

Oral History Interview of

Mr. Gary Tirey

Bexley, Ohio

March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2000

Gary Tirey  
Carole Nowicke  
Also present: Paul Bierley

Tape 1, Side 1

Carole Nowicke: First I would like to have you introduce yourself and tell me about your current career, and where you played before.

Gary Tirey: I'm Gary Tirey, I teach at Otterbein College. I teach tuba, and concert band, conducting, brass methods. I've played in the Columbus Symphony Brass Quintet for a number of years. We have a brass quintet at Otterbein. The dates for the Columbus Symphony would have begun in about 1960, there were two years I took off when I taught in Zanesville, and then that would put me finishing about 1980.

At Otterbein I've given a few recitals over time, and we have the brass quintet that functions as needed. I was a founding member of the Brass Band of Columbus, and that was like, what, 15 years ago? Something in that vicinity. I still play with them.

For the past several years I have played in Harvey Phillips' "Tuba Company" and "Tuba Santas," and most recently I believe, four years ago, Norlan Bewley founded the "Tuba Shop" quartet. We still function periodically. In two weeks we are going to record with the Tuba Company in Bloomington. That will be kind of fun. I just got music in the mail for that.

For a number of years I subbed for the famous tubist Paul Bierley in the Columbus Symphony. That was a great experience, I learned a lot of repertoire and met a lot of neat people. Those are most of my playing experiences. I get occasional gigs like [ ] and church gigs, and you get called to play the opening of a shopping center, something like that.

Nowicke: Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

Tirey: I was born in Ana, Ohio, which is a small town in western Ohio, in Shelby County in 1940 and spent all of my years in that town until I went to college in 1958. From that point on, I have called Columbus my home.

Nowicke: When did you start playing tuba?

Tirey: In the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I would have been 13, I believe. I was a cornet player, I might add. A bad cornet player, and I had to give it up to give it back to my sister (a political thing) and my Mom came down on her side. So I went to see the band director and gave her the band news that I couldn't be in band anymore. She said, "Come with me," and she took me into what we would today call a closet, she called it an "instrument storage room." She said, "You can play this," she pointed up on the wall to this black old tuba hanging. I said, "Fine."

So I started playing right away on that thing and I kind of took to it like a duck to water. Whatever embouchure problems I might have had on the cornet were just absorbed by the tuba mouthpiece, and enthusiasm and air made up for all the rest. I loved it. There was a guy a couple of years ahead of me who was a really fine piano playing organist, he played Sousaphone in the high school band. The high school band consisted of about 30 people. I was actually the 29<sup>th</sup> member at that point in time.

I had him to look up to. There were no band directors in that part of the state that played tuba, so there was nobody to take lessons from, nobody to even hear. This guy happened to be pretty good and so I followed him. All through high school, and even after he graduated, I found myself finding ways to get out of study hall so that I could go practice. I practiced two or three hours a day sometimes. I found a creative way to get out of phys ed by not showing up on the first day, then they would not put you on their roster. Then I would carry the Sousaphone through the phys ed class up to the stage, draw the curtain, and practice. The teacher never noticed that I was not in the phys ed class.

Nowicke: I like this.

Tirey: So much for higher education in Ana, but it was fun. We had young band director out of Capital, **Fred Grummel**. He was a trumpet player, and he saw to it when somebody came to town

and gave clinics that I was there. I remember seeing Raphael Mendez and different well-known people, but no tubists. Bill Bell never came through there at that point in time. When it came time to go to college I really loved music, although I didn't have much training in it, but there was no question what I was going to study. Different people got me going in the right direction.

In my town, which was a German Lutheran community, if you were going into education for music, you went to Capital University, if you were going into another field you went to another school. It was that fixed. So I never even gave it a moment's thought. The only other school I ever considered was the Cincinnati Conservatory, largely because my older high school friend went here and he was successful. I chose Capital because of the church connection.

At that point in time, realizing that I was going to become a music educator, a band director, I started practicing other instruments. I worked a little on baritone, clarinet, baritone sax, percussion, things like that, just so that I could become a little bit more skilled. It turned out it paid off big-time for me. When I hit the methods classes I just took to learning how to teach all those instruments really easily. It was fun. I was fairly inquisitive, not having been around sophisticated band programs, so when I saw guys with bass trombones with all the valves and things like that, I really didn't know about that, so I talked to my student colleagues and find out what's going on. I enjoyed those years.

Nowicke: Was there anybody there for you to take lessons with?

Tirey: Yes, although I started in 1958, and this was before there were many tuba teachers in the country at all. So I studied with the low brass man, which was Glen Harriman. He was a trombone player in the Columbus Symphony, a wonderful musician, and a great man, and I enjoyed it a lot. I worked with him for three years, and then two years with Nick Perrini, the first horn player, who also taught at Capital. Both of them were students of Donald Reinhardt from Philadelphia, so we got a lot of pedagogical information along with our lessons. Glen still today

lives in [ ? ] and plays well. He's retired from teaching, but he is still a good player on the scene.

Nowicke: How old is he?

Tirey: I'm not sure, but he's pretty old at this point. He would have been in his 30s—I'm trying to think here. He must be 80. I'm not sure. He is still in good shape, he and his wife toured Scotland two years ago, and they are very active.

Nowicke: Doug Yeo told me last week that Kauko Kahila still plays his bass trombone an hour-and-a-half every day and he's 80-something.

Tirey: Wow. Glen played euphonium as well as trombone, so he was no stranger to valve technique. I remember just as soon as he could he got us into the Kopprasch methods and things like that. They weren't readily available at that point in time, so we got those Thermofax—old, crinkly, yellow copies of those. I still have those. They've cracked and you can hardly read them, but I never felt much like throwing them away.

Glen was a great player in addition to being a wonderful teacher. There were moments in the Columbus Symphony where it sounded like "Glen Harriman and the Columbus Symphony." I don't know if Paul Bierley will agree with that or not, but he was a strong player.

Nowicke: That was mostly what you worked on in your lessons? Kopprasch? Method books?

Tirey: Solos. He did a lot of repertoire. There wasn't a lot of tuba repertoire at that point in time, but we played trumpet and trombone methods and things like that. I remember playing Bugs Bower's bebop duets and all those neat little things. I still use those things in my lessons today. The Bugs Bower rhythm studies are great and of course the Clark technical studies, we use those. Every time we warm up we play a little bit of that stuff. We got inundated with Reinhardt

techniques, like “spider webs” and descending arpeggios. For certain kinds of things, I use the Reinhardt “pivot system” exercises today with my students. I devised my own warm-ups that I use with my students out of these things and it works out really well.

My students all open up their low range rather quickly and when I started taking lessons and playing by myself in high school I never went below an F because the instruments wouldn't do it, and I didn't have any requirement. Nobody ever wrote a note lower than F in the music I saw. Today, that's really not true. A lot of music that the better high school bands are playing will occasionally have low Eb's and D's and the kids are able to play them.

It's kind of neat how all that has developed. The equipment needs have dictated how the music is written in a lot of cases. You can still play almost all that stuff with a four valve instrument. I remember learning fake tones because I wanted to play a low Eb and didn't have a fourth valve. You can do that easily by just dropping your jaw a little bit and you get this rather unfocused sound.

Nowicke: So, this horn you had in high school was a three valver?

Tirey: Yes, it was a three valve Conn Sousaphone, after I moved off the old Eb tuba. Everybody at some point in their lives plays Eb tuba.

Nowicke: I haven't!

Tirey: Some people get over it.

Nowicke: I'd love an Eb helicon.

Tirey: Conn made good instruments and those Sousaphones were really pretty responsive and nice sized instruments. Then, in the first year of college Capital had just purchased three valved recording bell Bessons. They were decent instruments, I never really liked them.

Nowicke: Compensating?

Tirey: No, these were before that. They had a lot of resistance, and I didn't really care for them much. Then just a year or two later, Capital purchased a pair of four valve compensating, and they were nicer instruments, although I never really played those seriously because at that point in time I purchased my first Mirafone and I was playing that. I bought the Mirafone in 1959 in Canton, Ohio, for \$650. It was a Kaiser model BBb, the 190 model number. There were no tubas in Columbus in any store to try. One of my teachers at Capital, **Fritz Saenger**, who taught percussion methods, he was manager of bands. He knew of a store in Canton, where the guy had two tubas to try. So he drove me up there and we tried them both and picked out one and brought it home.

It was a nice instrument. I played that for a number of years. It turned out that the Kaiser model horn was quite large, and it was pretty big for certain kinds of things, some solos and brass ensembles were difficult with it, but band and orchestra worked well for a long time. Then after college when I started at Otterbein in 1968 I purchased some smaller Mirafones, the 186 CC, and had a 184 BBb and different things like that. So, I had instruments that fit the ensemble better.

The big Kaiser is still being played, although not here in town. I have it on permanent loan to a preacher from Milwaukee who is married to a daughter of one of my best friends. He wanted a tuba to play and the horn was just sitting around drying up, so I thought, "Let him have it." The intonation on that Kaiser was really difficult. Every horn in those days was pretty individual—individually different. There was not too much standardization. Even 2<sup>nd</sup> line Bb was *really* out of tune on that horn. You had to favor it, and if you had long tones, you needed to pay it 2 and 3. It had a nice, warm sound and it was good. They've come a long way.

Nowicke: How big was it?

Tirey: Its bore was like .8-something. It was huge, almost 9/10s of an inch. I don't think the lead pipe was made proportionately very well, I think that was where a lot of the intonation problems were.

Nowicke: Was it too short?

Tirey: I'm not sure. This is not my area of expertise. I liked the instrument, but you learn to deal with the problems.

Nowicke: None of them are perfect.

Tirey: No.

Nowicke: We have you buying your Mirafone in '59, and you are going to graduate from college.

Tirey: 1964 was my actual date of graduation. Due to not doing well in a few early courses, like English and the History of Religion, I extended my stay at Capital a year and ended up double majoring in voice and tuba. I got married in 1963 and student taught the next year and did really well at that point in time. I just took a while to get in gear. I was 17 when I started, and I was not really ready, but it in time worked out.

At that point in time, I was already playing in the Symphony brass quintet, and I was also singing professionally with the Richard Johnston Singers, who was one of my teachers from Capital. This group predated the Columbus Symphony Chorus, the Cantare Professional Chorus, the Opera company, so this small 20 voice group did all those things. It was really kind of neat. I



didn't get many jobs on tuba because there were half-a-dozen pretty good tuba players in town already who had many years of seniority on me and they got almost the calls.

In the summer, however, the Columbus Parks and Recreation program had, when I hit the scene, they were doing 12 concerts a summer. They had different conductors, each guy would book his own group and have a rehearsal and play a concert in the park. It was a well-attended program and you got to meet a lot of people, then eventually those kind of went away in favor of smaller groups to the point where I get called now once every two years to direct a concert. There are no others. There are no other summer band concerts sponsored by the city of Columbus. There are a couple community bands in the suburbs that do concerts, and we here in Bexley have a little concert series that the band director from Capital and I do in combination with Parks and Recreation. We hire 25-30 professional players, and it's a wonderful thing, but just three programs a summer is all we are able to muster up the support.

My early professional work was mostly singing, and as I moved into my Otterbein years I got more and more contacts and started doing more things like playing recitals and practicing and teaching kids. When you teach young tuba players you get better yourself. You're always talking about breath support and embouchure rotation, and pivoting, and your playing gets better. You read music every day. Your music reading and all these things improve.

Nowicke: You have to clarify your thoughts about the process.

Tirey: Yeah. It was almost imperceptible to me, but it happened. One of the early things that happened, I started at Otterbein in 1968, and almost right away, I got a couple of serious tuba players in the school. They just showed up, and it hit me like a vision that I needed to get out and see some real tuba teachers because I'd never had that. I had always worked with Glen Harriman and Nick Perrini and was to a point, self taught.

So I called up Harvey Phillips, who was in his first year in Indiana, following his teacher Bill Bell, and that same year I also went to see Donald Reinhardt in Philadelphia. For a number of

years I did both of those things. I kept them going somewhat actively. I would go see Reinhardt on a regular basis, and I would see Harvey even more than that. The combination worked out really well, Reinhardt was a great pedagogical person, and Harvey Phillips is a supreme musician and a good human being. Just by being around him you learn things. It's neat. Even when we weren't having a formal lesson, you hang out with Harvey, you meet people, and you learn things. It was a great experience. To a point I am still doing that.

I went to see Reinhardt for a number of years, and he had passed away, roughly, it must have been 12 or 14 years ago, something like that. Harvey is still going forth. He doesn't really teach lessons at this point in time. He has other projects going. People still consult with him, and if somebody is doing a recital he'll go in and hear them and offer his advice. Those were wonderful years, so within my young 30s after I'd started getting students, that kind of inspired me to do more myself, that's when I went to study with Harvey and Dr. Reinhardt.

There was one very formative experience. I got a call—this was even before those years, and I was still in college and I'll never forget this. Paul Bierley called me up and said, "What are you doing tonight?" This was a Thursday. I said, "Not much. I'm just studying and practicing and all that." He said, "Well, come on out to my house and bring your horn."

So I did. I didn't know quite why, but when I got there, Bill Bell was there. That was the only time I had ever met him, so it was through Paul's good graces that I met Mr. Bell. He dedicated the whole evening to me. We played, we talked, I listened, and it was a wonderful experience. In another few years, my path and his never really crossed, and he died fairly young. So that was a wonderful opportunity for me to get to meet the man on pretty much neutral turf. Paul Bierley's basement is a great place to learn things.

Nowicke: Was this before Mr. Bell got to I.U.? You can talk, Paul.

Paul Bierley: He was still there.

Nowicke: Harvey went in in '71? '72?

Tirey: I'm not sure. It was the early '70s. '71 probably. This would have been '63 maybe? He had been at Akron or someplace doing a clinic.

Bierley: Canal Fulton. He'd stopped in Columbus on the way back.

Nowicke: I hadn't heard this story. I didn't know he'd ever been to your house.

Tirey: All roads through Columbus go through the Bierley basement. That was about two houses ago.

Nowicke: The Morris Road house?

Bierley: Yes. No, this was down in Medina, before I lived in Columbus proper.

Nowicke: Before you got rich and moved the suburbs? How are we doing on this?

Bierley: We still have another five minutes. I'm watching.

Nowicke: So what did you do with Mr. Bell in Paul's basement? What were you playing?

Tirey: I don't remember the solo I was playing that he asked me to play, and I did, and it was like a master class.

Nowicke: He critiqued a solo.

Tirey: Yes, and then I think we just played duets or something and listened to some music and talked. It was wonderful. He was a warm man. It's not a real surprise, knowing a lot of his

students around the country, what good teachers they are—the Tucker Jolly’s of the world, because they came up under Mr. Bell. My colleague at Otterbein, Lyle Barkhymer who teaches music history and clarinet, while he was an I.U. student, he played in Bill Bell famous German band and has lots of great stories about that. It was really a fine outfit. They played really well. They recreated that at a brass symposium a few years ago and talked about it. It was a neat experience for those who got to do that.

When you attend these brass symposiums (and I made very one of them for a long time) I saw Robert Eliason playing the ophicleide and serpent. I knew they existed but I had never heard them before. It was interesting. So I contacted him at the Henry Ford Museum and took many trips up there—in the spring I would take my brass methods class, and in the summer once I just went up with my wife and mother-in-law and the kids, and we spent a weekend.

They had a great collection and a lot of neat things, and he taught me to play ophicleide and serpent. It was neat. Then the Henry Ford Museum got new manager, and all this wonderful music stuff is now stored. He’s teaching at a school in New England. I’m not sure which one at this point, but he’s gone. I remember when he left the museum he would go home and have dinner, and then head off to some club to play Dixieland music. He was a neat man, we had a good time.

Those types of clinics, like the Brass Congress things, and the T.U.B.A..and other tuba gatherings that would be sponsored caused a lot of other things to happen, they broadened your horizons. I remember at the one conference held at the University of Illinois I was walking across the campus with New York tubist Howard Johnson who I thought was neat. We had just heard his Taj Mahal album where he was, shock of shocks, playing jazz solos on the tuba. I asked him, “Howard, how’s come you play bari sax and flugel horn and stuff like this, not just tuba? Why don’t you play it all on tuba?” He looked at me and said, “To buy groceries man.” I thought, “He’s right, you got to do what you’ve got to do, and in his scene, that’s what you do.” So, having met him, I felt comfortable giving him a call on occasion, like I knew he played with

the Gil Evans group, and the Jazz Showcase in New York. On a band tour there I took about 15 kids and we went down there and it was a wonderful evening. He had about three 45 minute sets and it was like basically uninterrupted music. The group used a few reeds, had a couple three trumpets, rhythm section, a couple French horns, a tuba, no trombones. There were lots of parts for tuba.

Tape 1, Side 2

Nowicke: Is that tape squealing?

Tirey: That particular tuba symposium at Illinois was...

Nowicke: That was like '78?

Tirey: It was an interesting time. I remember Harvey would always invite people to Tuba Ranch on their way home from events, so he invited me and the two students that were with me, and I remember Connie Weldon and some of her students were there. I've met other people at his house, but I'm thinking about this particular one. It provided an opportunity to get to know these people from other states, pretty good players. Earle Louder. I remember sitting in Harvey's back yard and Earle said, "My plane leaves Indianapolis in an hour." I got him there five minutes before the plane took off. I don't remember the occasion.

Nowicke: You were stepping on it. [laughs]

Tirey: Earle remembers the driving. It worked out fine.

Nowicke: That was probably before the beltway was up.

Tirey: Oh yes. Those events were kind of neat. Harvey would give us instructions to his house and we would all be sitting around outside, and about an hour later, Harvey and Carol would

show up with the old Cadillac, the back seat loaded with sacks of groceries, steaks, and corn, and watermelon and beer. He had to stop and buy stuff, he didn't have anything in the house for the cookout. At that particular one Winston Morris and his guys were there.

Nowicke: They told me about sleeping in the barn. The old barn, not the new designer barn.

Tirey: Right. I still see some of those guys around. They are active in their careers now. They were students at that point in time. So, like I mentioned before, all those connections were really kind of neat.

Nowicke: You said you were involved as membership secretary in the '80s?

Tirey: I was a midwest region membership person. I don't remember the exact dates. It could have been the first decade of T.U.B.A., after maybe two or three years I got asked to do that.

Nowicke: When did you join T.U.B.A.?

Tirey: In its inception.

Nowicke: So you were there the meeting in '73?

Tirey: I believe so, yes. After two or three years of its existence then they asked me to do that. It wasn't hard to get people to join T.U.B.A. at that point in time, it was a new organization that was attracting world-wide attention and people were joining every time an opportunity presented itself. You didn't really have to do much. So I just kind of functioned as a conduit, if somebody had question they needed answered I would channel it to the right person. I can't remember the year I stopped doing that. They somehow changed the organization a little bit, I don't know when that was.

Nowicke: They consolidated some of the offices.

Tirey: I have always enjoyed their journals. We subscribe to them at the library and I have quite a stack of them myself. I find the articles that are written tend to be fairly interesting, they are often subjects that you yourself do not know a lot about, so you read up on them.

Nowicke: Especially with Jerry Young as editor.

Tirey: I met him at a brass symposium just a few years ago and heard him play. He's a great man.

Nowicke: So you got your masters while you were working here at Otterbein?

Tirey: Yes, I started teaching in 1964 in Junior High up in Zanesville, teaching band and orchestra. This was a guy who vowed "I'm done with college, I'll never go back and do that again." During my first year of teaching I came to the realization that you need to go on to kind of focus your areas of interest and you need to go forward. So I checked out all the grad schools that would have me. A lot of the young band directors at that point in time who I admired attended VanderCook College in Chicago. So I enrolled there, and it was a summer program, so you could teach during the year. I went four summers. I started at Otterbein in '68 and I graduated (I had one summer left) in the summer of '69 from VanderCook.

I met some neat tuba players in school at VanderCook. **Bill Keck** from Eastman was one that comes to mind. He played for a number of years in the Mexico City Symphony. We were good friends. Ron, who is from Napierville, conducts the fine community band up there.

Bierley: Ron Keller.

Tirey: He was a VanderCook guy himself. There were a couple of Ohio guys, one from U of D, and one from Kent State. Tuba players are always very friendly, so you kind of hung out with these guys. It was just something that kind of happened without anybody even thinking about it.

Nowicke: Did you do any playing together?

Tirey: Yes, we'd do duets and practice, and of course worked together in band, but VanderCook was a Music Ed-based program, and you didn't take private lessons or things like that.

Nowicke: Which would have been my next question.

Tirey: Right. With the tuba players, there was a camaraderie, but there was also a competitiveness, so we ended up being one of the few groups of people that practiced and who could play the Kopprasch No. 9 in one breath. But it really worked! It focused. My first year there I was 4<sup>th</sup> chair out of five, and my senior year there I was 1<sup>st</sup> chair. That association, even without taking lessons provided a vehicle, a reason, to work. A reason to hone your craft. After you'd practice, then you'd go out and play tennis together. I don't now where all these guys are today, but I do know that Ron Keller still teaches, he directs that band. I think Bill has left the symphony. I'm not sure what he is doing. I think he lives in California at this point in time. We haven't kept in touch in the past 10 years.

Nowicke: You would go up there and live for the summer?

Tirey: Yes. We stayed in dormitories. We were on the campus of I.I.T. on South Michigan Avenue, and we were just a small part of what was going on there in the summer. The VanderCook school was separate from I.I.T. but it was on the campus, basically. My wife would stay with her family and I would just go there for six weeks. It was a neat program. You got to study with some wonderful people. The teachers I had (and this was near the end of their careers) the Forrest Buchtels, the Hascal HARRS, Dick Brittain, H.E. Nutt—you had some



wonderful teachers. I was fortunate enough to be there at a time when all of these people were still there. You're taking classes "from the guy that wrote the book."

Another interesting thing in grad school, you're in classes with virtually the cream of the crop in your business. Those guys would come from all around the country to take graduate work there. There were a couple hundred of us there in the summer. You know, I venture a guess that you learn as much from your classmates as anyone else.

Nowicke: That's a completely different college experience when you are taking your course work with people who are already professionals than when you are there with a bunch of 20 year olds that don't know anything.

Tirey: Yes, and highly motivated men. Even today I still see these people. There must have been 20 guys from Ohio there, and these guys are now nearing the end of their careers and they are among the leaders of the state in the band area.

Nowicke: Probably VanderCook had set up the program this way on purpose.

Tirey: Well, yeah, it took a while for them to gain the confidence of the various states' accrediting agencies. Ohio was one of the leaders. We had guys from Georgia, guys from Illinois, a lot of guys from Michigan. Those states kind of dominated. There'd be a few from others, like Wisconsin, but certain states made it easier for their teachers to do that work and get the proper credit for it.

Nowicke: It's hard if you are teaching and need to do the studying in the summer. It's far-sighted of an institution to set up.

Tirey: It was a good approach to things, too, very practical. They would start with course outlines and you'd simply move through them and it put use the various things that you were

doing in your teaching at the very time you needed to be doing it, so it was a wonderful program and I would not do it differently. I have a lot of respect for Ph.D.s and other professional programs, but I wouldn't change the direction I took at all.

It was a wonderful time to be there. Chicago was a great place in the summers, a lot of music going on. I remember my first week there was the last big riots they had. It was kind of hard to sleep at night because you could hear this all over town. You could hear the fire trucks and everything. Those were interesting days.

Nowicke: You never tried to take a lesson with Arnold Jacobs while you were there.

Tirey: It didn't seem to work out. I didn't have the money or the contacts at that point in time. I got to know him later at Harvey's house, and he was a wonderful man. Sitting there at the dinner table with the Phillips and the Jacobs, listening to stories about the orchestra on tour, and things like that. I forget the other gentleman's name, but this one particular dinner there was a bass player from the Cleveland Orchestra there, and he and Arnold kind of dominated the conversation for stories.

I use some of Arnold Jacobs' techniques. I use a lot of his breathing things and I have attended clinics he's done on several occasions. He was here at Ohio State in Columbus quite a few years ago. I remember attending that. It might have been an M.E.N.C. he was appearing at. I'm not sure of the details, but getting to know him was a real treat. I will never forget his bag of mouthpieces. He would carry a bag of mouthpieces out on the stage with his big old tuba, and he would say, "This is my *Bolero* mouthpiece." "I use this when I want to show the new trombone players in the Chicago Symphony who is boss. Then I would play their repertoire in their range better than they could." It was amazing. He didn't buy new horns, he just had different mouthpieces for different functions, and of course he knew in his mind's eye what he wanted it to sound like, and he was able to achieve that.

Harvey is somewhat the same way. Harvey plays a Conn 2 mouthpiece, even today. If my students came in (well, they'd be embarrassed to play a mouthpiece as beat-up as Harvey's)--but it's not the mouthpiece, it's the man behind the horn, and he proves that every day he plays.

When I was at VanderCook, I didn't see myself becoming a better tubist or focusing as a tuba teacher at that point in time. My main direction was music education, being a band director. So, I didn't do the things that if I were to look back now, I would have taken better advantage of that situation.

When T.U.B.A. did their research article on the tuba players of the symphonies of America, about who they studied with, what their equipment was, this kind of thing, I read that article with a lot of interest. Bill Bell and Arnold Jacobs were the most mentioned people in terms of who people studied with. Connie Weldon was another fairly often mentioned name, and a name, I didn't know this, I didn't realize the extent--was Bob LeBlanc from Ohio State was mentioned 14 times by those 50-some tuba players. So he had touched the lives of Mickey Moore, and all those guys, Fritz Kaenzig. I don't think here in Columbus gave the man enough credit. Paul and I were there at his retirement recital when a lot of these guys came back and played. It was a wonderful evening. It was some years ago, 10? More than that, 12 or 14 years ago I think, I'm not sure.

Bierley: I don't think it's been that long.

Tirey: Really?

Nowicke: As a private, non-degree student with Harvey, what happened the first time you went to take a lesson?

Tirey: You prepare, like you do for a lot of other things, and all of the things that you think he's going to ask you to play, he doesn't even get close to. He said, "Play something for me." So I

did. He didn't say anything. Then he got an exercise out that had dotted 8<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> rhythms in it. He said, "Play this for me." We spent 45 minutes working on dotted 8<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup> rhythms. It was a lesson in itself. I learned a lot. There are other things that you learn about this experience. We met at 8:00 in the morning in the summer on a Sunday morning. I got there early. I drove over from Columbus so I'd be there in plenty of time. I must have left home at 3:00 or something. At 7:00 Sunday morning in (I forget the name of the building) the round building with all the studios, there were people practicing trumpet, trombone, and tuba, and school was out. School had been out about a week, but these guys were still working. They must be fairly dedicated, knew what they were doing.

Harvey was right on time. We met from 8:00 'til 10:00 and worked, and he worked on one of the solos I was doing at the time, and the dotted 8<sup>th</sup> - 16<sup>th</sup>, and we talked about things and recommended things for me to play in the next year. I said to Harvey "Harvey, why do I have a lesson at 8:00 today? If I can just ask? Not that I minded driving over, what was the reason for that?" He said, "Because I am going to take my boys fishing when I get home." "Great. Where do you fish?" He said, "In my back yard." So he scheduled a lesson at 8:00 on a Sunday morning so he could spend the rest of the day with his family. A lesson in life. These guys are grown up today, and they love their Mom, and it's really a neat experience to have gotten to know them all. That's been some time ago.

Most of the other trips I've made to Bloomington to study with him have been with a specific thing in mind, like I was playing a recital and I wanted him to hear a couple works, or at a school like Otterbein, I get periodic sabbaticals where you are expected to go do "learned things." I didn't work on an advanced degree necessarily, I just went to different symposiums and workshops, and I went to see Harvey, and Dr. Reinhardt on a regular basis and just spend time with them, and talk about things and play music and didn't have any particular goals in mind necessarily, but just being there was an education in itself.

Nowicke: Did you talk about particular pedagogical problems with your own students?

Tirey: Well, you talk about things, yeah, and they give you advice. You don't sit around and talk about equipment much, you mostly talk about life and music and stuff. I remember being Harvey's guest one evening during one of those workshops. There was a composer from Wisconsin, and I were the only two people there that evening. Carol had dinner ready at 8:00-something, and Harvey wasn't ready. He wanted to keep talking, so we didn't have dinner until 11:00 that night. Carol kept it going and it was fine, and it was just an interesting thing to watch the evening develop and listen to the conversation. This was in the old house, before the new house was built up around it. Harvey was quite a drinker in those days, and he had his little Wild Turkey cask. I don't know if you've ever seen that thing.

Nowicke: Over how many years have you actually formally taken lessons with him?

Tirey: Probably 10 or 12. At this point in time we don't have lessons, but we do things together, and some of the recording projects. You just learn by watching and being part of it. The TubaChristmas thing—we started a big TubaChristmas here when his program was still relatively new, and that's good fun too. We've had about 18 years of them here in Columbus and it's settled down to the point where we now average about 375 performers. We are up to a couple thousand people in the audience now. We do it inside at the Palace Theater, whereas in the earlier years we did it outside on the Statehouse steps. That was fine, unless it was cold and raining, which it usually was.

Nowicke: That's when you take your ophicleide so it doesn't freeze shut.

Tirey: We have had guys bring ophicleides and serpents. Occasionally somebody wanted to know if saxophones were allowed! In Columbus a few years ago, they held a *flute* Christmas. They did it once, nobody came. The students of Cathy Jones came, and they participated, but it was not an ongoing program.

Tirey: My goals for the TubaChristmas in Columbus at this point, I mean, it's an ongoing program, we've had as many as 500 participants on a couple different occasions. My goals at this point are to make it musical. So we encourage people to go to other programs too. There are eight or so TubaChristmases in Ohio, when it isn't so big, you can do things with balance, and it's kind of neat to try and make it musical so the kids take home some ideas. A lot of these kids sit in the back of a band and their conductors mostly conduct like this [motioning to them to hold back] so you try to teach them things that will help them become better band members and tuba players.

Nowicke: I think for most of us, our experience in school is that we don't ever hear anybody who plays better than we do. Which is too bad.

Tirey: A lot of young tuba players don't necessarily know what it's supposed to sound like. Once that get that in their ear (and TubaChristmas is a good vehicle to do that because you can be standing beside a professional player) it works out really well like that. One of the things that helped me a lot in dealing with the TubaChristmases is the is the two years that we worked on the first recording project with the TubaShop Quartet where we recorded the Alec Wilder and Norlan Bewley arrangements. You actually learn what makes the balance work, you change things a little bit. Instead of playing every note there, Harvey and I dovetailed. It worked out really well, breath-wise and different things. So when I go out and direct a TubaChristmas at this point (like I direct the Circleville one, and occasionally guest direct somewhere) you can take some of these ideas and ask people to do things a certain way and it works out pretty well. So, TubaChristmas has accomplished a lot, it's got good media coverage. Harvey goes back to the same places every year, like Atlanta and Chicago, and the media still come out every year to video or chronicle what they think is a tradition. The *Columbus Dispatch* a couple years ago labeled our TubaChristmas program as "One of Columbus' Christmas traditions," and people have grown to expect it, even if they don't come themselves, they know it goes on. I think this is one of the main goals that we've accomplished.

We do a unique thing at our TubaChristmas, in the fact that we are inside the theater, I put some of my private students, and few adults, people like Buddy Laws and Paul Droste and Paul Bierley (when he comes) on the stage behind Harvey and myself, and have all the students and the bulk of the performers out in the hall. It's a neat thing, because you have this core of sound. In a perfect situations (which means when they happen to all be watching).

Bierley: [laughs]

Nowicke: You aren't saying he wouldn't watch, are you? [laughs]

Tirey: No, no. These guys do, but occasionally if you get the wrong number of young people, they don't all watch. Guys who play for a living pretty much watch, they know what to do, but young ones don't always do that, they just get kind of carried away. So it's good for the young to hear the sound. Occasionally we'll do something like feature Jim Akins and he plays the bass lines while Harvey sings *Santa Wants a Tuba for Christmas*. We've done some small ensemble things. People take home a little bit better idea of what a tuba sounds like.

Nowicke: Are we ready to put the other tape in?

Bierley: We have about two minutes.

Nowicke: We might as well stop it and pop another tape in.

Tape 2, Side 1

Nowicke: You said you were coming over to do some recordings of the TubaShop Quartet. Are you recording in Creative Arts?

Tirey: No, we are going to a studio. I forget the name of it, but it works out pretty well. Norlan has done a few new arrangements and we still have a lot of really good workable arrangements that we have not recorded yet, so we're going to key on some of those, and try to get 20 more tunes recorded. The Tuba Shop Quartet functions as the core group and Harvey brings in a few other grad students and professional players who are around and it works out fine. It's kind of neat to watch it all happen. Norlan Bewley's arrangements work really well. He writes well for the F tubas on the first part. I play BB $\flat$ , but the other guys usually play CC and that works out nicely. There's a nice sound there. He doubles our part with an electric bass, and one of the I.U. faculty members plays that, and the euphonium playing, there's a lot of unison, a lot of two and three and four part harmony, and it ends up sounding like a sax section in a big band or something. So, that's coming up the first full weekend of April. We're going to play the Bloomington Beerfest Thursday and Friday nights, and then record all day Saturday.

Nowicke: Is this going to be a theme album?

Tirey: I'm not sure. I know the tunes. The first album didn't have a theme necessarily, it was just recording tunes in about four different styles, the German tunes, and the Mexican tunes.

Nowicke: It's pretty much what he plays every time you go over there now.

Tirey: Yes. Wherever we play, people generally like it. It's really not an educational kind of situation. They aren't going there to hear Mozart.

Nowicke: It's entertainment.

Tirey: Yes, and people identify with it quite a bit.

Nowicke: Nobody is going to sit down and listen to you at the Bloomington Beerfest, they are going to enjoy you in the background.



Tirey: Right, but they've come to expect it. We've grown up along with the Beer festival and it's pretty much a tradition at this point. They do really enjoy it, as much as we enjoy doing it, I think. There have been a few people who sat in over time who maybe done one or two of these. I think you need to have been a part of this for a group of years to really put it all in perspective and enjoy it and see how it works. We played a new one last year, over in whatever town Indiana State is in, way over on the other side of the state.

Nowicke: Terre Haute.

Tirey: It didn't have the tradition that the Bloomington ones do, and the people didn't come to it knowing in advance what it was going to be like, and they, quite frankly, didn't like it. They didn't care. They had no prior knowledge, and it was just a curiosity to them. We've played a lot of different things, some of the Tuba Santa things in Chicago, and we played with the players from the Army band, and Pokorny from the Chicago Symphony, and it was just a great group. This was at a Marshall Fields opening or something, it was in December. It was a little chilly.

Nowicke: This past year?

Tirey: No, no, this was maybe four years ago, five years ago? It was fun to be part of a group of those talented guys.

About an hour ago I mentioned the Howard Johnson thing. Well, we brought Howard Johnson to Columbus a few years ago as a soloist with the Jazz Arts Group, which is a professional concert-based jazz group, unlike anything else in the country. It's wonderful. They bring in guest artists regularly. I talked **Ray Eubanks** the director into bringing Howard in, and Paul Bierley, and Jim Akins from the Symphony, and **Larry Schiffer**, and myself, and a tubist named Gary Twining (who has since moved to Cleveland) we were the back-up tubas for Howard on that event. That

was a lot of fun. I would venture the opinion that I don't think most of the members of the Jazz Arts audience enjoyed it very much. It was too unusual for them. I thought it was neat what they are able to do, and the writing of the arrangements. Howard Johnson wasn't a real known quantity in Columbus, Ohio, at this point in time. Although I did see him on public television on a Sunday morning some years ago. Somebody did a special on a new album that he had just done and had his group on.

Nowicke: You never took any lessons with Sam Green?

Tirey: No. The Cincinnati guys are kind of in a different world. I know him, I've met him, but we just don't have a professional association at all. The Cincinnati people are not involved in TubaChristmas. He's retired now, he teaches part-time, and the new guy at the university is very active and he performs all over the place. I know him from the Summit Brass. The other tuba player whose name escapes me...

Nowicke: Mike Thornton.

Tirey: Mike Thornton. I attended a clinic he did here in Columbus for the **CBD&E**, but I've not seen him on any other occasions, and nothing against them, I just don't think they associate outside of their town. When I do the Ohio Music Education Association, I will occasionally have a tuba-euphonium group, and bring in guys from around the state, and we have a rehearsal and play a concert. You get all the Tucker Jollys and the Ivan Hammonds, and all these guys show up, but the Cincinnati guys have never done that.

Nowicke: Is there sort of a dividing line between this part of the state and that part of the state?

Tirey: There must be.

Nowicke: Does Ivan come down here? I know he has a tuba in Paul's basement.

Tirey: Oh yes. Ivan has in Westerville, a friend. His significant other lives in Westerville, she works in Columbus. I don't know her name, I've met her.

Bierley: Connie something-or-other. I assumed she was his wife.

Tirey: Well, I don't know.

Nowicke: That's a long commute.

Tirey: Ron Bishop has sent his regrets. Even though he is as busy as you get, he still acknowledges the fact that we are doing this, and he will personally call and say "I'm sorry, we're playing that day, but thanks for asking." The Cincinnati guys never have done that.

These kind of groups turn out to be a lot of fun, because everybody has a good time and seeing each other. You don't see each other on a fairly regular basis. I'm about ready to do another one of these in another year or so. I'm chairing the convention for next year, so it won't be that year. Maybe the year after that we'll do it.

Ohio must have more than 20.

Nowicke: Professional tubists?

Tirey: And collegiate tuba-euphonium people, which puts them among the highest in the nation, I would think.

Nowicke: In some states one person is teaching at three or four colleges. Ed Goldstein was teaching at about five!

Tirey: Almost all those people have some connection to Bill Bell too, a lot of those guys would have studied with him as their primary teacher at some point in time. When Bill Bell was

teaching, there were only a couple of other tuba teachers in the country, Rex, in Kentucky, and Connie from Florida.

It's just fun to pull them together. We always have a lot of success every time we do that. We had Winston Morris up a few times. He is a great proponent of the tuba ensemble. We've done a lot of his arrangements. He's a good guest director. He relates well with the educators in the audience.

Nowicke: Winston can talk to anybody.

Tirey: Yes. I've enjoyed getting to know him when he was in the TubaJazz Consort. When you go to these symposiums, or the Midwest, and you do the things during the day, and then in the evening when they play, just hang out there in the evening. It's such a neat thing.

Nowicke: I remember hanging out when they were playing at the Illinois symposium.

Tirey: I investigated bringing them in for the Otterbein Artist's Series, or just renting a hall in Columbus and giving a concert, but I couldn't pull it off. It was too expensive. At that point in time we're talking \$24,000 twenty years ago. It just didn't happen. Still, when we have a gathering of people here, a student picnic, or alumni or whatever, that's one of the CDs I'll play, because a lot of people haven't heard them. It's just amazing to hear Rich Matteson play jazz on his euphonium.

A long time ago I mentioned the Bugs Bower methods books.

Nowicke: Of which I am completely unfamiliar.

Tirey: He was a New York musician, and I think a friend of Charlie Colin, and that's the guy who published those for him. That's still a great teaching tool. A lot our young tubists, they don't have an opportunity to play jazz much, unless they maybe double on bass or something

like that. You can teach them the styles by doing those. There's the bebop duet book, and there's the rhythm studies. So, when I work the rhythm studies with these kids, we play the exercises through straight, and we go back and play them swung, and it's a great way to do that.

Nowicke: My teacher Bob Whaley said there was never anything harder to do than try to get a euphonium player to swing. He said they were terminally square.

I have a note here from Mr. Bierley saying I should ask you about the "God and Country Award."

Bierley: That's tonight.

Tirey: Well, I am being honored by the Salvation Army and the Brass Band of Columbus and I'll be anxious to hear once again what the award is. I respect the people who have previously received it, and I just don't know necessarily...

Nowicke: What they are giving you an award for?

Tirey: Well, they haven't said.

Bierley: They just tell about your accomplishments and your service to the music community.

Tirey: I am honored to have that happen, and I respect the people who are doing it. The Salvation Army movement band-wise has been significant. I was telling my church choir about this Wednesday night and I said, "The music of the Salvation Army is not the bell ringers out in front of shopping centers at Christmas time, we're talking some pretty serious players, and the bands in the major cities, like Chicago and New York, their staff bands are truly wonderful musical organizations.

Nowicke: I played in the D.C. band.

Tirey: So I'm really pleased that that is happening, and the best measure I have is the people who have gone before me, people like Paul Bierley and Les ....., and Paul Droste, and Ray Castle.

Bierley: Ziggy Cohen.

Tirey: Ziggy, right.

So, I'm looking forward to that.

Nowicke: Is there anything that I haven't thought to ask you about that you really want to talk about?

Tirey: I've been fortunate to get to know people like Paul Bierley and Harvey Phillips and to become part of their lives in a significant way, and I think that's important for a young person. I'm proud of a lot of the students that I've had, and I've had five or six students go on to do good things. Craig Fuller, who is at Omaha, he came from south of town here, and he didn't even start taking lessons until his junior year. He studied with me for a while, then I sent him up to Bob LeBlanc, he studied with him, then he went to Indiana and studied with Harvey, and he's doing really well. Tony Clements teaches and plays in the San Francisco area and is very successful. There's a young man who is just out of the Marines, Ben Brown, who plays in the Redlands, California area, he's from Patascola. Eric Strohecker from Sunbury, Ohio, I had as a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student on through high school, he played in the Otterbein band for a couple years, and I sent him to Indiana. He's playing in the Air Force band in Germany right now. So, that's always been nice to know that some of your people have done well. A lot of my other tuba students have gone on to become fine band directors in the state, and a few out of state. So, I'm proud of that, and we still keep in touch with these people periodically.

Bexley, here, this one town, has its share of tuba players. We have Jules Duga who is a colleague of Paul's and mine, and good in his own right. His daughter, Jan, is in the Air Force Band. Donald Blakeslee went to Ohio State when I went to Capital, and I was aware of him. We didn't know each other at that point in time, then he transferred after two years to Curtis, and he's played his entire career in the Concertgebouw orchestra. We played a summer parade with him once, he happened to be in town and Jules Duga organized this union band, and I remember he strapped his F tuba to his shoulders and marched with us. He said it was the only thing like that he had ever done in his life. His mother, who just passed away a couple years ago would keep him apprized of things that would happen tuba-wise in town. So, I'd get the occasional postcard from him. It was nice to know. One of our violin teachers at Otterbein for a period of time returned home to Holland to play in the Concertgebouw orchestra so they knew each other. It was another interesting way to keep in touch.

Nowicke: I found when I was doing a search to find out if you had any articles that you had written, that you had conducted a couple of the Hoe recordings.

Tirey: Yes, I got those through the good offices of Paul Bierley, and Mr. Hoe asked his good friend Paul Bierley one day, "Are there any blowing college bands in the state of Ohio?" Or something like that. Paul recommended me to him. It was a wonderful opportunity, and one of the best things that happened out of that was that I became the recipient of all these records that he sent to all these folks. So I have a complete collection of those. I've enjoyed that, plus it's a great resource. The first recording we did was in our theater building, Colin Hall, and it was the old "one mike in the back of the auditorium" technique. It worked OK, but Mr. Hoe wanted a better product, and so the next year we recorded at Music Hall Studios where Paul Bierley was an employee, and we recorded on a Sunday evening from 6:00 'til about 11:00 and on that particular record I cut the group down greatly and we used cornets, soprano clarinets, piccolos, trombones, euphonium, Eb tuba (Paul played on that) and BBb tubas, and percussion. It turned out to be a really tight recording. It was about a 25 piece group. I enjoyed that a lot and learned a lot, and just setting it up so that you would have songs go from one key to the next key in

different styles on the side of a record, it worked out really well. So I was honored to be asked to do that, and I have a file in the archives of the school about two inches thick of letters that I received around the world from people who were recipients of these records and they sent a kind word or two. I entitled that file, "Letters from Friends." I still have it.

Bierley: I'd like to see that sometime.

Tirey: Well, I'll haul it out. I'd like to read through it again too. It's been a while. Last December I spent a really, really, pleasurable day. I went through all the old records and got rid of some of them. When you're at a place 31 years, you accumulate a lot of "stuff," and I don't throw away things that have some potential use, but there are things that you don't need to keep any more, like multiple copies of who was on the truck crew on the tour in 1974, and stuff like that. I got rid of some that stuff, but it was fun to see all the old PR pieces and pictures and things like that.

So, those two recordings, well, one is better than the other, but I thought the second one was really good. It got Otterbein out, and it was personally good for me to have done that. There are people on that series who I have met from around the country and it's was neat to be part of that. We worked on a third recording, but it never got completed somehow. The Otterbein library installed a new recording studio in the basement, and we worked on it down there, and it just didn't work. So, the project kind of folded at that point. To the kids who are in the program today, it's a great curiosity to know that something happened in your school that was noteworthy 25 years ago. They can't imagine them that are older than them. I'm pretty proud of what we accomplished in that second recording. We could haul one out and play it, but the recorder doesn't work any more.

Bierley: I've got one at home I will play for her.



Nowicke: He will probably make me play with it. I didn't bring a tuba with me, I just brought the ophicleide.

Tirey: It's a neat recording. It's fairly technical and it worked out really well.

Bierley: We played Fred Jewel was it?

Tirey: And R.B. Hall.

Bierley: Yes, Jewel and Hall, we'll have to get it out and play *The Pumpkin Center Cornet Band*.

Nowicke: Yes, that looked like an interesting piece.

Tirey: It introduced me to music that I didn't know, and I still do that piece every few years with the Otterbein band because it's such a neat period piece.

Nowicke: There are a lot of things which are *really* fun to play that nobody remembers.

Tirey: I really can't think of too much more. We've covered a lot of territory today.

Nowicke: It's tough work to talk for an hour, but thank you very much for doing this for us. We can add this to what we hope will be a very large collection of memoirs.

[End of Interview]

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