

The Making of a Solo Trombone Ensemble

This project has been in the making for a very long time, about 7 years to be exact. When I first picked up the trombone, I never expected to continue playing it as long as I have. I was a baritone player, not a trombonist. But there was a particular day when I was watching trombone tutorials on Youtube when a trombonist named Christopher Bill came up on my recommended list. It was a video of him playing different parts on top of himself until he made a full ensemble sound, and the rest of his channel was the same. I had never thought of this method of music as a possibility (since I had just barely begun my musical journey). His videos inspired me to continue with the trombone and eventually, learn how to arrange music. I would listen to the different parts he would play and try to learn them myself. This carried into high school when I started arranging songs for our marching band to play. Writing those songs for a band was much harder than picking apart Christopher Bill's videos because I wasn't as familiar with the other instruments in the band. Through this difficult process, I found my love for taking vocalized music and transforming it into a piece for a band. From there, I branched out into transcribing and arranging for ensembles ranging from duets to quintets. My favorite songs I've arranged were for a Christmas quintet I put together where we would play popular holiday songs and Christmas carols.

Nearing the end of senior year, I had a few pieces written out that I was excited to play, but sadly, that was all canceled due to Covid. While sitting at home, I longed to play with a group again but I had no idea how. Luckily, I was contacted by my band director to put together a virtual ensemble of all the senior band members. Once we decided on the song, which was "I Get Around" by the Beach Boys, I got to work. I first needed to write out a part for everyone, so after listening to the song hundreds of times, I was able to pick out specific harmonies and wrote

them for the instruments that made sense. This wasn't particularly easy because our balance was off; too many of one instrument, not enough of another, but it worked out. After that, everyone needed to record their parts along with an additional video of them playing. From there, I put everyone's recording together and made it all sound nice, then, I cut up all the videos and oriented them in a way that matched what was going on in the music.

I wouldn't have been able to accomplish this without help from my teachers and peers because I had never taken up a task like this. After hours of work and a halfway decent product, I knew I wanted to continue doing this type of thing throughout my musical career. Once I started classes at USC, I added an audio recording/editing class to boost my very basic knowledge of audio editing. My jazz band director also has an extensive background in editing audio, so I reached out to him multiple times to ask the same couple of questions: "Can you listen to this?" "What do you think?" "What can I do to make it better?". After gathering more knowledge on editing, I decided I wanted to make a video of an ensemble of me's playing together. This project started as a personal goal: put out a video for Halloween just like Christopher Bill.

Just like before, I started by writing out the 6 trombones and rhythm section parts. I planned to record $\frac{1}{3}$ of the song at a time since it was a 4-minute song, so I initially only wrote out $\frac{1}{3}$ of the music. And I shouldn't say initially because it stayed that way. For the rest of the song, I just memorized each harmony and how it changed across the different sections of the song, so when that part of the song came up, I knew what to play. After I got all 6 trombone parts recorded as well as the rhythm section, I used my knowledge from the audio editing course I took to balance out the sound. To go to the next level, I pestered my jazz director about helping me fix any issues I had. After I had my final mix of the song, I got to recording the videos, which was surprisingly hard. Who knew playing trombone with a bedsheet ghost costume on would be

so difficult. Once I got all my videos recorded, I needed to plan out how I wanted to orient all the videos next to each other. This took a good day or so because it was basically like creating a storyboard for the entire video. Within a couple of days, I had my videos all chopped up and oriented how I wanted and in the end, I unintentionally made the opening title text look like a pair of lips (like from Rocky Horror) and a Jack-O-Lantern face with the individual videos during the bridge. As awkward as some of my dancing was, I'm very proud of how this turned out. I truly think I took that next step towards being able to make a Christopher Bill quality video. Although I would love to continue to make ensemble videos in collaboration with other musicians, I can't wait to make more solo projects like this one.