

## **CREATIVE IMPULSE**

by Jon Sass

Some years ago at ITEC in Minneapolis, I had my debut to present my music and ideas. I made a statement that some of my peers seemed relieved to hear..."check out tubists that you like and do not do as they do. Then check out tubists you don't like and do not do as they do either." Those who understood this knew that this meant tuba players should follow their OWN paths. In other words, do your own thing or that which turns you on. Don't misunderstand, this idea doesn't mean that you should abandon your initial goals, whether it be orchestral tubist, soloist, etc. The key here is about expanding our own opportunities, adding diversity to our own musical universe, and aiding in the evolution of the tuba. We have time to provide the growth and direction needed for our own artistic paths, as we see fit, for we are the architects of our own lives.

For those of you who aren't sure where to start, usually the best advice is to look inside yourself and to try to feel out what excites you in regards to expression with the tuba. Have you ever dreamed of using the tuba in an area where it is never heard nor commonly used? The result for some may mean doing that which is familiar such as classical soloist, orchestral tubist, teaching, and for others something entirely different. It may be that it takes time, it's ok! When you recognize your way to becoming unique then the time taken to make this space in your life to explore and develop your uniqueness is time well spent.

As is the case for many of you, at the time of my studies I saw my future career opportunities being either an orchestral or chamber music tubist, jazz artist, teacher, or soloist. Fortunately at the time of graduating from university, I was faced with a big career decision. I would either have stayed in Boston as a freelance musician and audition for 2<sup>nd</sup> tuba in the Boston Symphony, or move to Vienna to work with the Vienna Art Orchestra, Europe's premiere big band. Due to a recommendation from Jazz Tubist Howard Johnson, I had actually began working with the VAO two weeks after graduating High School in New York City. My choice was then clear and I moved to Europe after university. The biggest reason being that I wanted to allow my talent to develop with more creative opportunities. It was also based on an inner feeling or that well known "gut feeling." I felt there was something important I needed to say or express with the tuba, while keeping in mind that I must allow time to be my teacher. Time brought me Sam Pilafian, and I am very thankful for the many years together with him as my teacher. He was always supportive of my efforts and he gave me the impulse to think in terms of networking with my opportunities. Within 3 years after making the move a whole world of opportunities opened up for me. Before I knew it I was teaching privately, working in the studio, and participating in 4 groups each of a different musical genre. This all happened in the 80's but even today all of my musical situations are still very diverse. I have found that diversity acts to forestall stagnation so one never gets bored. The advantages are amazing. Some of which being: improving personal skills, developing improved life skills, extending musical flexibility, and unending self discovery.

As time went by and my creative voice was developing, I saw that it was being greatly appreciated. I often recalled an important moment from my youth while living in New York City. I often visited Jazz Tubist Bob Stewart, who lived one city block away. One time he said, "Jon, all those sound ideas and articulations you have, use

them more in your groups!" Those articulations and sound ideas he made reference to were inspired from my "creative fun" with my tuba. Eventually I introduced "my thing" to my colleagues and the rest was history!

I feel that tubists today need to incorporate more concern into developing their own artistic path. By developing this path, it would be much easier for the musician and his or her peers to recognize a "true creative gift". This gift can not be learned. It must lie within. Only with time, the search for "your truth" in your creative efforts and sincere development, can one discover the presence of an original creative voice! When this occurs, heads often turn to hear this rare human phenomenon. On the other hand, while there are many tubists on our planet today, not every voice will project with authority, let alone originality, and be heard.

Still it is otherwise healthy and important to maintain this path.

Technical standards have risen greatly in the last 25 years. There are more intense instructions and insights into the performance traditions of other instrumentalists which aid in the development of tuba playing. Teachers such as Sam Pilafian, Jerry Young, Winston Morris, Harvey Phillips and others are providing great educational opportunities in both the Jazz/Creative and Classical genre. Then why are there too few options and jobs for the contemporary tubist? It is of my opinion based on 25 years of playing in many different territories, that more creative efforts must be channeled to students, not only in group situations but on a more individual basis, if it is not already being done. If a student shows talent and promise with their required curriculum and chooses to integrate creative concerns to their education, it would be worth while to encourage the student to develop their imaginative skills. This does not happen over night, time must be given. Here are a few ideas:

- Have students experience more improvisation. Improvisation can also be effective in various musical situations and genre.
- Encourage students to compose for themselves. They can take a course in composition to aid in this effort or take a learn-by-doing approach.
- Allow and encourage more experimentation with new concepts in performance, concert programming and stage concepts.
- Arranging original compositions for new ensemble instrumentations.
- Give the students the opportunity to learn basic information and the use of equipment in recording facilities when available. Have them record their own material individually or with an ensemble. Simulate live situations in regards to microphone use, monitoring, sound possibilities and equalization.

The point here is to help students "create" experiences early on so that they are better prepared to react outside of academia. Schools which have already been active with these ideas can truly provide a good basis for their students. On the other hand, teachers may find they lack the resources or experience to provide some of these opportunities. The impulse to manage a creative project comes best from experience. These suggestions can be approached by professional musicians, teachers or students as individual explorations. Workshops or projects can be planned for summer periods or in the space of a semester period. Here are some ideas which may help students better understand the industry:

- Take importance in showing students how and where to market their ideas, music, etc. in today's world.
- Provide an understanding of Musicianship while being aware and adapting to our ever changing environments.
- Encourage career planning for those who need and want it.

- Awareness of other paths may help provide the right kick and give inspiration. I have crossed paths with many different types of tubists around the world and it has helped me a great deal.

Tubists have an advantage because our instrument is relatively young and to my knowledge, hasn't reached the ears of the masses until now. We have a chance to correct any unnecessary stereotypes and/or unhealthy stigmatism. This clearing will provide space to explore and expand our creative efforts. There are many who are already making efforts in this direction at this very moment. Who knows? Perhaps one day, somewhere in this world, a well known producer in a more popular genre may be more open to the tuba itself and be attracted and drawn to the sounds and uniqueness of an individual tuba player. This not only helps the individual but opens doors for the tuba world. If your goal is to get on MTV with a new sounding group, for example, that's great. But be focused. Don't try to prove a point with the tuba, but go with an attitude of complete sincerity so that what is seen and heard is truly what you want to say and give!

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