

# The Role of the Trombone in Big Band

In big bands, wind instruments are called horns. There are three horn sections: trumpets, saxophones and trombones. Usually there are four trombones in the section.

**First trombone** is known as the leader, or lead of the section and main responsibilities are to match the lead trumpet's phrasing and where appropriate, the lead alto saxophone. On sectional parts, the lead player's role is establish the style and phrasing and act as leader of the section. Finally, the lead trombone player should have the highest range as most lead parts are written consistently in the higher registers.

**Trombone 2** must be able to take stylistic cues and blend with the lead trombone. This player often plays similar lines to trumpet 3 and 4, and a tenor saxophone, and must blend accordingly. They can hear the trumpet player behind them clearly but the trumpet player cannot necessarily hear this player, so trombone 2 plays a linking role. Trombone 2 can also take solos, and these are usually shared with the lead player. The range of the second player is not usually too challenging.

**Trombone 3** is the part which may be 'left out' when a school big band lacks four trombone players as it often doubles with the tenor saxophone and trumpet 4. The trombone 3 part is often a difficult part to play, as the part requires a lot of rapid slide movement in lower registers. This player usually needs to play louder, as the lower register can create blending difficulties if too soft.

It can be argued that the bass trombone (**trombone 4**) is as important as the lead trombone, and where possible, a specialist instrument (bass trombone) should be used. This is easily distinguishable from a Bb/F (or commonly referred to as a trigger) trombone as it has 2 triggers (valves) and is generally larger. The bass trombone can generally be rehearsed with the bass and baritone saxophone. In order to maximise the balance within the trombone section, the bass trombonist should be encouraged to play louder in order to be heard. Finally, the bass trombone often plays the fundamental (root) of a chord, so must be able to play in tune. Good intonation is paramount for this position.