

"Blowing-In" your Tuba -
Reality or Myth - by Paul W. Haugen
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The discussion of a player's impact upon his/her horn is always guaranteed to raise a few eyebrows among brass players in a discourse on the finer points of resonance. Anyone will agree that it takes a certain amount of time to adjust to the inconsistencies inherent in all of our horns, and through trial and error in "blowing techniques" and alternate fingerings most of us finally tackle the challenge of producing the sound we want and meeting the standards demanded of us for Intonation.

My first experience with the phenomenon of what our colleague Robert Tucci in 1973 referred to as "Blowing in" occurred when I first assumed my post as tubist of the Nuremberg Philharmonic and Opera Orchestra in 1973. Still "wet behind the ears" (I had graduated from high school scarcely a year before) in the finer points of intonation, I was admonished by my colleagues to "discontinue that horrible American C tuba" and play on the Theater's F tubas and Kaiser BBb instead. Faced with the "horror" of having

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and tackle the F or lose my newly acquired job; (gigs were then, as now, a precious commodity) I "buckled down" and proceeded to conquer the task assigned me.

Returning BBb fingerings was relatively easy I had kept in touch with them by playing Arban's version of the "Carnival of Venice" on the CC tuba using BBb fingerings. My German colleagues were then satisfied that any intonational difficulties that were encountered were my own and not the result of the CC instrument.

Bb "sidewinder" trumpets, F-Bb horns and Bb trombones were the norm in Nuremberg, and any attempt to deviate from this 140 year tradition (such as the introduction of the CC tuba to the orchestra) was considered sacrilegious. The general unwieldiness of the BBb Kaiser tuba forced me to conquer the F tuba as a means to execute the parts to such operas as "Solome" and "Woyzeck" where the CC's agility would have formerly sufficed. After experiencing defeat by the section in numerous "intonation wars" (the trombone section in Nürnberg was at that time noted for its cautious gauging of intonation, I resorted to slinging some rude remarks over beer in the opera "KANTINE" as to the

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surname for Meinl-Watson) Unfortunately, my predecessor in Nuremberg, Klaus-Jochem Sordel happened to be drinking beer at the next table and he promptly challenged me to show him how badly his hand-picked choice played. He had chosen the tuba at the factory 2 years previously, and his "perfect pitch" had been the criteria for his choice of that particular model tuba and the theater's requisition of the instrument.

We both proceeded to stomp down to the "catacombs" of the 19th century operahouse where my tuba lockers were to begin a somewhat turbulent friendship that has tempered my ideas about tubas to this time.

Upon picking up the instrument, Jochem played a few scales and accused me of "Sabotaging" an instrument which had previously played in tune. When I asked him what he meant he proceeded to tell me how in Germany, and elsewhere I've since found, players believe that they all leave their individual "mark" on any instrument they play for any period of time. This remark sent me on a journey to Munich on my next free day to visit my European mentor, Bob Tucci, and have someone explain in my native tongue what was meant by Herr Sordel's term "einblasen"

Bob explained to me what the implications of Hare Sordet's remarks were - that we as brass players have the ability to influence not only the intonation, but tonal characteristics of our particular instrument over a period of time by how we individually go about blowing them when we play each day.

Through many rigorous therapeutic sessions Bob taught me how to "Blow free" and continue to steer me on the path that Arnold Jacobs had put me on when I had begun my studies with him in Chicago. I have since on my own developed a system of "einblasen" that uses techniques of alternate fingerings and extreme dynamics to change the "Bad notes" on any tuba I happen to own for any period of time.
