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The French Tuba

Michael Forbes Tuba
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Illinois State University
School of Music

Faculty Recital
Michael Forbes, *Tuba*

“The French Tuba”

with

Deborah Forney, *Piano*

&

Dr. Steve Parsons

Greg Delich & Jason Binde, *Trombones*

Kemp Recital Hall
Tuesday Evening
September 30, 2003
8:00 p. m.

This is the fourteenth program of the 2003-2004 seasons.

Program

Introduction and Dance

Joseph Eduard Barat
(1882-1963)

Sonatine

Défilé
Sérénade
Final

Jacques Castérede
(born 1926)

Histories de Tuba – IV. Concert Opéra

“V” comme Verdi
“O” comme Offenbach

Pierre Max Dubois
(1930-1995)

/Intermission

Concertino

Allegro vivo
Andante ma non troppo
Allegro vivo

Eugène Bozza
(1905-1991)

Être ou ne pas être (“To Be or Not To Be”)

Hamlet

Dr. Steve Parsons, Greg Delich, and Jason Binde, trombones

Henri Tomasi
(1901-1971)

Fantaisie & Variations on *The Carnival of Venice*

Jean-Baptiste Arban
(1825-1889)

Program Notes by the Performer:

Greetings and welcome to this final installment of my dissertation recital sequence entitled, “The European Tuba.” Many of you may remember that I investigated some of the offerings in the tuba repertoire from Scandinavia and Great Britain last year, but tonight we arrive at one of the less performed tuba repertoires, that of France. The most important element in the creation of this rich and varied repertoire was the existence of the French Tuba. Pitched in C, a step above the B-flat euphonium, the French Tuba possesses a larger bore size that enables it to produce a sound more analogous to the tuba, but with a range more synonymous to the euphonium. It uses a tuba-sized mouthpiece and has six valves (for extreme low range), but it can also utilize its lightness and agility in the upper register to rival the technical facility of the euphonium. It is indeed the instrument that Berlioz had in mind when deleting “Ophicleide” from his scores and it is also the instrument that Stravinsky intended for his Petrouchka “Bear” solo. Ravel also intended the use of this French tuba for his lyrical “bydlo” solo in his orchestration of Moussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition”.

This instrument is what the tuba students of the Paris Conservatory studied throughout most of the 20th century, and it was for those students and that tradition that most of the works presented tonight were composed. It is also due to the extreme upper register of the French Tuba (and thus its repertoire) that a great deal of tonight’s works are regularly overlooked by performing tubists. Likewise, the agility required in the lower register of these works makes for some tough going for even the most gifted euphoniumists. It is this dichotomy that causes a great deal of the French solo literature to be overlooked. It is my hope in this recital to shed new light on this challenging repertoire and to not let it go unperformed.

Hence, I will be utilizing my unique euphonium/French Tuba set-up for two of the works that will be presented tonight. I had the Schilke mouthpiece company create a small tuba-sized mouthpiece for me that fits into the large euphonium shank mouthpiece-receiver. The resultant sound and range of this unique set-up is similar to that produced on an original French Tuba. I will also be performing other works originally intended for the French tuba on the bass tuba which is today’s standard instrument of choice around the globe by solo tuba recitalists.

Joseph Eduard Barat’s early work for French Tuba, *Introduction and Dance* is probably one of the most widely performed works from the repertoire on tonight’s program. Light in its compositional texture, the work lends itself especially well as a concert opener. Due to its rather restrictive range (excepting the cadenza), the work is suitable for both the amateur euphoniumist as well as an advanced tubist.

Jacques Castérede’s *Sonatine* is somewhat more accessible to bass tubists playing the French Tubists’ repertoire, and the work seems to have received some notoriety especially among American tuba recording artists Velvet Brown and Toby Hanks. Though the work does reach into the higher tessitura of the French Tuba, a bass tubist with significant skills may find this work (the second movement in particular) to be quite attractive.

The first half of the program will draw to a close with a lighter work by Pierre Max Dubois entitled, *Histories de Tuba*. Primarily a composer of chamber music (especially for woodwinds), Dubois composed this solo tuba work in a series of “concert etudes” for French Tubist, Fernand Lelong. This is the final work in a series of four solos that gradually increase in difficulty. Each of the various solos in the series invokes musical genres associated with the stage and screen; consequently, this work asks the soloist to emerge themselves in the world of opera—especially those of Giuseppe Verdi and Jacques Offenbach.

The second half of the program begins with Eugène Bozza’s *Concertino*. Especially known for his brass quintets—one of which is a staple in the repertoire—Bozza’s *Concertino for Tuba* is much less often performed. Perhaps due to its extreme range and technical facility, the work has yet to find its way into the standard tuba recital repertoire nor onto any commercial recordings. The work seems especially “French” with its light, nimble, and especially disjunct melodic lines; moreover, the work also seems to echo various elements of famous French music. After a particularly challenging first movement that is more idiomatic to bassoon writing, the second movement is a beautiful fantasy on what seems to be a remembrance of the bassoon solo at the beginning of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*—a work completed during Stravinsky’s years in Paris. Concluding the work is a rhythmic third movement, which pokes fun at Dukas’ *Sorcerer’s Apprentice* in the cadenza.

The French Tuba may have fallen from favor perhaps due to the increase in bore size of the American symphony trombone section. Many tubists opt to play the orchestral solo passages mentioned above in the first paragraph on the bass tuba and in some instances, even the contrabass tuba (pitched in CC or BB-flat). Hence, the contrabass tuba will be used for the Henri Tomasi piece, *To Be or Not To Be* in order to best blend with the trombones in this quasi-orchestral musical setting of the famous monologue by William Shakespeare.

The final work in tonight’s performance is the only work *not* actually written for tuba, per sé. Jean-Baptiste Arban was the author of probably one of the most famous brass method books of all time. Surprisingly, this book (and the famous *Variations on the Carnival of Venice*), were written a few years after the tuba was invented! J.B. Arban was a cornetist, and the book was originally written for members of the high brass family. It has since been rearranged and indoctrinated into the libraries of all of the brass families thus making it the official “Brass Bible.” This work was programmed this evening in order to show the transversal nature of this music across the brass families and to reflect on how the tuba has slowly been indoctrinated into the solo arena.

In retrospect, the works presented in this concert differ from the others presented in this “European Tuba” recital series much due to the French Tuba’s lightness in sound. Also, one could argue that the French brass sound in general has a more agile, nimble prominence (especially in the orchestral passages of Berlioz, Bizet, or Dukas). On the contrary, however, we find that Tomasi’s work is more analogous to the larger brass sound found in passages of orchestra works by Franck or Saint-Saens. One could argue still that those brass voicing in particular are still lighter in texture in comparison to the especially heavy German tradition (Bruckner, Wagner, etc.). Nonetheless, this stylistic tendency will certainly be explored in this recital, as will the demonstrations of the different solo tuba timbres.

Biographies

Michael Forbes is the Assistant Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at Illinois State University where he also performs with the ISU Faculty Brass Quintet. He began his career as a tubist with the U.S. Army Band, "Pershing's Own" in Washington, D.C., where he was an active soloist and chamber musician as well as the founder and conductor of the U.S. Army Brass Tentet. Dr. Forbes has also appeared with the Aspen, Chautauqua, and Hot Spring Music Festival Orchestras as well as with a host of regional orchestras. He has also served on the faculties of Mary Washington College, Columbia Union College, Frederick Community College, and the Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp. He is also the columnist of the "Chamber Music Corner" in the *International Tuba Euphonium Association's "Journal."*

Also a regularly commissioned composer and arranger, Dr. Forbes's works have been selected for numerous international competitions and recordings. Editions BIM publishes his compositions while his many arrangements for low brass can be found in the catalogs of *Music Express* and the *Tuba and Euphonium-Press*.

As a soloist and part of the internationally recognized *Sotto Voce Tuba Quartet*, Dr. Forbes is regularly invited to give performances and clinics at universities and conferences throughout the U.S. and Canada. *Sotto Voce* has released its premier recording, "Consequences" on the *Summit Records* label (DCD 322) and anticipates its second disc, "Viva Voce: The Complete Quartets of John Stevens" to be released later this summer. The quartet recently completed a tour of the United Kingdom, and Dr. Forbes will be giving solo performances in Budapest, Hungary and Taipei, Taiwan in 2004.

Dr. Forbes recently received his Doctor of Musical Arts Degree at the University of Maryland. He holds a Master of Music degree from the University of Wisconsin and a Bachelor of Music degree from the Pennsylvania State University. Through an exchange program, he also spent a year in Manchester, England where he studied at the University of Manchester and the Royal Northern College of Music.

Deborah Forney is a doctoral candidate in piano performance at the University of Maryland School of Music. She also has been a frequent collaborative performer at The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and on the U.S. Army Band's recital series. Recent solo engagements include the McGraw Series at Illinois College, performances in Paris during the French Piano Institute, an appearance with the Battle Creek Symphony Orchestra, a recital broadcast on the WBFO Classical Hour in Buffalo, New York, and numerous recitals throughout the country. Ms. Forney holds degrees in piano performance from the Eastman School of Music and Michigan State University. In addition to concluding her Doctoral studies with Bradford Gowen at the University of Maryland, she also teaches, supervises, and coordinates the class piano curriculum.

Tonight's trombonists, **Dr. Steve Parsons**, **Greg Delich** and **Jason Binde** were very kind to assist me with tonight's performance. Dr. Parsons is the Professor of Trombone at Illinois State University, and Jason Binde is his current graduate student. Greg Delich completed his master's degree in trombone performance at ISU earlier this year.

Upcoming ISU Brass & Oktubafest Activities

October

09	8:00 p.m.	CPA	Trombone Choir
15	8:00 p.m.	CPA	Tubalaté Tuba/Euphonium Quartet
16	8:00 p.m.	CPA	Tubalaté Masterclass
21	8:00 p.m.	CPA	Faculty Brass
22	8:00 p.m.	KRH	Pre-Halloween Brass Bash
26	7:00 p.m.	KRH	Oktubafest: Tuba/Euphonium Studio Recital
27	8:00 p.m.	CPA	Oktubafest: Tuba/Euphonium Ensemble Concert