to find a niche for yourself. They're all very satisfying things to do. To me, one of the cool things about arranging is that once you establish a little credibility as an arranger, people want to play your music, and occasionally they will ask you to write something for them.

This is kind of looking at the sixth question, talking about your teachers or influences and how they led you to pursue arranging. My first trombone hero was J. J. Johnson, and I saw that even the small group, quartet, quintet arrangements of his recordings were immaculately created. They're very specific and they're very tight and very professional. You listen to a J. J. record.... and you know it's exactly what J. J. wants you to get about his artistry. And then you start to hear some of his big band and larger ensemble writing, and, like I was talking about before, he's creating these worlds that he wants to live in as a player. And the same thing with Slide Hampton. Same thing with Bob Brookmeyer. All these guys that play, first and foremost to me, it's the beauty of their artistry on their instrument, their specific individual voice that drew me in, but then you start to hear all the harmonic complexities of a Slide Hampton chart or the Brookmeyer chart, and you realize that that informs their playing to a great extent. If you listen to Thad [Jones], Thad's soloing is very much like Thad's writing. The quirky, angular melodies that you encounter in his charts, he plays, so he's being honest. He's representing himself.

Getting back to the question, the composing and arranging and playing, they're very complimentary to me. Teaching what I do, I'm going to encourage my students on whatever instrument—whether it's someone in my combo, or one of my private trombone students—I'm going to encourage them to try this, because if you try to write a contrafact on a chord progression and you go through the painstaking process of fixing it and erasing it and deleting it, and writing it differently, and you try to get to the one that's really satisfying, those are the decisions that you can make with the benefit of being able to go back and change things. But you practice making those decisions a lot and that's going to inform your soloing, so you start to make these decisions spontaneously when you're playing your instrument. It makes you think more melodically when you're playing.

AB: Since you started talking about your influences, I wanted to ask specifically, you have a close association with Woody Herman. What about his band and the long lineage of great arrangers that worked in his band. Were they an influence on your writing?

PM: Absolutely. Of all the big bands that I grew up listening to—Basie and Ellington and Kenton and Maynard's bands, Buddy Rich Band, Woody Herman Band—those are all the bands I got to hear in high school, I always really liked the Woody arrangers. Now, going back to guys like Neal Hefti—and Neal Hefti was someone who wrote for all the bands, as was someone like Bill Holman. Those guys were great because they made each band sound like itself, and not just like a generic big band chart. Then you look at Ralph Burns and you look at Nat Pierce with Woody's band, and some of the more contemporary guys. Bill Stapleton is one of my favorite arrangers from Woody's band. He did some really great arrangements. I always liked that chart he did on "Come Rain or Come Shine" and he did a chart on "Meaning of the Blues." I just liked his writing.

But the thing that was interesting about playing in Woody's band, the unique aspect of that band was its instrumentation, because you have three tenors, a bari, three bones, five trumpets. And Woody would play alto, but you didn't really have Woody playing lead on solis and things. He would pick up the alto and play a melody every now and then, but you really didn't involve him in the specifics of the charts. He didn't want to have to pull out a part to read it, you know as part of the band. So basically you have three tenors and a bari, which led to some interesting decisions because you didn't have a typical—like if you want to write a sax soli—it wasn't a typical saxophone section, and that's why very often in some of the sax soli things I'm working on in Woody's band, you would hear a trumpet or maybe a Flugel horn playing lead and then three tenors and a bari. So there would be your five parts, which also had a completely different sound than a traditional two alto, two tenor, bari saxophone section.

Very often in that band, the bass trombone—that bass trombone book was definitely not just a bass trombone book. Sometimes the bass trombone would be up in the upper portion of the range with the other trombones when you needed the three trombones to be comping, and sometimes the bass bone would be down with the bari, playing the bass lines. So the bass trombone player in that band had to be very flexible. You had to be a real bass trombone player, but you also had to be able to [play] up with the second trombones.

Then you have the three tenors remaining (and this is something I got used to hearing with a lot of the charts in Woody's book, and I do this a lot in my own writing, even stuff that's not Woody related); they kind of feel like melodic obligatos in unison. They're kind of free to play with this soloistic, melodic feel, the three tenors together.

[John] Fedchock was really adept at writing for those parameters, of the specifics of writing for that band. But you hear a lot of charts that he has re-written for publishing and he maybe had to create an alto part and take the first tenor part and turn it into a second alto part, and basically add a trombone part, so it's conventional instrumentation. He's great at doing that and it works great, but all of a sudden it doesn't sound as much like a Woody chart. It sounds like a big band chart because the instrumentation has

changed. It's an interesting thing to me. I've had a couple things that I've written for the band that when I bring them in for [another band] to play, I really try to have them get an extra tenor player, and try to do it as much like Woody's band as possible, because that's what makes it sound like a Woody chart.

So, back to the question, the influence of the arrangers for that band. You saw how they learned how to write for the band—I think that's the lesson learned from all the arrangers. Each of the major big bands had some arrangers that were very important. You think of the way Thad [Jones] wrote for his band, or the way that Duke [Ellington] and Billy Strayhorn wrote for their band, or that guys in the [Count] Basie band like Thad [Jones] or Frank Wess, or Frank Foster wrote for that band, because they were in the band and they knew the sound of the band, as opposed to somebody from outside the band just kind of throwing a chart out. If you don't really have a sense of how the band sounds, it's going to sound like a generic big band chart.

I think the lesson learned, specifically playing from Woody's band, but also from listening to other bands, is that trying to find an identity, either as a writer or as a player—you want to have a signature sound, so maybe somebody hears your music on the radio, maybe they hear you playing a solo, and they say 'hey, that sounds like Paul McKee' or 'that chart sounds like a Paul McKee chart.' If you can carve out a little tiny sliver of a niche for yourself as far as creating some identity in your writing or playing, it's a big achievement. You hear a lot of players who sound like—as writers, or players—they sound like clones of whoever they studied. Part of the criticism of jazz education in higher ed is that a lot of players come out sounding like clones of whoever they have been studying. You transcribe solos, you've studied such and such charts, and you've adopted all this language, and then you want to try to encourage the next step of taking all this language and creating something that's unique to you, so you don't just sound like a clone. Maria Schneider has created a lot of clones, and a lot of them don't really have their own sound, they're a copy of someone else's sound. And that to me is the step that's most important, the step of finding your own sound so that you can have something that's identifiable. It's hard. It's not easy to do. You have to figure out, 'what am I bringing to this.' Your playing and writing are the sum of all your influences, plus the X factor, which is you and the way that you take this gumbo of ingredients, all the different influences, and you create something. If I hear someone's chart, 'oh I can tell this person really liked Oliver Nelson. Through their playing, I can tell this trombonist really likes Carl Fontana. But they have gone beyond just sounding like a copy of this—they sound like some of this influence, but [they have] their own voice.'

So that is the goal for me, trying to encourage my students, trying to get beyond just the sum of the influences.

AB: We've mostly been talking about big band, but how, if at all, is your small group approach in playing and arranging different, being a trombonist?

PM: Different than the big band?

AB: Yeah, and you kind of touched on this a little bit with Woody Herman because he's got a unique band that's a little smaller than a traditional, like a Kenton sized big band or even a traditional five-four-four or five-four-five. But in a combo setting, where you're the only trombonist, how is your arranging/composing different in that aspect?

PM: When I start off writing for a small group, it's to a great extent based on finding the common range of the instruments that are in the group. Let's say you have trumpet, tenor, and trombone in a group. I tend to write to find the common ground for those instruments. For those three instruments, you look at the middle C to an octave above middle C—that's a pretty good common ground for those three horns. Now there are times where you want to maybe have the trumpet up in almost the lead trumpet range, where the horns are really spread out, for a send-off to a solo or something exciting—maybe it's a unison figure. But as far as writing voicings for those three instruments, I think that it's definitely affected by the range issues of the trombone that we talked about earlier. I'm trying to write some voicings for those three horns that involve them being in close proximity. The thing about writing for three horns versus two horns is that with three horns you have the ability, a little more readily, to focus on some half steps in the voicings. With two horns, you can do that, but it's more like an effect; the only two horns are a half step apart, so it kind of draws more attention than if it's the bottom two horns in a three horn voicing, where the bottom two voices are a half a step apart.

Anyway, a lot of it is the proximity of the range of the instruments. The trombone often ends up being the bottom voice in a three note voicing, and with my students and combos and such, I really try to get away from having that be an autopilot kind of setting for the voicing, because what happens is the trombone player never gets the experience of playing the melody, or playing the top of a voicing, so I try to create some variations. Sometimes the trombone is not in the bottom, but even the middle or the top of the voicing. Now in order to do that, you have to observe limitations about the other accompanying instruments and voice them accordingly so that the range issues don't become a problem. I think about the stuff I do for my students in the combos at school, and I really try to find ways to challenge the trombone. If they're playing a bop tune, I'm going to avoid the temptation to harmonize it, and just give everybody the melody in a unison situation, so that the trombone players can experience playing the melody for once—not always playing rests or an occasional comping thing.

I think in a small group, there's definitely an opportunity to challenge the trombone a little bit more and include them, and the same thing in composing. Look at J. J.'s small group arrangements. He has a lot of specific things for the rhythm section to do, other than just playing an Aebersold accompaniment. The horns will have a lot of specific kicks and figures, so that everyone's involved.

If you have a sextet, I look at six different players—it's not just rhythm section and horns, but the possibility for combining those six people in different ways is a great opportunity. Like I say, you want to have something that's comfortable and fun to play, but you also want to avoid being overly predictable, and I think that way as a player and a writer. You want to try to create some moments of surprise, so people don't get bored. You know,

‘this guy always writes very conservatively, nothing ever happens, and his charts are boring.’

AB: Well, that brings us full circle to your first point about being a trombonist, especially in a big band, trying to keep everybody engaged. I think that’s an interesting approach...

PM: Well, it’s interesting verbalizing these things. That’s what’s great about teaching: you have to verbalize things that you think about. You have it real clear in your head, but it’s different when you have to explain it to someone else. Suddenly you go, ‘wow, I’d never really thought about it in terms of how do you explain it.’

Paul McKee: Summary

Paul McKee proved a gracious subject, serving as the first interviewee in this series. Some of the interesting points he makes about the relationship of the trombone to composing/arranging include: the importance of the trombone in a big band setting, despite the relative dearth of great trombonists in small groups in modern jazz; the importance of writing melodically for the trombone (and other instruments); the interconnected nature of the playing, composing, and arranging disciplines; and the importance of finding a unique voice as both a player and composer/arranger.

McKee cites criteria such as agility, technical prowess, and harmonic conception in comparing the trombone to other more visible instruments in modern jazz, specifically the trumpet and saxophone, reasoning that the relatively small number of successful trombonists have faced great challenges in keeping pace with players of the saxophone and trumpet in these aspects of performance. In counter to this observation is the noted importance of the trombone in the big band setting. McKee discusses the impact of the Stan Kenton band (of which the trombones carry a critical weight) in his formative years, saying that hearing the band inspired him to try his hand at arranging.

Related to the importance of the trombone in big band is the range of the instrument, a topic that surfaces throughout the interview. McKee explains that in big band arrangements, much of the harmonic density in the chord voicings lies within the trombone's natural range. He suggests that trombonists, especially in dealing with a fretless instrument, must have acute ears to tune the close intervals they frequently encounter, which may result in a heightened harmonic sensitivity.

Later in the interview, Paul McKee states: “[t]he traditional role of the trombone in the big band, it does influence how I arrange, because I try to avoid being overly predictable...” and notes the common problem of overly static and remedial writing for the trombone.⁸ Further considerations in writing for the trombone in big band are discussed: “I think that there’s other ways to feature trombonists that doesn’t necessarily require them to play with the vertical arpeggiated skills that are idiomatic to saxophone.”⁹ McKee explains the tendency of trombonists to neglect the beauty of the slower, sonically rich, melodic capabilities of the instrument in trying to match the technical complexities of instruments such as the saxophone and trumpet, once again citing range as a limitation. Another point of interest is his analogy of the trombone section serving as the offensive line in a big band, and his suggestion that perhaps many trombonists compose and arrange for this medium in an effort to be more involved in the creation of the music.

McKee takes a similarly non-traditional approach in arranging for the trombone in a small group setting. He believes this environment offers a chance to challenge the trombonist, and eschews the practice of having the trombone serve as the lowest voice in

⁸ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

⁹ Ibid.

a horn section by default. The opportunity to play complex unison melodies and upper voices presents a more inclusive role for the instrument in this forum.

Like the artists that influenced him, McKee strives to arrange ‘worlds’ within which to live as a performer. He cites J. J. Johnson as an early influence in this regard, in addition to other players and composers.

All these guys that play, first and foremost to me, it’s the beauty of their artistry on their instrument, their specific individual voice that drew me in, but then you start to hear all the harmonic complexities of a Slide Hampton chart or the [Bob] Brookmeyer chart, and you realize that that informs their playing to a great extent. If you listen to Thad [Jones], Thad’s soloing is very much like Thad’s writing. The quirky, angular melodies that you encounter in his charts, he plays, so he’s being honest. He’s representing himself.¹⁰

This illustrates McKee’s opinion regarding the interconnected nature of the performing, composing, and arranging disciplines, which he feels are largely inseparable. He also describes the often lengthy and painstaking process of creating and editing a composition as having the ability to inform decisions made while improvising in real time:

[I]f you try to write a contrafact on a chord progression and you go through the painstaking process of fixing it and erasing it and deleting it, and writing it differently, and you try to get to the one that’s really satisfying, those are the decisions that you can make with the benefit of being able to go back and change things. But you practice making those decisions a lot and that’s going to inform your soloing, so you start to make these decisions spontaneously when you’re playing your instrument.¹¹

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Finally, in describing his experiences playing and writing for Woody Herman's band, a group with a unique sound due to its somewhat non-traditional instrumentation, McKee emphasizes the importance of finding a unique voice in both the performing and composing/arranging worlds of music.

I think the lesson learned, specifically playing from Woody's band, but also from listening to other bands, is that trying to find an identity, either as a writer or as a player—you want to have a signature sound... Your playing and writing are the sum of all your influences, plus the X factor, which is you and the way that you take this gumbo of ingredients, all the different influences, and you create something... If you can carve out a little tiny sliver of a niche for yourself as far as creating some identity in your writing or playing, it's a big achievement.¹²

John Fedchock: Brief Biography

Another veteran of the Woody Herman Orchestra, John Fedchock is a Grammy-nominated trombonist, composer, arranger, and educator. In addition to past performances with T. S. Monk, Gerry Mulligan's Concert Big Band, Louie Bellson's Big Band, and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, he leads his own John Fedchock New York Big Band. He has released several recordings showcasing his talent as a player and composer/arranger in both small and large group settings, including *On The Edge, No Nonsense*, and *Up & Running* with his own big band, and *Hit The Bricks* and numerous live albums for small group. Fedchock holds degrees in Music Education and Jazz Studies from Ohio State University, and a Master's degree in Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media from the Eastman School of Music. He currently teaches at

¹² Ibid.

Purchase College in Purchase, NY and has served on boards for the International Trombone Association, the International Association For Jazz Education, and the Jazz Education Network.

John Fedchock: Interview

The following questions were presented in writing to the interviewee, who provided written responses via email.

AB: Would you say that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists or group leaders (especially of small group formats) than many other instrumentalists in modern jazz? Has being a trombonist 'driven' you to pursue composing/arranging, for either economic or artistic reasons?

JF: I think that there is a greater instance of trombonist leaders due to the fact that most small groups don't choose to include the trombone in their instrumentation. Because of this, trombonists are more apt to form their own groups. I was driven to writing through my participation in big bands.

AB: How has being a trombonist influenced your approach to composing/arranging? How much of your composing do you do on the trombone vs. other instruments (e.g. piano)?

JF: Due to the initial larger technical learning curve of the instrument, trombonists tend to approach writing, as well as improvisation from a more melodic approach, rather than an intricate harmonic or technical approach.

I normally do not compose using the trombone, unless I am writing something specific to the trombone. In those cases, I still do not write with the trombone, but will check things after I've written them to make sure they feel and lay properly on the horn.

AB: Do you think the physical placement of the trombone section, the trombone's place in the orchestration, or the traditional role of the trombone in a big band influences your approach to composing/arranging? If so, how?

JF: Sitting in the middle of a big band gives a unique perspective to the writer. It is much easier to hear and observe arranging techniques. Other sections don't have the placement to listen to all sections of the band. From the trombone section, I was able to hear, in detail, how the trombone section works with the saxes as well as the trumpets and rhythm.

AB: How has leading your own big band influenced your playing and composing/arranging?

JF: Leading my own band has only influenced my writing in that I'm writing for specific personnel to fit with my overall vision of what I'd like my band to sound like.

AB: What differences do you see in the influence of being a trombonist on your small and large ensemble composing/arranging?

JF: For small ensemble writing, the obvious difference from most is the mere inclusion of the trombone in the small group. Because I include trombone in my small groups, I've more extensively explored three-horn writing much more than two-horn writing.

My large ensemble writing is influenced by the drive to include the sound of the trombone section as something more than merely providing chord pads or sonorous qualities to the ensemble. The goal of having the trombones contribute to the melodic development of my compositions lends itself to a more evenly distributed approach, with no one section filling a preordained "role."

AB: How have your teachers or influences led you to pursue composing/arranging? Were Woody Herman and his great arrangers a significant influence on you in this regard?

JF: I haven't had any teachers that "led" me to composing/arranging, but due to my studies, have been "exposed" to it through classes on the subject. My arranging teacher, Rayburn Wright had a sincere passion for the art form, and that significantly inspired me to continue in my pursuit of the medium. Playing [the Woody Herman] book for 7 years was a big influence, so all those arrangers have affected my writing.

John Fedchock: Summary

Appearing more than once in John Fedchock's answers to the interview questions is the concept of the inclusion of the trombone in both small and large jazz ensemble settings. Additionally, Fedchock states that he has "extensively explored three-horn writing much more than two-horn writing" in the small group setting.¹³ He also strives for the active inclusion of the trombone in a big band setting: "The goal of having the

¹³ John Fedchock, personal email, 11-12 September 2013.

trombones contribute to the melodic development of my compositions lends itself to a more evenly distributed approach, with no one section filling a preordained ‘role.’”¹⁴

John Fedchock cites his extensive experience playing in big bands as a leading influence on his own composing and arranging. He claims he was initially led to writing through playing with big bands, and also asserts that the physical placement of the trombone section in a big band (centrally located behind the front row of saxophones, in front of the back row of trumpets, and adjacent to the rhythm section) has offered a unique perspective to him as a composer/arranger.

Finally, Fedchock reasons that leading his own big band, a natural extension of years of playing and writing for this medium, influences his composing and arranging through, as he explains, “writing for specific personnel to fit with my overall vision of what I'd like my band to sound like.”¹⁵ This undoubtedly includes himself as an often-featured player, which illustrates the concept of a trombonist leading their own group by means of their original compositions and arrangements. In his interview, Paul McKee similarly describes “that feeling of wanting to create the entire world around you, as a soloist—you want to write the kind of tune that you want to play on, and something that exploits your strengths.”¹⁶ John Fedchock, like other trombonist/composers asserts the same.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

Steve Wiest: Brief Biography

Yet another veteran of acclaimed jazz big bands, multiple Grammy-nominated trombonist, composer, and educator Steve Wiest spent years playing with Maynard Ferguson's band and The Doc Severinsen Big Band, among other notable jazz artists. He holds a Master's degree in Jazz Studies from The University of North Texas, where he is currently a full-time professor and directs the award-winning One O'Clock Lab Band. He has also served as the Assistant Director of Jazz Studies at The University of Texas at Arlington and as the Director of Jazz Studies and Trombone at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Wiest's 2006 release *Excalibur: The Steve Wiest Big Band* received critical acclaim and features both his inventive composing and his virtuosic playing. His compositions and arrangements have garnered numerous awards and are available through prominent jazz publishers. Steve Wiest cites J.J. Johnson, Slide Hampton, Frank Rosolino, and Carl Fontana as influential trombonists, and Slide Hampton, Gil Evans, Jim McNeely, Thad Jones, and Bob Brookmeyer among his favorite composer/arrangers. The influence of many other artists both within and outside of the jazz idiom is apparent in his eclectic approach to playing and writing.

Steve Wiest: Interview

The following questions were presented in writing to the subject, who provided written responses via email.

AB: Would you say that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists or group leaders (especially of small group formats) than many other instrumentalists in modern jazz? Has being a trombonist 'driven' you to pursue composing/arranging, for either economic or artistic reasons?

SW: I would. For whatever reason, we don't see as many trombonists in that role. There are, of course, and always have been trombone players who are at a level every bit as talented as artists that play other instruments as leaders, but for some reason the trombone has not achieved the level of prominence in that category as saxophone and trumpet. As a trombonist, this mystifies me. Perhaps it has been the marketing of a specific sound that is "representative" of jazz over the years that has done this, or maybe the lack of education in the business ranks of the major labels when they were still in business, I really don't know. With the likes of Steve Davis, Michael Dease, Marshall Gilkes, Vincent Gardner, Wycliffe Gordon and the current (as of September, 2013) cross over appeal of Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews, perhaps that trend is changing—one can only hope so!

I feel that being a trombonist has not "driven" me towards being a composer, but I believe that it has helped tremendously. One of the reasons is that trombonists have a wonderful opportunity to study voice leading and chord progressions and the foundation of orchestration because of their usual placement at the heart of the large jazz ensemble. Just playing all of those pads and noting how they are put together has helped me tremendously. I believe that with that kind of strong harmonic and linear foundation, trombonists are natural composers.

Of course the old joke (that has, sadly, some basis in historical reality) is that trombonists have nothing else to do, might as well learn to compose! ☺

AB: Do you think the physical placement of the trombone section, the trombone's place in the orchestration, or the traditional role of the trombone in a big band influences your approach to composing/arranging? If so, how?

SW: I do indeed. Answered in the previous question.

AB: What differences do you see in the influence of being a trombonist on your small and large ensemble composing/arranging?

SW: I don't really see a lot of difference, except perhaps a stronger understanding of the range of the instruments. As a trombonist, one must become familiar with where the "sonic dividing line" is for chord tones in the middle of the bass clef staff. Also, trombones need to play in the upper register to really be heard in a burning rhythm section, so we become adept at extensive range techniques and air efficiency, as well as clever orchestration. I believe this is why Slide Hampton's small group writing sounds so big. He can make three horns sound like an entire large jazz ensemble!

AB: Regarding your improvised playing, you have described a majority (70-90%) as being a calculated, conscious approach, and a minority (10-30%) as being more intuitive.¹⁷ Do you feel similarly about your composing/arranging?

SW: Interestingly enough, that ratio tends to flip with my composing. Early on, I worked from the piano quite a bit until I realized that I was just regurgitating my “go-to” voicings that I had learned for the instrument. These days, I tend to use my ear and imagination much more than the piano. I try to stay in the realm of pure imagination for as long as possible, using a full array of muse-generating techniques—some random and some calculated—to keep my writing as fresh as possible. I believe that the more my vocabulary increases as an improviser, the more this ratio will begin to take shape in my playing as well. Overall, I feel this approach is more organic and healthier.

AB: How have your teachers or influences led you to pursue composing/arranging? Were Maynard Ferguson, Doc Severinsen, and the arrangers in their groups a significant influence on you in this regard?

SW: Yes and YES! My first teachers were, of course, recordings. I struggled to transcribe everything that I enjoyed by taking kind of a “grocery shopping” approach on my own for quite awhile. But when I joined Maynard’s band, I found myself surrounded by writers that had a spectacular level of schooling and education with a world of craft and resources that I was completely unaware of. These great composers were the true beginning of my education as a writer. To live 24-7, 365 music on a bus with the likes of Tim Ries, Denis DiBlasio, Chris Brayman, and Matt Harris was a profound laboratory and a really natural way to learn what truly fit my personality. I have benefited from that time ever since.

And those books! Listening to and performing Maynard’s book, followed by the UNT One O’Clock’s book and then Doc’s book was like the world’s greatest doctoral seminar on how to compose music! I am forever grateful for this and draw from it constantly.

AB: How has being a trombonist influenced your approach to composing/arranging? How much of your composing do you do on the trombone vs. other instruments (e.g. piano)?

SW: As I covered partially in some of your other questions, I think the physical placement of the horn in the large jazz ensemble plus the fact that sonically speaking, the trombone is in the bass clef comfortably close to that point where chord tones can get muddy has influenced and informed my orchestration sensibilities.

I used to do most of my composing on the piano, but now at least 90% of it is directly to Finale. I can then listen to the results and make tweaks before it ever gets to the band,

¹⁷ Steve Wiest, “Steve Wiest – The Trombone Zone,” <http://www.jazzeveryone.com/teachers-corner/steve-wiest/> (2010), accessed 28 April 2013.

which is a great luxury. I think that the fact that I used to have to imagine the results by simply looking at the score paper or trying to play it on piano myself is a great advantage over someone who has never had that tactile background, but I don't think that the trombone itself has had any major influence on my writing beyond that which I have already mentioned. I do check trombone parts on my horn to make sure they are playable and natural feeling however.

Steve Wiest: Summary

Though Steve Wiest's answers to the same basic set of questions have much in common with the previous two interviewees, he raises some other interesting points regarding the trombone and composition. His ideas that the trombone may often be excluded from modern jazz groups due to "the marketing of a specific sound that is 'representative' of jazz over the years...or maybe the lack of education in the business ranks of the major labels" present interesting alternatives to the more common notions of the trombone as an instrument that is limited by aspects such as range and difficulty of playing.¹⁸

The concept of range constitutes an important part of Wiest's arguments. Specifically, what he describes as the 'sonic dividing line,' also explained by Gary Lindsay in his *Jazz Arranging Techniques: From Quartet to Big Band* as 'low interval limits,' has important ramifications concerning the trombone's harmonic role in a big band.¹⁹ In discussing the importance of a strong understanding of range in arranging, Wiest describes the ability of influential trombonist and composer Slide Hampton to make a small horn section sound surprisingly powerful.

¹⁸ Steve Wiest, personal email, 27 September 2013.

¹⁹ Gary Lindsay, *Jazz Arranging Techniques: From Quartet to Big Band* (Miami, FL: Staff Art Publishing, 2005), 92-94.

Wiest feels that being a trombonist has not necessarily ‘driven’ him toward composing for either artistic or economic reasons, but that it has benefited him greatly in his understanding of and ability to compose and arrange. He cites the physical placement of the trombones in the middle of the big band, as well as the harmonic and melodic function of the trombone section as providing a unique perspective that has benefited his composing and arranging abilities, and believes that “with that kind of strong harmonic and linear foundation, trombonists are natural composers.”²⁰

Wiest describes his extended experience reading books of the great big bands he performed with as “the world’s greatest doctoral seminar on how to compose music.”²¹ This is no doubt a result of both the experience observing composing/arranging techniques in the music being performed, as well as direct musical and social interaction with the great artists with whom they collaborated. Wiest explains:

I found myself surrounded by writers that had a spectacular level of schooling and education with a world of craft and resources that I was completely unaware of. These great composers were the true beginning of my education as a writer. To live 24-7, 365 music on a bus with the likes of Tim Ries, Denis DiBlasio, Chris Brayman, and Matt Harris was a profound laboratory and a really natural way to learn what truly fit my personality. I have benefited from that time ever since.²²

Wiest does most of his composing away from the trombone and prefers to imagine the music as much as possible before doing any writing.

²⁰ Steve Wiest, personal email, 27 September 2013.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

I tend to use my ear and imagination much more than the piano. I try to stay in the realm of pure imagination for as long as possible, using a full array of muse-generating techniques—some random and some calculated—to keep my writing as fresh as possible...I think that the fact that I used to have to imagine the results by simply looking at the score paper or trying to play it on piano myself is a great advantage over someone who has never had that tactile background...²³

A final point of interest is Steve Wiest's answer to the question concerning the amount of calculation and consciousness versus intuition in his approach to playing and composing. Though he claims that his composing tends to follow a more intuitive process, while his improvised playing is more calculated, he believes that as his vocabulary as an improviser increases, so will the intuitive component of his playing. This resembles Paul McKee's idea that the practice of making decisions while composing has the ability to inform those made while improvising in real time, and most importantly, that for these trombonist/composers, the two disciplines are intimately linked.

Fred Sturm: Brief Biography

Though an accomplished trombonist who founded and performed with the forward-looking jazz-rock fusion group *Matrix* in the 1970s, Fred Sturm is probably best known for his prolific array of compositional projects and texts on composing and arranging. His books *Changes Over Time: The Evolution of Jazz Arranging*, *Kenny Wheeler: Collected Works on ECM*, and *Maria Schneider: Evanescence*, like his many compositions, are available through prominent publishers and are widely utilized by

²³ Ibid.

music educators. Sturm's compositions draw on eclectic sources, including world and popular music styles, and in addition to jazz bands, he has written for symphony orchestras, wind ensembles, and chamber groups. He studied music at the University of North Texas, the Eastman School of Music in New York, where he served as Professor and Chair of Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media for eleven years, and Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in Wisconsin, where he is currently the Director of Jazz and Improvisational Music.

Fred Sturm: Interview

The following questions were presented in writing to the subject, who provided written responses via email.

AB: Would you say that trombonists have experienced a less prominent role as soloists or group leaders (especially of small group formats) than many other instrumentalists in modern jazz? Has being a trombonist 'driven' you to pursue composing/arranging, for either economic or artistic reasons?

FS: Yes, I agree. Few if any big bands and small groups throughout jazz history have been led by trombonists with "marquee" names comparable to Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey. I suspect that J.J. Johnson's significant small group leadership resulted from his tremendous artistry as a player as well as his writing skills (and no doubt his wonderful personality). A current big band leader like Alan Ferber, for example, stands out because Alan's a superb writer and player — and because folks want to work with him.

No, being a trombonist never seemed to inspire my pursuits as a writer.

AB: How has being a trombonist influenced your approach to composing/arranging? How much of your composing do you do on the trombone vs. other instruments (e.g. piano)?

FS: I was a college freshman trumpet player when I first tried my hand at composing and arranging. Due to range, endurance, and embouchure issues, I switched to the trombone. Because I was at the bottom of the heap among my peers during the transition from one instrument to another, I found that writing allowed me some form of identity when my playing obviously couldn't.

Because I don't perform any more as a trombonist, I obviously never compose "on the trombone" these days, but even in my active playing days, I can't ever recall doing any writing "on the horn." I have typically composed and arranged by ear, at a keyboard, or with digital notation.

AB: Do you think the physical placement of the trombone section, the trombone's place in the orchestration, or the traditional role of the trombone in a big band influences your approach to composing/arranging? If so, how?

FS: In a big band or larger chamber jazz format, I always enjoyed "hearing from the interior" of an ensemble, thinking of my trombone role in the center of the band's range/register and often being less prominent than a lead trumpeter, a tenor soloist, or a drummer. In big bands and small groups, my trombone rarely carried "the tune" and I was often playing a lower note in the voicing or occupying an accompanimental or "comping" role. Perhaps, in some small way, that made me conscious of everything around me and all of those roles being played.

AB: What differences do you see in the influence of being a trombonist on your small and large ensemble composing/arranging?

FS: None, really. As I noted above, I probably was drawn to writing to establish some kind of identity among my ensemble peers. Had I been a screaming lead trumpeter or a burning tenor soloist or a terrific rhythm section player, the "seed" to compose or arrange may have never been planted in me.

AB: How have your teachers or influences led you to pursue composing/arranging?

FS: My high school band director Roger Gard knew of my interests in writing, and he encouraged me to develop my first chart and bring it into the school jazz ensemble to try it out. John Harmon, my amazing undergraduate jazz guru, did more than any other individual to foster my desire to compose and arrange, and he always programmed my projects in concerts and supported them wholeheartedly. My great Eastman mentor Rayburn Wright (whom I was blessed to serve as a graduate teaching assistant and as a trombonist under his direction in the Eastman Jazz Ensemble) pushed, drove, and inspired me to examine and approach my writing as an *artistic* pursuit.

AB: You have numerous publications that analyze the works of great composer/arrangers. Has being a trombonist influenced the way you view the work of these and other artists?

FS: Not really. By the time I created those texts, I had abandoned my performing life as a trombonist to commit all of my creative energies to teaching and composing/arranging.

Fred Sturm: Summary

Though not currently performing professionally as a trombonist, Fred Sturm's experience playing the instrument has led him to similar conclusions as the previous interviewees regarding the interview topics. One point of interest involves his role as a trombonist in big bands, as he describes: "'hearing from the interior' of an ensemble, thinking of my trombone role in the center of the band's range/register and often being less prominent than a lead trumpeter, a tenor soloist, or a drummer."²⁴ In addition to the aforementioned idea that the trombone section's physical placement provides a unique perspective, Sturm alludes to the idea that in filling a conventionally more accompanimental role, perhaps "that made [him] conscious of everything around [him] and all of those roles being played."²⁵

Establishing a unique voice as an artist has been a central part of Fred Sturm's musical development. Interestingly, he claims that in his undergraduate studies, pursuing composition during a transition from the trumpet to the trombone, at which he had less experience, "allowed [him] some form of identity when [his] playing obviously couldn't."²⁶ He goes on to explain:

I probably was drawn to writing to establish some kind of identity among my ensemble peers. Had I been a screaming lead trumpeter or a burning tenor soloist or a terrific rhythm section player, the "seed" to compose or arrange may have never been planted in me.²⁷

²⁴ Fred Sturm, personal email, 29 September 2013.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

Sturm notes artists such as Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey as rare exceptions to a general dearth of trombonist/band leaders in jazz history, also citing the influential J.J. Johnson as a trombonist/composer whose “significant small group leadership resulted from his tremendous artistry as a player as well as his writing skills.”²⁸

²⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER V

COMPARISONS

Where the summaries that follow each interview in the main body of this dissertation discuss relevant points from each interview, this chapter offers a more structured comparison of the interviewees' responses to the same basic set of questions with which they were presented as part of this study.

The four trombonist/composers interviewed agree that the trombone has experienced a less prominent role than other instruments in modern jazz, positing reasons such as the instrument's lower range, its capacity for ease of fluidity and virtuosic expression, or, as Steve Wiest hypothesizes, a possible result of marketing a specific sound in the jazz genre.

Interestingly, two of the notable trombone soloists and bandleaders that Fred Sturm cites, Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey, led big bands during the swing era, prior to what is generally considered the modern jazz era, as defined by the birth of bebop and its derivative styles such as hard bop and cool jazz.²⁹ Paul McKee explains that one of his mantras in his teaching is that "all roads lead through bebop."³⁰ He claims that mastering the challenges of playing this style, which include agility, precise intonation,

²⁹ Fred Sturm, personal email, 29 September 2013.

³⁰ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

articulation challenges, and harmonic knowledge, allows trombonists to perform alongside trumpet and saxophone players in modern jazz contexts.³¹ The comparative scarcity of prominent trombone soloists and bandleaders in modern jazz may be due in part to these great challenges. Reinforcing this idea is the significant influence that trombonist and composer J. J. Johnson has had on the interviewees, in addition to many other modern jazz trombonists. Johnson is widely considered the first successful trombonist in bebop, who negotiated the demanding style not by directly imitating the virtuosic and complex melodies of bebop innovators saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, but by formulating an original lyrical approach that worked within the context of the music. His equally original approach to composing/arranging is detailed in Kurt Dietrich's *Jazz 'Bones: The World of Jazz Trombone*, and summarized:

...Johnson's compositions seem to be more carefully thought out than most bop tunes. The listener quickly realizes that an appreciable amount of effort was put into not only the conception of the melody in relation to the chord changes, but also the setting of the melody and harmony in a more complex context.³²

Johnson's prowess as a performer and composer/arranger, along with his original approach to modern jazz styles has provided an influential model to many trombonist/composers over the last several decades.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Kurt Dietrich, *Jazz 'Bones: The World of Jazz Trombone* (Germany: Advance Music, 2005), 203.

The same can be said of another modern jazz trombone icon, Slide Hampton, who is also highly regarded for his composing/arranging abilities. Though claiming J. J. Johnson as an important influence, Hampton states:

As much as I love the way J. J. and a few others play...the trombone is such a slow instrument, I would rather not try to pattern myself too much from guys who play the instrument, because it holds them back, and it would hold me back, too.

The technique and the literature for the instrument are very slow compared with other instruments; consequently, I would rather listen to a horn which has more to offer.³³

In drawing inspiration from players of instruments other than the trombone, Slide Hampton, like J. J. Johnson, has forged a unique path in his playing and composing/arranging that has allowed him to be considered one of the few prominent trombonists and bandleaders in modern jazz, serving as an important musical model to other trombonist/composers, including those interviewed here.

Though the general rarity of heralded trombonists in modern jazz seems to be a point of agreement for the interviewees, they also point out the significant talent of many current artists. Fred Sturm cites Alan Ferber as an example of a strong contemporary trombonist/composer, and Steve Wiest optimistically points out the growing popularity of several current players:

With the likes of Steve Davis, Michael Dease, Marshall Gilkes, Vincent Gardner, Wycliffe Gordon and the current (as of September, 2013) cross

³³ Barbara Gardner, "This Is Slide Hampton," *Down Beat*, January 1961, 14-15.

over appeal of Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews, perhaps that trend is changing—one can only hope so!³⁴

Though their individual experiences differ significantly, the four artists interviewed all cite their participation in big bands as the genesis of their composing/arranging careers. Fred Sturm utilized the big band as a venue to explore his original artistic voice as a young student, while the others acquired many of their composing/arranging skills in the service of the professional big bands they toured with early in their performing careers. Paul McKee also describes the impression that iconic bands such as Stan Kenton’s had on him at an early age. None of the interviewees claim to have been ‘driven’ to pursue composing/arranging due to economic reasons, though Paul McKee and Steve Wiest both believe being trombonists has benefited them in their writing. McKee describes composing/arranging as another positive dimension of his work in music that often puts him in greater demand: “To me, one of the cool things about arranging is that once you establish a little credibility as an arranger, people want to play your music, and occasionally they will ask you to write something for them.”³⁵

When contacted about participating as a potential interviewee in this study, legendary jazz composer/arranger Sammy Nestico quipped: “Being a trombonist/arranger I’ve always said that trombonists have more respect for notes than most other instrumental arrangers (Pianists).”³⁶ The trombone, as Paul McKee describes as a ‘differently enabled’ instrument, presents unique challenges that prevent many players

³⁴ Steve Wiest, personal email, 27 September 2013.

³⁵ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

³⁶ Sammy Nestico, personal email, 26 April 2013.

from attaining the level of proficiency necessary to excel in many modern jazz styles.³⁷

This may in part influence trombonists' approach to composing and arranging.

Though many of the subjects' thoughts concerning the first part of this question are covered in the summaries following their individual interviews, there are other similarities worth noting. John Fedchock's succinct answer recalls J.J. Johnson's original and lyrical approach to the bebop style that has become a widely imitated model:

Due to the initial larger technical learning curve of the instrument, trombonists tend to approach writing, as well as improvisation from a more melodic approach, rather than an intricate harmonic or technical approach.³⁸

Though Paul McKee advocates composing and arranging with an approach that challenges trombonists, he also acknowledges the importance of writing idiomatically for the instrument:

I think that there's other ways to feature trombonists that doesn't necessarily require them to play with the vertical arpeggiated skills that are idiomatic to saxophone. I think there's a lot of ways to compensate for that without having to go the other extreme of not giving them anything to do.³⁹

McKee is the only interviewee that explicitly mentions the use of playing the trombone in his composing. Fedchock and Wiest claim to do most of their composing away from the trombone, and only use the instrument to ensure that composed lines 'lie

³⁷ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

³⁸ John Fedchock, personal email, 11-12 September 2013.

³⁹ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

well' on the instrument. All interviewees discuss the importance of imagination in this process, McKee summarizing that "it's really imagination first, trombone second, piano third, as far as composing."⁴⁰ Like many current composers, Fred Sturm and Steve Wiest mention utilizing notation software such as Finale. However, Wiest believes his past experience of having to write purely from imagination provides a great advantage in his current composing. This mirrors McKee's experience writing for the Woody Herman Orchestra while on tour, with no piano or other external compositional tools. Fred Sturm also mentions writing by ear, and all interviewees claim to use the piano in their composing, specifically for Paul McKee, as a harmonic tool.

The idea that the central physical placement of the trombone section in a big band gives trombonists an advantage in hearing the inner workings of arrangements has been suggested by authorities on the topic, including the late valve trombonist and composer Bob Brookmeyer:

As a trombonist in a big band, you're in the middle of everything. You learn how things are made. My old joke is that saxophonists get all the girls, trumpet players make all the money, and trombone players develop an interior life.⁴¹

Unlike the other interviewees, Paul McKee does not explicitly state that the trombone section's physical location provides a unique perspective in the jazz orchestra. However, all interviewees seem to agree that both the trombones' place in the orchestration and the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ben Ratliff, "Bob Brookmeyer: Raging and Composing Against the Machine," http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/12/arts/music/12broo.html?pagewanted=1&_r=3 (2006), accessed 21 September 2013.

traditional role of the trombone in a big band influence their composing/arranging for this medium. They consider a variety of specific topics that include: the lower range occupied by the trombone section in the harmonic voicing of chords, the related harmonic sensitivity required to tune the close intervals of which these voicings are often constructed, the tuning of these intervals on a fretless instrument such as the trombone, and the traditionally more supportive, less melodically complex role of the trombone in big band arrangements. Of particular interest are Paul McKee and John Fedchock's intent to compose for the trombone in a manner that rejects this traditionally more supportive role, striving for a more active and inclusive one.

John Fedchock states: "For small ensemble writing, the obvious difference from most [other jazz combos] is the mere inclusion of the trombone in the small group."⁴² He mentions his frequent employment of three horns in this context. In an illuminating interview with Bob Bernotas, legendary jazz trombonist and composer/arranger Slide Hampton (who Steve Wiest discusses in this study), elaborates on this topic:

I had heard Art Blakey's band, with only three horns. It sounded like a real big band, you see, and that's because their concept of writing wasn't based on the kind of theory that you usually get in classical writing. Usually you write instruments together that are pretty much in the same register family.

But in Art Blakey's band, they wrote things in a more open harmony, so it sounded bigger. The trumpet may be an octave above the tenor, and the trombone might be an interval of a sixth away from the tenor, so you've got these wide intervals. When you have that kind of open harmony, you get overtones and that makes it sound full. It sounds big.⁴³

⁴² John Fedchock, personal email, 11-12 September 2013.

⁴³ Bob Bernotas, "An Interview With Slide Hampton," <http://www.trombone.org/articles/library/slidehampton-int.asp> (1994), accessed 14 Oct 2013.

McKee also discusses writing for three horns in the jazz combo, with specific regard to voicings: "...I think that it's definitely affected by the range issues of the trombone... I'm trying to write some voicings for those three horns that involve them being in close proximity."⁴⁴ He also takes into careful consideration the common range of the particular horns in a small group, and examines different approaches in arranging for them:

Sometimes the trombone is not in the bottom, but even the middle or the top of the voicing. Now in order to do that, you have to observe limitations about the other accompanying instruments and voice them accordingly so that the range issues don't become a problem.⁴⁵

As with his arranging for big band, McKee strives to challenge the trombonist in a small group setting by eschewing the conventional role of the instrument as largely accompanimental, or as playing a lower voice in a chord by default. He also strives for an inclusive role for all the instruments involved, citing the small group arrangements of J. J. Johnson as exceptional models in this regard.

Though he sees less of a difference in his arranging for big band and small groups, Steve Wiest does mention a strong understanding of range as being critical to arranging successfully for the trombone in small groups. He also discusses aspects of performance in small group settings, stating: "trombones need to play in the upper register to really be heard in a burning rhythm section, so we become adept at extensive range techniques and air efficiency, as well as clever orchestration."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Steve Wiest, personal email, 27 September 2013.

Having focused primarily on composing and arranging for much of his career, Fred Sturm claims to see no distinction between his large and small group writing with regard to the trombone. As exemplified by Wiest in his aforementioned comment, the differences that he, McKee, and Fedchock describe between their large and small group composing/arranging likely stem from their extensive experience performing in these different sizes of groups for many years.

In discussing the subjects' influences and teachers, it is fitting to note that they are all experienced educators in their own right, as explained in their brief biographies. Both John Fedchock and Fred Sturm mention their experience studying with trombonist, composer, and arranger Rayburn Wright at the Eastman School of Music, and describe his passion and drive as inspiring them to pursue composing/arranging as a serious art. Sturm also cites teachers Roger Gard and John Harmon as providing opportunities and encouraging him early in his composing/arranging career.⁴⁷ Like performing, the art of composing and arranging requires dedication and practice, as exemplified by Slide Hampton's description of the opportunities and patience afforded him by bandleader Buddy Johnson early in his development as a writer.⁴⁸

John Fedchock and Paul McKee attribute much of their development as composer/arrangers to time spent performing with Woody Herman's band. McKee describes the influence the great arrangers for the Herman band and other big bands had on his style:

⁴⁷ Fred Sturm, personal email, 29 September 2013.

⁴⁸ Bob Bernotas, "An Interview With Slide Hampton," <http://www.trombone.org/articles/library/slidehampton-int.asp> (1994), accessed 14 Oct 2013.

You saw how they learned how to write for the band—I think that’s the lesson learned from all the arrangers. Each of the major big bands had some arrangers that were very important. You think of the way Thad [Jones] wrote for his band, or the way that Duke [Ellington] and Billy Strayhorn wrote for their band, or that guys in the [Count] Basie band like Thad [Jones] or Frank Wess, or Frank Foster wrote for that band, because they were in the band and they knew the sound of the band, as opposed to somebody from outside the band just kind of throwing a chart out. If you don’t really have a sense of how the band sounds, it’s going to sound like a generic big band chart.⁴⁹

McKee’s statement emphasizes his belief in the importance of developing a unique voice as an artist, a sentiment shared by other great trombonist/composers, including frequently cited icons J. J. Johnson and Slide Hampton.

Those interviewed as part of this study overwhelmingly look to great player/composers such as Johnson and Hampton as models, also citing the talented composer/arrangers in the big bands they worked with, as well as influential teachers. Fred Sturm and John Fedchock both spent time at the Eastman School of Music studying with Rayburn Wright, a noted trombonist, composer, and educator who Fedchock explains “had a sincere passion for the art form, and that significantly inspired me to continue in my pursuit of the medium.”⁵⁰ Wright authored *Inside the Score*, a widely utilized text on jazz arranging, which analyzes works of three prominent jazz composer/arrangers (two of whom, incidentally, are trombonists: Sammy Nestico and Bob Brookmeyer).⁵¹ The relationship of those interviewed as part of this study with icons such as J.J. Johnson, Slide Hampton, Bob Brookmeyer, and Rayburn Wright

⁴⁹ Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

⁵⁰ John Fedchock, personal email, 11-12 September 2013.

⁵¹ Rayburn Wright, *Inside the Score* (Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1982), 2.

suggest a natural lineage of trombonist/composers that reaches back far into jazz history and is very much alive today.

This lineage is also revealed in studying the relationships of these interviewees to the acclaimed big bands from which they drew significant inspiration. Paul McKee and John Fedchock both mention the influence that Woody Herman's other great arrangers had on their writing, and Steve Wiest followed Slide Hampton in a series of talented trombonists that performed in Maynard Ferguson's band. McKee, Fedchock, and Wiest seem to share the experience of drawing a vast amount of compositional knowledge and inspiration from the environment of the celebrated big bands in which they have spent years performing. All four of the interviewees' passion for their art is further evidenced by their drive to educate the next generation of performers, composers, and arrangers.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Though this study is not intended to prove or disprove the existence of a phenomenon in which there are an inordinate number of jazz trombonists who also excel at composing and arranging, the ideas discussed herein serve to illuminate the relationship between the disciplines of trombone performance and composing/arranging. Conclusions and possible explanations for the close relationship of these disciplines can be inferred from the interviewees' statements, and are presented here as potential sources for further dialogue on the subject.

Many conclusions drawn from these interviews focus on the context of the big band, in which the subjects have extensive experience playing and composing/arranging. The interviewees agree that the trombone is traditionally not a frequently featured instrument even in big bands, where its role is more critical than in small jazz groups. The largely supportive nature of the instrument in the context of the jazz orchestra may be a primary impetus for trombonists to pursue composition, regardless of the ability and experience of the individual player. Fred Sturm suggests that playing a less complex, more accompanimental role as a member of the trombone section in a big band may have allowed him to more easily observe other aspects of arrangements. Paul McKee also

acknowledges the possibility that traditionally “trombone parts have a lot more rests and whole notes and so there’s more time to listen to what’s going on.”⁵²

The trombonist/composers interviewed as part of this study favor a more inclusive role for the trombone in a big band setting. Their propensity for composition in the big band medium is driven in part by a desire to eschew the more traditionally supportive role of the trombone section, in which they may have acquired their acute ear for the workings of big band arrangements. In striving to create melodically interesting parts for the trombones, perhaps McKee and other trombonist/arrangers have developed a greater consideration in writing for other instruments as well. This may elicit a positive response from the music’s performers, and subsequently from its listeners.

There’s so many things that you can do when you bring in a chart to a band that puts them in your corner...If you are trying to write melodically for everybody, for one thing, the music is going to sound better sooner because they’re playing a logical melody and it reads down easier, and also it’s just more fun.⁵³

McKee believes writing with this approach has led to positive reception of his music, and though this idea can be applied to composers who play any instrument, perhaps the more adventurous compositional approaches McKee and other trombonist/composers have taken based on their experience playing the trombone, an instrument with the specific limitations discussed herein, have helped each define a unique style that has been positively received.

⁵² Paul McKee, personal interview (17 August 2013).

⁵³ Ibid.

Paul McKee and Steve Wiest both emphasize range as having an important bearing on the role of the trombone in composing and arranging. This applies to both large and small ensemble settings. Because the trombones often occupy the lower range of the harmonic voicing of chords in a big band, where the proximity of chord tones can create unclear, or ‘muddy’ sonorities, perhaps trombonists develop a heightened sensitivity to writing in this range that serves to inform their general arranging and orchestrating technique. As mentioned, intonation challenges associated with the fretless nature of the instrument and the dense voicings encountered in trombone parts may further impact this sensitivity.

The range of the trombone may also influence its use in small group arrangements. Interestingly, John Fedchock and Paul McKee both describe writing for the trombone as part of a three-piece horn section. The inclusion of two horns in addition to the trombone may stem from a desire to express a spectrum of range, of which the trombone generally occupies only the lower part. Arranging for three or more horns presents further textural opportunities as well as challenges, which likely increases the arranger’s experience and ability in this regard.

Fedchock also points out the scarcity of trombonists in many modern jazz combos. This exclusion of trombonists from many small groups may often lead them to form their own, for which they must provide original material by composing and arranging.

Finally, Paul McKee and Steve Wiest feel that playing the trombone has benefited their composing and arranging, and vice versa. McKee notes the additional opportunities afforded him as a composer/arranger, and both he and Steve Wiest discuss the symbiotic

relationship of playing and composing/arranging. For these artists, pursuing trombone performance in tandem with composing/arranging has led to success in both disciplines, both economically, and, as detailed in the summary sections of the discussion, with respect to their artistry.

The subjects interviewed as part of this study represent only a small proportion of a storied history of fine trombonist/composers, but are also some of the foremost authorities working in the field today. Whether citing specific reasons such as the inclusion of the trombone in different settings in jazz, the instrument's playability and range, or its place in the orchestration or tradition of jazz composing and arranging, the unique nature of the instrument and its capacity in the music seems to have a similarly unique influence on those performing, composing, and arranging for it. Slide Hampton eloquently expressed the instrument's relationship with composing/arranging and music in general in the Bernotas interview:

[The trombone] makes you develop a respect for music in general, because you don't get music out of a trombone just by blowing air into it.

The most that you can do on trombone, actually, is make music. You can't really excite people, most times, on a technical level. You have to excite them with the music that you make. Some guys have a lot of technique, but technique in the case of the trombone doesn't always come out very musical.

The thing that has to be put first is the musical achievement. And although you don't have all the advantages of the other instruments, you can still compete with those guys if you understand what it is about the instrument that's valuable.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Bob Bernotas, "An Interview With Slide Hampton," <http://www.trombone.org/articles/library/slidehampton-int.asp> (1994), accessed 14 Oct 2013.

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APPENDIX
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



Institutional Review Board

DATE: August 16, 2013
TO: Adam Bartczak, MM
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE: [456591-1] Doctoral research interviews
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: August 14, 2013

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.