

Instrument Range Charts

*Comprehensive range charts for
common jazz instruments*

Jim Repa

January 9, 2025

Web: <http://www.jimrepa.com> Email: jimrepa@hotmail.com

Instrument ranges - recommendations

- The following charts show suggested instrument ranges for common jazz instruments, with notes about characteristics of different registers in the instrument's range.
- Some details about top ranges, timbre, difficulty, etc. depend on the individual player, along with their mouthpiece and instrument. Use these charts as a rough guide.
- When writing, think about how high a note is within the range of the instrument, not just how it sounds on the piano or computer playback. For example, concert C an octave above middle C sounds more intense on tenor sax (near top of range) vs. trumpet or alto sax (comfortable range).
- Consider saving higher, more intense parts of an instrument's range for climactic parts of a passage or the entire piece.

Soprano sax

- Transpose up a major 2nd

Transposed



FULL SOUNDING IN THIS RANGE,
BUT NOT AS AGILE. SLOWER TO
RESPOND IN STACCATO PASSAGES*

RESONANT AND
FULL SOUNDING,
LYRICAL

BRIGHTER, BUT
STILL LYRICAL

CAN BE SHRILL, DEPENDING
ON THE PLAYER



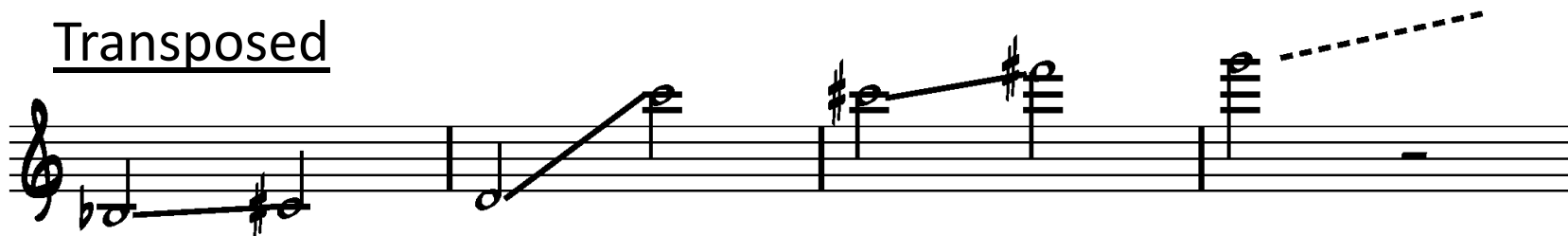
Concert

** Low Bb, B, C, C#, and Eb on the horn (Ab, A, Bb, B and Db concert) are operated by the player's pinkies – fingerings can be awkward.*

Alto sax

- Transpose up a major 6th

Transposed

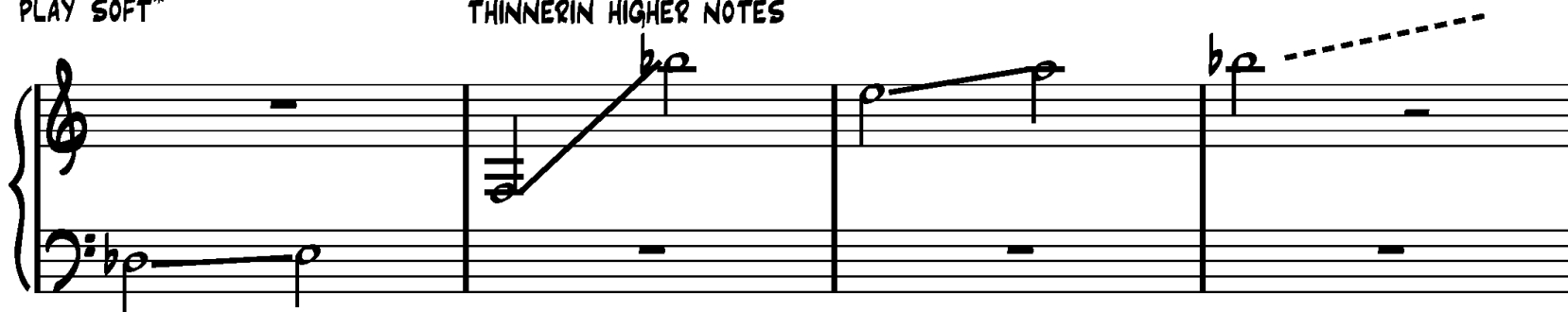


LOW AND DARK IN THIS RANGE. NOT AS AGILE AND SLOWER TO RESPOND IN STACCATO PASSAGES. FOR SOME PLAYERS, HARDER TO PLAY SOFT*

RESONANT & FULL SOUNDING. IN LOWER NOTES, LYRICAL THROUGHOUT, INCREASINGLY BRIGHTER AND SOMEWHAT THINNER IN HIGHER NOTES

BRIGHT, SOUNDS HIGH, BUT CAN STILL BE LYRICAL

ALTISSIMO - EXTREME RANGE - USE ONLY IF YOU KNOW THE PLAYER'S SKILLS



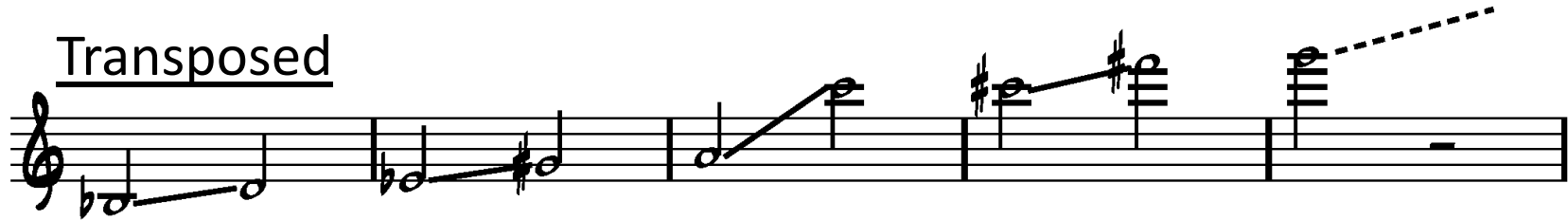
Concert

* Low Bb, B, C, C#, and Eb on the horn (Db, D, Eb, E and F# concert) are operated by the player's pinkies – fingerings can be awkward.

Tenor sax

- Transpose up a major 9th

Transposed



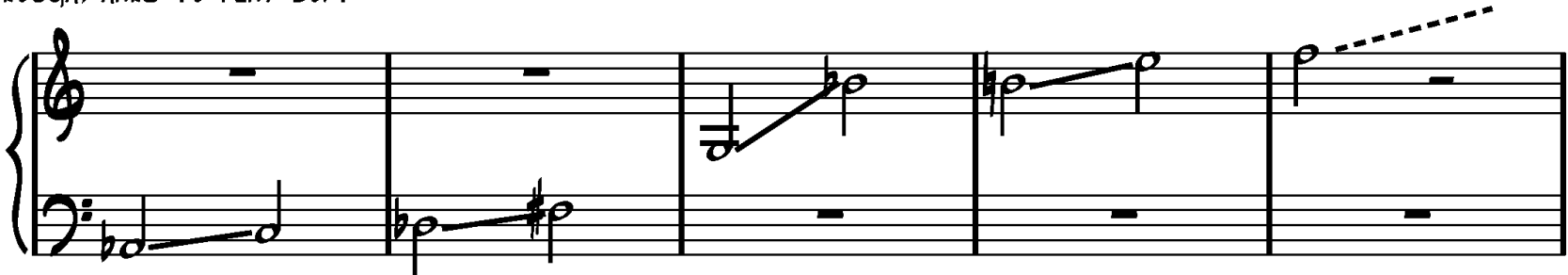
LOW AND DARK. NOT AS AGILE AND SLOWER TO RESPOND IN STACCATO PASSAGES. FOR SOME PLAYERS COULD SOUND ROUGH, HARD TO PLAY SOFT*
 .FOR SOME PLAYERS, MAY SOUND

RESONANT AND FULL SOUNDING

RESONANT AND FULL SOUNDING, LYRICAL

BRIGHTER, SOUNDS HIGH, BUT CAN STILL BE LYRICAL

ALTISSIMO - EXTREME RANGE - USE ONLY IF YOU KNOW THE PLAYER'S SKILLS



Concert

** Low Bb, B, C, C#, and Eb on the horn (Ab, A, Bb, B and Db concert) are operated by the player's pinkies – fingerings can be awkward.*

Baritone sax

- Transpose up a major 13th

Transposed



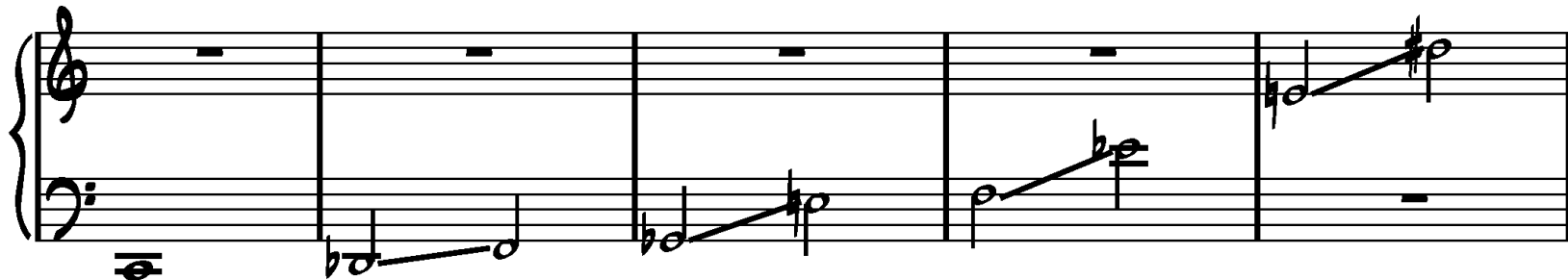
NOTE IS AVAILABLE ON MOST MODERN BARI'S, BUT NOT ON SOME OLDER INSTRUMENTS

STRONG NOTES, BUT NOT AS AGILE AND SLOWER TO RESPOND. FOR SOME PLAYERS, HARD TO PLAY SOFT*

RESONANT AND FULL SOUNDING

THE MOST EXPRESSIVE RANGE ON THE INSTRUMENT

CAN SOUND STRIDENT, DEPENDING ON THE PLAYER



Concert

* Low Bb, B, C, C#, and Eb on the horn (Ab, A, Bb, B and Db concert) are operated by the player's pinkies – fingerings can be awkward. These keys, plus low A (C concert) are keys on long rods that take longer to move

A note about student and school saxophones

- The low notes written C# down to low Bb on saxophones are particularly affected by small leaks or misadjustments in the instrument
- Students might struggle playing low C# down to low Bb for a few reasons
 - Their embouchure is not well developed or they are not using enough air support
 - They are using reed that is too stiff for the mouthpiece
 - The instrument is poorly adjusted and there are leaks in one more more pads
- When writing the lowest notes on the instrument, be aware of these possible issues if you have novice student players or poorly-maintained instruments.
- Low notes on the clarinet are less likely to be effected by instrument issues, because of the physics of the instrument, and because the pads, keys, and mechanics are smaller and less prone to bending.

Flute

- No transposition needed

<p>NOT ALL FLUTES HAVE THIS NOTE. IT OFTEN SOUNDS WEAK, DEPENDING ON THE PLAYER</p>	<p>THESE NOTES MAY SOUND WEAK, DEPENDING ON THE PLAYER</p>	<p>THE MOST COMFORTABLE RANGE FOR DOUBLERS OR PLAYERS WITH LIMITED SKILL. EXPRESSIVE.</p>	<p>SOUNDS QUITE HIGH, BUT BUT WELL-CONTROLLED WITH GOOD PLAYERS</p>

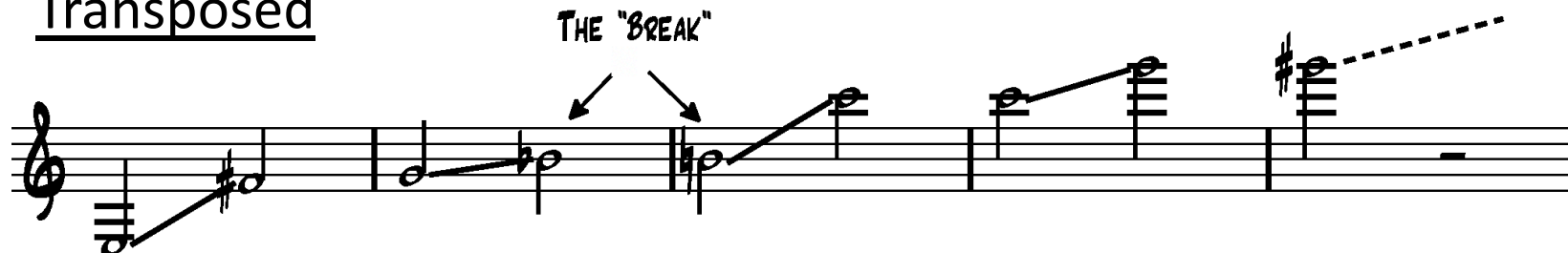
The top octave of the flute has more difficult fingerings, and players with limited skill may struggle with fast, active passages in this range.

In a jazz context, the flute works well playing a solo line, or doubling another instrument in unison or octaves. As part of a harmonized melody, it can blend well with a clarinet, saxophone playing softly, or muted trumpet. It may not work as well harmonizing with open brass instruments or saxophones.

Clarinet

- Transpose up a major 2nd

Transposed



CHALAMEAU REGISTER.
FULL AND RICH SOUNDING.
LOW NOTES ON A
CLARINET ARE EASY TO
PLAY LOUD OR SOFT.

THROAT TONES. GOOD
PLAYERS CAN MAKE
THEM SOUND ALMOST
AS FULL AND RICH AS
CHALAMEAU RANGE

CLARION REGISTER.
BRIGHT AND
EXPRESSIVE.

MODERATELY HIGH
REGISTER.
VERY BRIGHT.
REASONABLY EASY.

EXTREME ALTISSIMO
SHRILL. USE ONLY IF
YOU KNOW THE PLAYER'S
SKILLS



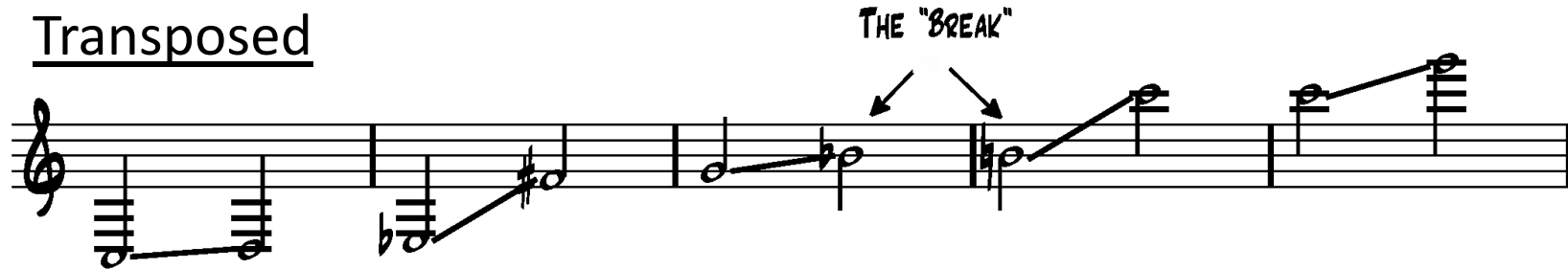
Concert

Note the "break" between registers, between written B \flat and B \natural (concert A \flat and A \natural). The fingerings for notes just below and above the break, A \flat to E \flat (concert G \flat to D \flat) can be awkward for less skilled players. Be careful with fast, active passages using these notes unless you know the clarinetist.

Bass Clarinet

- Transpose up a major 9th

Transposed



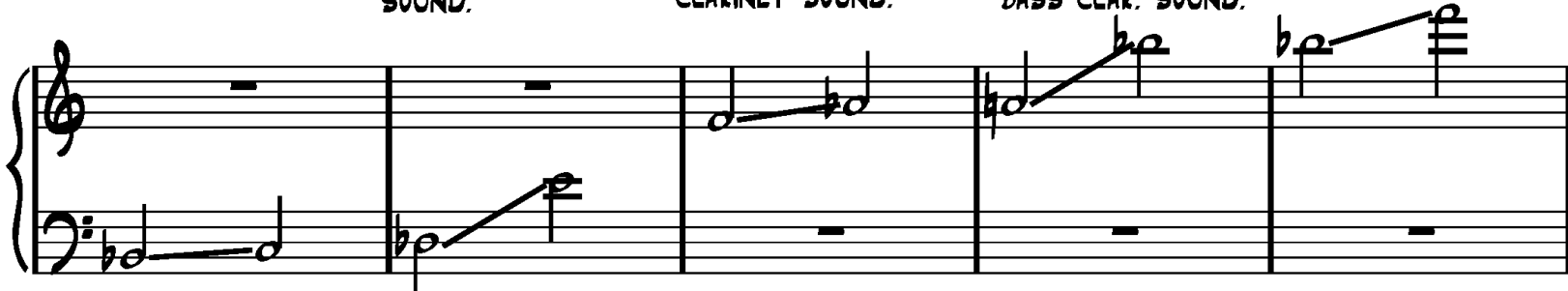
SOME BASS CLARINETS HAVE THESE ADDITIONAL LOW NOTES. DEEP, RICH AND FULL SOUNDING.

DEEP, RESONANT AND FULL SOUNDING. CHARACTERISTIC BASS CLARINET SOUND.

THROAT TONES. ALMOST AS RESONANT AS LOWER NOTES. STILL CHARACTERISTIC BASS CLARINET SOUND.

ALMOST BRIGHTER, DISTINCTIVE SOUND. LESS CHARACTERISTIC OF BASS CLAR. SOUND.

VERY BRIGHT. DISTINCTIVE SOUND.



Concert

Note the "break" between registers, written B \flat to B \sharp (concert A \flat and A \sharp). The fingerings for notes just below and above the break, A \flat to E \flat (concert G \flat to D \flat) can be harder for some players. Be careful with fast, active passages.

Trumpets in a small ensemble

- When writing for small ensembles, with 2 – 6 horns, do not write the lead trumpet part as high as you would in a big band.
- For small ensembles, keep most of your writing for trumpet no higher than written G or A above the staff.
- For trumpets in a small ensemble, a few higher passages are OK if supported by other players within a 4th or 5th below. Doubling a part in octaves also provides support.

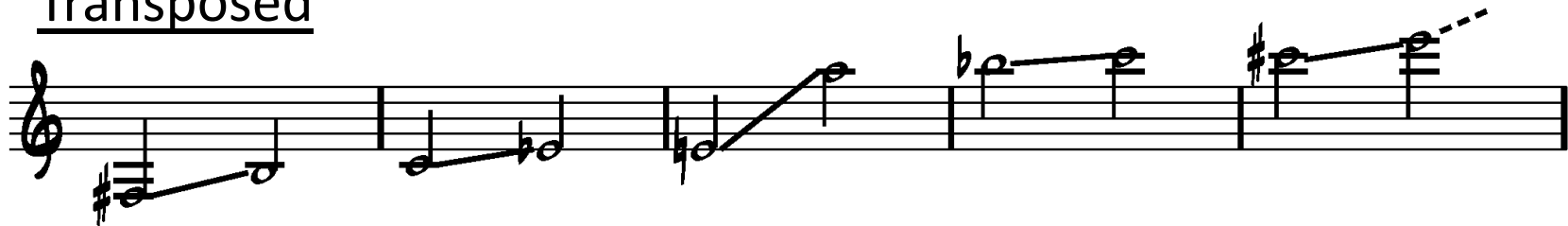
Trumpets in big bands

- When writing for a big band with 3-4 trumpets, it is common for the lead trumpet part to have some passages going 2 or 3 ledger lines above the staff.
- When writing a high trumpet part for big band, also support it: Harmonize within a 4th below, or double the line an octave below.
- There often is a lead trumpet specialist particularly skilled with power and range. Others in the section might be specialists in improvisation, but not high notes.

Trumpet

- Transpose up a major 2nd

Transposed



LOW AND DARK.
DISTINCTIVE SOUND,
BUT MAY BE WEAK
FOR SOME PLAYERS.

EASY RANGE,
NOT AS STRONG
AS HIGHER NOTES.
INCREASINGLY BRIGHT

COMFORTABLE RANGE.
GOOD FOR SMALL
ENSEMBLES.
SHOULD BE SUPPORTED
IN LOWER VOICES*

HIGH AND BRIGHT.
BIG BAND LEAD NOTES
FOR CLIMAXES. SUPPORT
IN LOWER VOICES **



Concert

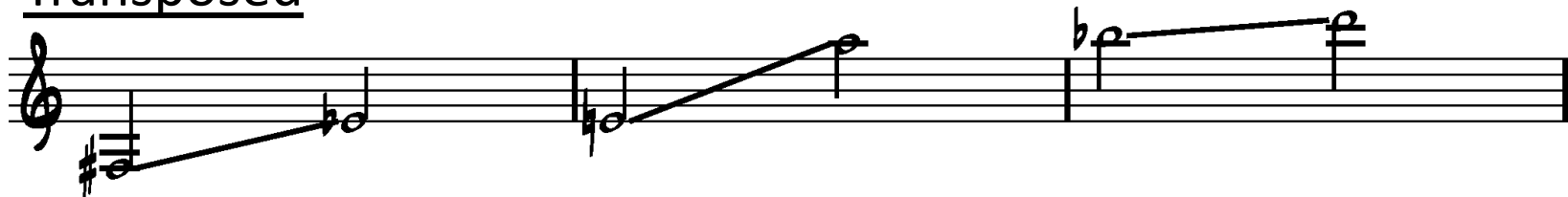
* High notes in the lead trumpet should be supported by lower voice a 3rd or 4th below, or voice the passage in octaves.

** Big band lead trumpet specialists commonly play these notes and higher notes. Use theme sparingly, in the climax portion of a chart, and support them in lower voices.

Flugelhorn

- Transpose up a major 2nd

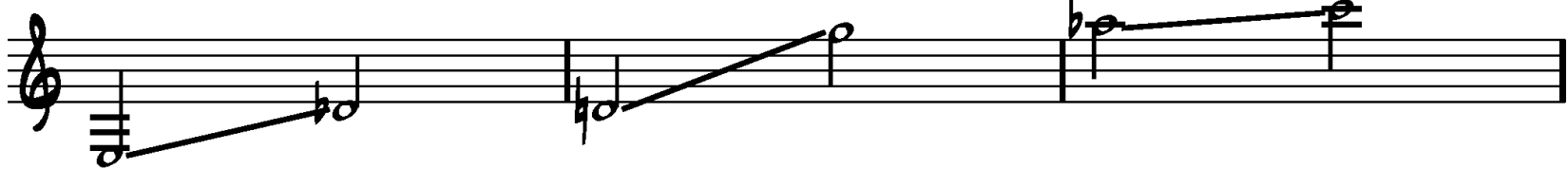
Transposed



LOWER NOTES ARE
FULL AND RICH SOUNDING
ON THE FLUGELHORN

COMFORTABLE RANGE.
INCREASINGLY BRIGHT, BUT
MORE MELLOW THAN TRUMPET.

HIGH & BRIGHTER. PLAYABLE
ON THE FLUGELHORN, BUT
LESS CHARACTERISTIC.



Concert

The flugelhorn is a more mellow, wider-bore cousin of the trumpet. It blends nicely with woodwinds as well as brass. It can get a full, rich sound in lower notes that might sound weak or thin on the trumpet.

Trombone

- No transposition needed

Tenor trombone

PEDAL TONES ARE POSSIBLE ON A TENOR TROMBONE, BUT BEST USED ON BASS TROMBONES ONLY

THESE NOTES ARE IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT A TRIGGER*

DARK RANGE OF NOTES.

CLEAR AND COMFORTABLE. MODERATELY DARK.

BRIGHTER AND STILL COMFORTABLE. CAN BE EXPRESSIVE.

BRIGHT - OK FOR LEAD PART WITH A STRONG PLAYER.



* Some tenor trombones have a trigger and can play C – Eb below the staff, but not B \flat . However, these notes are usually only written for bass trombone in a jazz chart.

Bass trombone

PEDAL TONES WORK BEST ON A BASS TROMBONE. CAN BE DEEP AND RESONANT.

IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT A 2ND TRIGGER

WORKS FINE ON A BASS TROMBONE. CAN BE DEEP AND RESONANT.

CLEAR AND COMFORTABLE.

BRIGHTER AND STILL COMFORTABLE.

POSSIBLE NOTES, BUT LEAVE THEM TO TENOR TROMBONES.



Guitar

- Sounds an octave lower than written

A FEW GUITARS HAVE 7 STRINGS, WITH A LOW B-STRING BELOW THE STANDARD E-STRING

LOWEST PART OF STANDARD 6-STRING GUITAR RANGE. SOUNDS BASS-LIKE

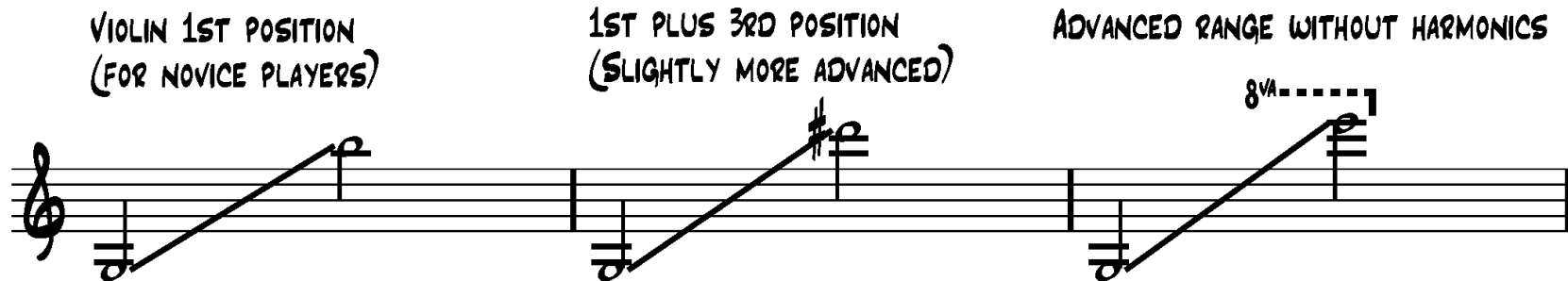
COMFORTABLE MIDDLE OF GUITAR RANGE.

HIGH NOTES - USED FOR SOLOS OR A DIFFERENT ENSEMBLE TIMBRE.

The image shows a single musical staff with a treble clef. It is divided into four measures. The first measure contains two notes: a low B (below the staff) and a B with a sharp sign (on the first line). A dashed line with '8va' below it spans from the low B to the B with a sharp sign. The second measure contains two notes: a low B (below the staff) and a B with a sharp sign (on the first line). A bass clef is positioned below the low B. The third measure contains two notes: a B with a sharp sign (on the first line) and a chord consisting of three notes (B with a sharp sign, D with a sharp sign, and E) on the first line. The fourth measure contains two notes: a high B (on the second space) and a chord consisting of three notes (B, D, and E) on the second space. A dashed line with '8va' above it spans from the high B to the chord above it.

Violin

- No transposition needed



- The upper range can be extended further using harmonics. Harmonics also can create an ethereal effect. The player fingers a note and lightly touches the string higher on the fingerboard to produce an overtone. Use only for special effects with advanced violinists.