

Tubby's Great Complaint

Barton Cummings

Supplements:

SideNote: Introducing *Tubby the Tuba*
by Herb Wekselblatt

A Review by Barton Cummings of the new publication *Tubby the Tuba* by Paul Tripp and illustrated by Henry Cole. (Dutton Children's Books Published by the Penguin Group (USA) Inc.).



Tubby the Tuba as illustrated by Jack Graham

Mr. Wekselblatt writes that early in 1945 at a rehearsal of The Dean Dixon Youth Orchestra, George Kleinsinger, the composer and Paul Tripp, the wordsmith of *Tubby the Tuba* were in attendance. At that time, Dean Dixon went through the manuscript of *Tubby* with the orchestra from beginning to end including the words.

However, according to the reminiscences, that have been edited for clarity by the author, of *Tubby* provided by Paul Tripp's son, David, it is impossible that Paul Tripp narrated at that time because he was still stationed in China and did not return home until December 24, 1945. And after arriving home at his small apartment in Tudor City, it was on that Christmas Eve that he heard *Tubby the Tuba* performed for the first time. It should be noted that Paul Tripp did indeed narrate with Dean Dixon, but this was well into 1946. **1**

For decades, tuba players, conductors, and musicians in general have quietly snickered when *Tubby the Tuba* is mentioned and absolutely cringe when it is actually programmed. Why is this? And is this abhorrence to the piece justified?

To answer these two questions, it is important to know more about the piece. And after some 60 plus years, there are many urban legends about when, where, and how *Tubby* came to be written.

WHERE AND WHY TUBBY WAS WRITTEN

According to an interview with George Kleinsinger that appeared in the Los Angeles Times on October 26, 1980, George Kleinsinger and Paul Tripp were attending a rehearsal of the NBC Symphony Orchestra to hear the preparation of a *Scherzo for Orchestra* by Kleinsinger. The year was 1941.

Prior to rehearsing the Kleinsinger piece, the orchestra under the direction of Milton Katims, was working with soprano Eileen Farrell. They were rehearsing some arias by Mozart and the tuba player Herbert Jenkel was joining in on the bass part. Feeling that the tuba sound was too heavy and loud for this music, Katims continually asked that Jenkel play softer and softer and finally not to play at all.

After finishing the aria rehearsal, they tackled the Kleinsinger work and Jenkel got to do a lot of playing. After the rehearsal, Jenkel spotted Kleinsinger and walked over and asked him if he had ever thought of writing a concerto for tuba and orchestra.



Victor Jory, narrator for the first recording of Tubby the Tuba

Turning to Paul Tripp, Kleinsinger said, “We have a story here. We have a guy who wasn't allowed to play his oompahs and now he wants a concerto.” **2**

In his reminiscences of *Tubby*, David Tripp recounts the events differently.

The first collaborative effort between Paul Tripp and George Kleinsinger was the story of *Jack and Homer the Horse* . This piece was first performed and broadcast on the WOR Musical Network on December 19, 1941 and was conducted by Robert Russell Bennett and narrated by Ray Middleton.

As Paul Tripp recalled the event to his son, it was after the broadcast performance of *Jack and Homer the Horse* that the tuba player, Herbert Jenkel, with his tuba still clutched in his hands, came up to Tripp and Kleinsinger and said “Beautiful! Such a lovely story Mr. Tripp, beautiful music Mr. Kleinsinger. Some day you must write something special for me. You know, tubas can sing too. Why don't you write me a solo please!”³

David Tripp also relates that a few years ago, his father said that the tuba player, whose name he did not recall, posed his question to he and Kleinsinger during rehearsals and that his father then began to ask Kleinsinger about the properties of each instrument.



Herbert Jenkel, the inspiration for Tubby the Tuba and the first tubist to record Tubby

So it may be that the “inspirational” question may have been asked a couple of days before his father began his actual writing of *Tubby* .

After the broadcast of the premier, past midnight, Paul Tripp, exhausted from all of the preparation and the broadcast, fell asleep but later suddenly awoke to a sound in his head. That sound was “OOM-PAH!!!” and scrambling out of bed, grabbed a pen and some paper and scribbled, “How a tuba found a melody to play.” He jotted down his ideas and conjured up the shapes of instruments with their own personalities. He had haughty violins, a mischievous xylophone, a courteous cello, a smiling piano and a piccolo that whistled like a kid.

He began his tale with the words “Once upon a time there was an orchestra....” And those words never changed. A few days later the first working draft of *Tubby* rolled out of his typewriter, and its final words were “How happy I am!” This was December 29, 1941.

Why did he name the main character “Tubby?” In the words of Paul Tripp, “The tuba isn't a fat instrument, but the tuba had a chubby sound so I called him “Tubby”. 4



Leon Barzin, conductor of the first recording of Tubby the Tuba

In mid 1942 Paul Tripp was drafted into the Army and assigned to Special Services, and *Tubby* was momentarily put aside. At some point, Tripp ended up stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey where he managed to get a ten-day furlough by convincing his Colonel that he had a chance to make \$10,000 by collaborating with George Kleinsinger on *Tubby*.

For ten days the two worked non-stop with Kleinsinger at the piano and Tripp writing, editing, and suggesting. The original six and a half-page draft manuscript written during those two weeks was cut down to three and half pages of text.

At the end of the furlough, Tripp went back to the Army, and the draft of *Tubby* went back on the shelf.

In 1944, finding himself in the Signal Corps, Paul Tripp was shipped out to India and eventually ended up in China. During this time, his wife Ruth Tripp and George Kleinsinger attempted to create interest in a performance and recording of *Tubby* but with the war on, it was quite impossible.

In his reminiscence David Tripp states that *Tubby* was recorded in late 1945 by a record company run by what his father described as “a cast of Damon Runyonesque

characters complete with white ties, black shirts, and violin cases that did not contain fiddles.” 5



*Paul Tripp, author *Tubby the Tuba**

Kleinsinger in the L.A. Times interview states that he insisted that Herbert Jenkel, the man who inspired *Tubby*, record the work, and the piece was recorded with Leon Barzin conducting. Herbert Jenkel was the soloist and well-known actor Victor Jory narrated.

The recording was released in 1946, and, at the time, David Tripp says that it was hoped the record would sell perhaps 6000 copies. Surprisingly, it was a phenomenal success and became an instant hit. By the end of 1946 there were between 300 and 500 thousand copies in print!

Sadly enough, a few weeks after the record was released, George Kleinsinger received a phone call from Herbert Jenkel who was very unhappy. As was often the case with recordings of *Tubby*, the name of the tuba soloist was nowhere to be found either on the cover or the record label.

To make up for this, Kleinsinger and Tripp agreed to write a sequel and as Kleinsinger recalls in his interview, “...I told RCA Victor that the only way I'll give them this piece of music is if they put the tuba player's name on the album cover in large letters.” 6 The sequel was written and was named *The Further Adventures of Tubby the Tuba*.

WHO WERE GEORGE KLEINSINGER AND PAUL TRIPP?

George Kleinsinger was born in San Bernardino, California on February 13, 1914 and moved to New York City at the age of five. He made his home in New York City from that time until his death.

Initially trained as a dentist, he later turned to music and earned a B.A. at New York University. His teachers included Marion Bauer, Charles Haubiel, and Philip James. Upon completion of his studies at NYU he entered Julliard where he studied with Frederick Jacobi and Bernard Wagenaar. During his time at Julliard he composed an opera, *Life in a Day of a Secretary* that won the National Theater Prize in 1939. In 1940 he wrote a choral cantata on texts of Walt Whitman called *I Hear America Singing* that was met with great critical acclaim and established Kleinsinger as a serious and gifted composer.

He composed numerous serious compositions, including violin and cello concertos, symphonic works, and chamber music. He wrote the musical *Shinbone Alley*, which was based on *archy and mehitabel* along with lyricist Joe Darion who is most famous for penning *The Impossible Dream* as well as the rest of *Man of La Mancha*. *Shinbone Alley* was later produced on Broadway, TV and film and was co-authored by Mel Brooks. Even though he wrote much music and contributed to television, radio, films and stage, he is primarily remembered for writing the music of one piece: *Tubby the Tuba*.



George Kleinsinger died in New York City on July 28, 1982 at the age of 68.

Paul Tripp , born in New York City on February 20, 1911, entered the City College of the City University of New York at age of 14 before dropping out to pursue law studies at Brooklyn Law School, studies that he also later ended prematurely. Eventually, Tripp made his Broadway debut at the age 25 in Walter Hampden's production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* .

At the suggestion of his agent, Tripp auditioned in the apartment of George Kleinsinger for a part in *Victory Against Heaven* with music by Kleinsinger. Kleinsinger liked Paul Tripp's voice and he got the part. The opera was premiered in Hartford, Connecticut on January 17 th , 1941 as part of a twin bill that had a suite of dances choreographed and performed by Agnes de Mille. Unfortunately it was a flop and Kleinsinger renamed it *Victory Against Kleinsinger* .

Despite the failure of the opera, George Kleinsinger and Paul Tripp became life-long friends and collaborated on several projects.

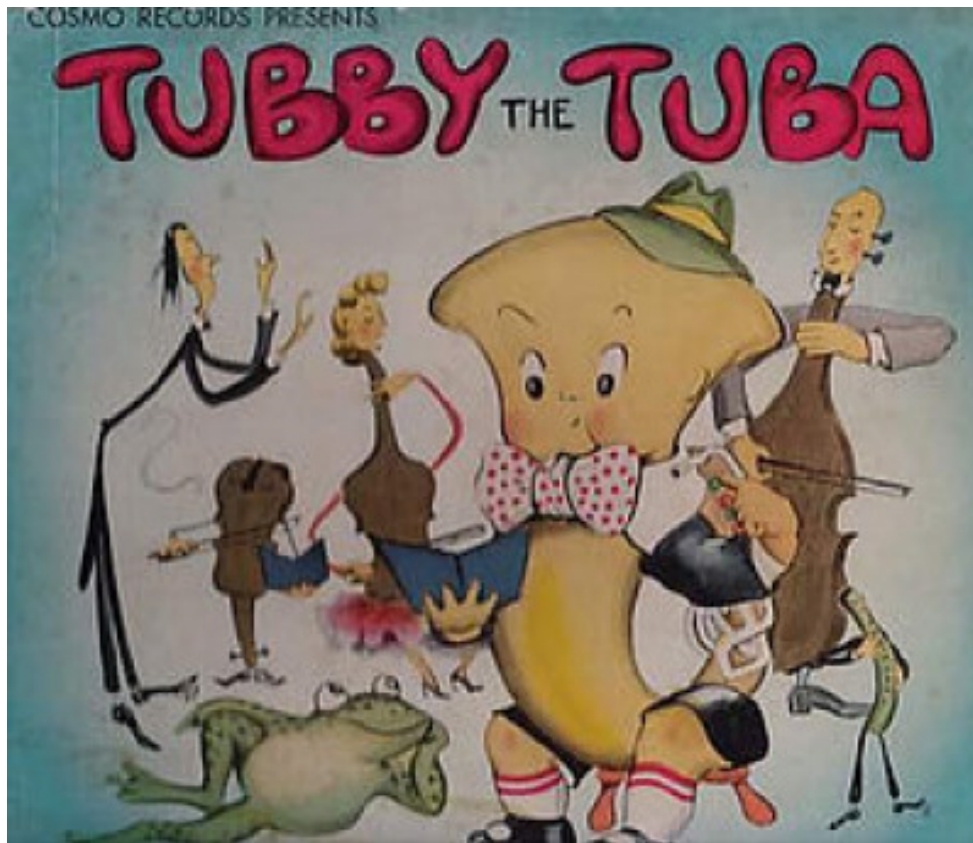
He was drafted into World War II in mid 1942. He continued to perform while serving in the Army, and, upon his return stateside, he rejoined Kleinsinger and continued to develop *Tubby* . In addition to writing four children's books and recording and publishing around 600 songs on 30 albums, he found his love for music and education expanding to numerous other avenues. He is fondly remembered for creating and starring in three award-winning television shows for children. *Mr. I. Magination* , which aired from 1949 to 1952, is considered a pioneering classic of the Golden Age of Television. The other two programs were *On the Carouse* and *Birthday House* . The film adaptation of his book *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't* would go on to become a holiday tradition. In 2001 Paul Tripp was inducted into the Television Academy of Arts and Sciences prestigious Silver Circle for his contributions to the medium. He received Emmy and Ohio State awards for his efforts in television programming for children. He died in New York City on August 29, 2002 at the age of 91.

THE STORY AND WORDS

Tubby the Tuba has been called a melodrama for tuba solo, narrator, and orchestra because it tells the story of an unhappy tuba who is seeking an escape from the mindless and mind-numbing “*oompah*” parts and the chance to play beautiful melodies.

Paul Tripp manages to tell his tale using language that is simple and at the same time eloquent. Children have no trouble understanding and following the story and adults are not talked down to, as is so often the case with children's stories.

As the rehearsal begins, a melody is begun and each section of the orchestra gets a chance to play it. When it comes time for Tubby to play the little melody, he does so in a rather clumsy and awkward way and ends up sitting on the poor little melody flattening it. He tries to squeeze it back into shape but to no avail.



Chastised by the conductor and sternly scolded by the violins, Tubby admits that all he wanted to do is dance with the little tune and play a beautiful melody instead of going *oompah, oompah* all the time.

The entire orchestra ends up laughing earning a stern rebuke from the conductor.

Feeling bad, Tubby leaves the rehearsal and says good night to his friend Peepo the Piccolo. Sitting by himself on a log down by the river, he sees his reflection in the water and sings to himself a mournful little song.

All of a sudden a big bullfrog leaps out of the water but is ignored by Tubby. Feeling unwanted the frog jumps back into the water. Tubby immediately begs the frog to come back. After explaining his problem the frog commiserates with Tubby and tells him that no one listens to him either as he sings his heart out every night.

Upon hearing the frog sing, Tubby asks if he might try the tune. Given permission by the frog, Tubby proceeds to play and discovers that the melody suits him perfectly. Told by the frog to try it out on his orchestra, Tubby assures him he will and they say goodnight to one another.

The next day a very famous and important conductor arrives, and, as the rehearsal begins, Tubby starts to play his tune. Of course the reaction of the orchestra is negative, but the conductor asks Tubby to continue. When the rest of the orchestra hears how beautiful his tune is they request the chance to play. And much to their delight Tubby agrees. So, Tubby no longer just plays "*oompah, oompah*," and he finds acceptance by his peers. As the music ends, Tubby notices the frog seated

beside him. Both are happy to know that others have discovered that we all have our good points and how happy it makes us to share them.

The simple story told in beautiful word combinations combined with the charm of the music has made it the single most popular and well-known work ever written for the tuba.

THE MUSIC

According to Mr. Wekselblatt, Tubby's solo was first written extremely high. Relating this fact to George Kleinsinger and upon being told that Mr. Wekselblatt could play to the high F above middle C, all the manuscript parts were gathered up and a week later Tubby's solo had been re-written to the way we know it today.

Tubby's first entrance is made playing slowly and sadly his semi-oompahs.



And then he tried to dance with the little tune.



Tubby's sadness is revealed in this melody as he leaves the rehearsal and says goodnight to Peepo.



After his meeting with the frog he makes his first attempt at playing the beautiful melody.



And finally his debut with the orchestra provides him with the opportunity to expand his melody and to show a little technique.

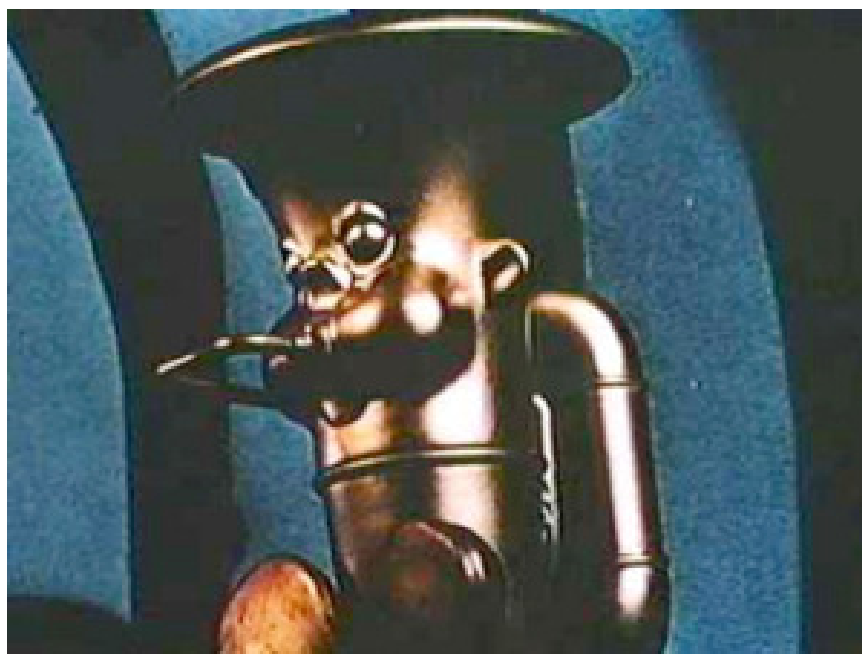


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In terms of technical demands, it is not extremely difficult and like the Hindemith *Sonate* and the Vaughan-Williams *Concerto* it is accessible by good high school and college players. By today's standards, these works would not be considered great technical vehicles, yet the musical demands are of the highest order. So it is with *Tubby*. The soloist must possess a range from the low E to the F above middle C and must have total command of the instrument in terms of dynamics, technique, and the ability to play long sustained lyrical lines. Perhaps one of the most telling passages is the twelve measures in example three. Too often tubists leave gapping holes when they take a breath and break this line in a most unmusical fashion. It takes some preparation to bring this section off musically. The same advice would apply to both of the passages featuring the “Tubby” theme.

SOME TUBBY FACTS

After its 1946 release, the recording of *Tubby The Tuba* created a whole new market for children's recordings, and the team of Paul Tripp and George Kleinsinger have been called the “Rogers and Hammerstein” of the field. 7



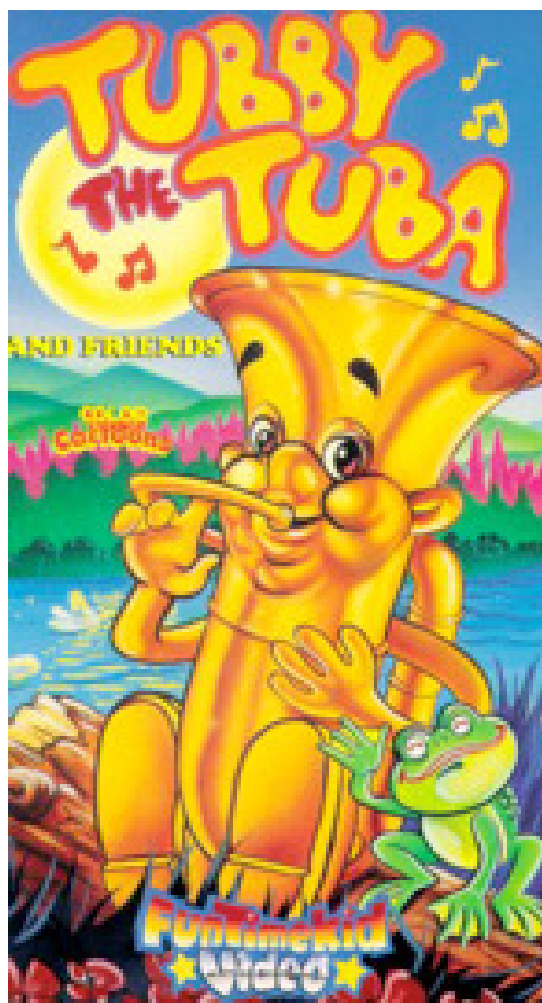
The great renowned producer of animated shorts George Pal, who is also revered for his pioneering special efforts for films, made a version of *Tubby* that was hailed critically and was nominated for the 1947 Academy Award for animation, and the adaptation by Puppetoon made *Tubby* a hit on television.

In 1958 Jose Ferrer's narration of *Tubby* was nominated for the Grammy Award.

The Manhattan Transfer and Tommy Johnson became the first to record all four of the *Tubby* adventures and the recording was nominated for the Grammy for Best Children's Record of 1994.

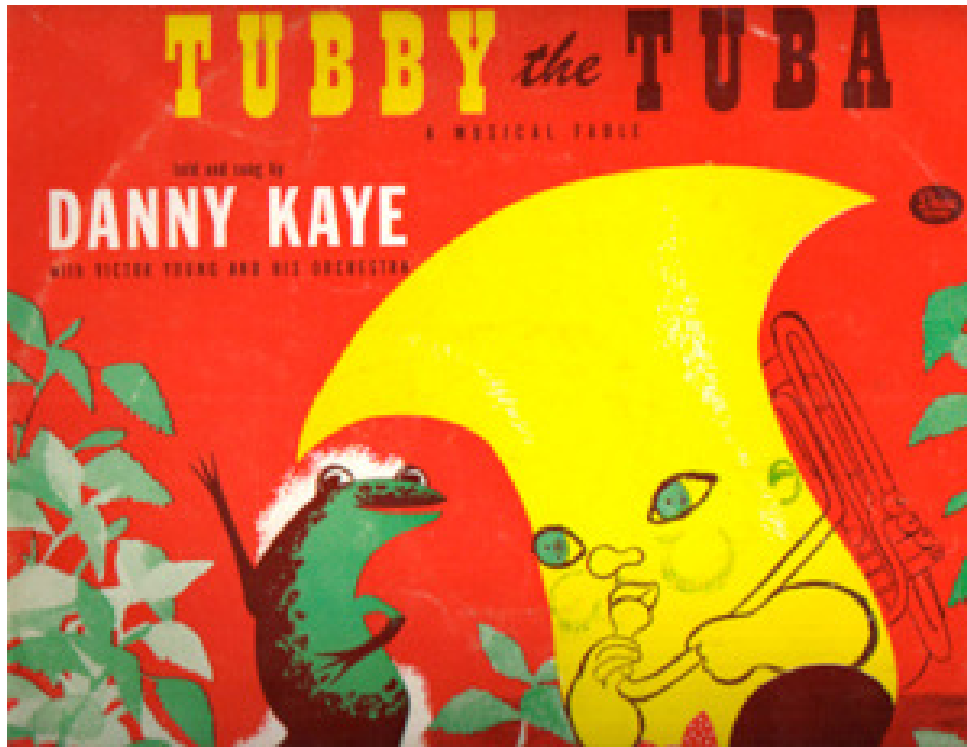
Other facts:

- *Tubby the Tuba* has sold approximately 13 million records over the last sixty years.
- *Tubby the Tuba* has entered the vernacular.
- *Tubby the Tuba* has become a clue in *The New York Times* crossword puzzles.
- *Tubby the Tuba* has been translated into more than 30 languages.
- *Tubby the Tuba* has been recorded on more than 20 record labels.
- *Tubby the Tuba* is a registered trademark of Rytvoc, Inc.
- *Tubby the Tuba* was named to the Library of Congress's Registry of Recordings that is composed of America's most culturally and historically significant recordings.



THE CONCLUSION

When all is said and done, *Tubby* must be considered the first major work for the tuba with orchestral accompaniment. True it does feature a *Narrator* but this is no different than say the play *Our Town* where one of the major characters is the *Stage Manager/Narrator*. The fact still remains that it is a major solo work for the instrument. But even more, it predicted events that have come true.



For in 2006, Tubby's Great Complaint has been addressed and answered. His desire to play beautiful melodies is a reality. Today's tubist can choose from a rich and varied repertoire of music written for the tuba by the greatest composers of the 20th Century and the first years of the 21st Century.

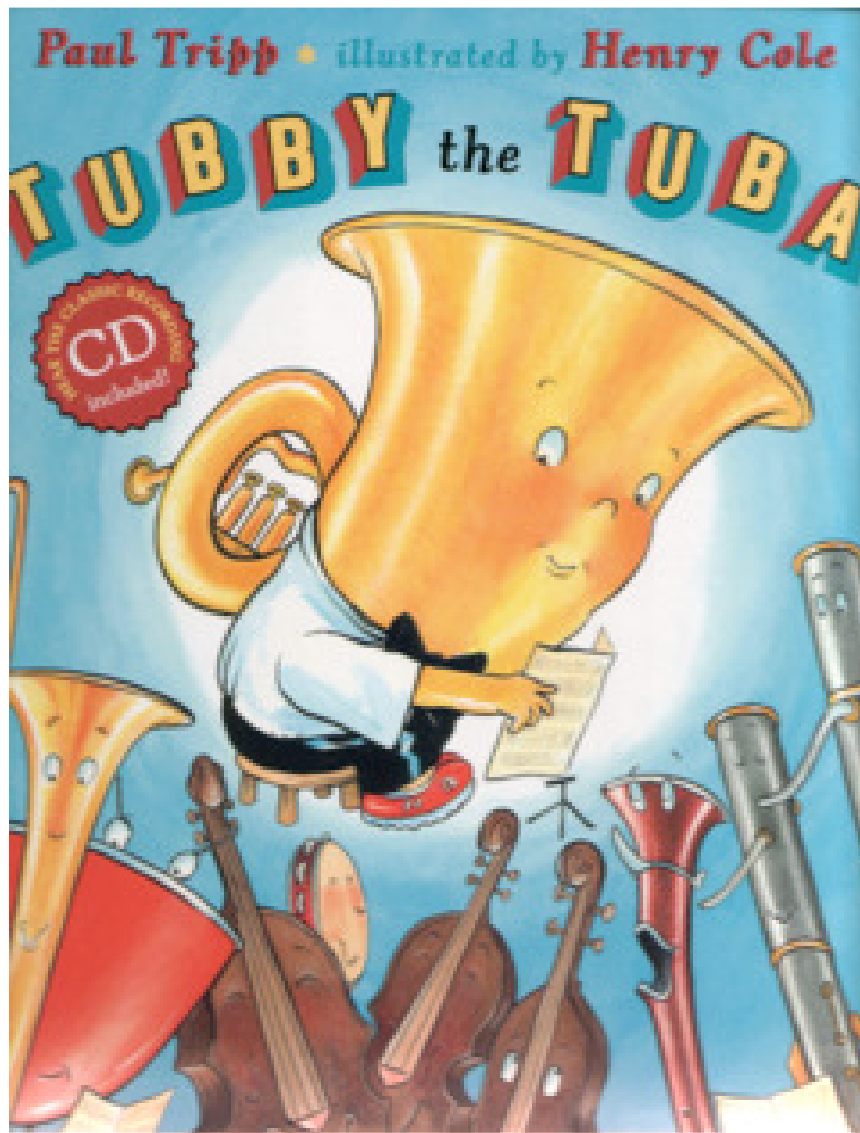
This completely delightful and whimsical story about a tuba named *Tubby*, who gained happiness through giving pleasure to others, is indeed a work that every tubist should take great pride in performing. Children delight in it and adults are taken with the beauty of the music and the story. No one could ask for more.

With Thanks

The author wishes to thank Carole Nowicke, Reference Librarian, Indiana University Prevention Resource Center for all of her research and for sending copies of articles about *Tubby*, most especially the interview with George Kleinsinger; Eli Newberger, renowned tubist, M.D. and author, who sent much information concerning *Tubby*; David Tripp and his sister Suzanne Tripp Jurmain for the insightful reminiscences of their experiences with their father and *Tubby*; Louise Eastman-Weed, of RYTVOC for her permission to quote freely the words and music of *Tubby*; Tommy Johnson, the world's most heard tubist for providing the solo part to *Tubby* and Steven

Meltzer, Executive Managing Editor, Dial Books for Young Readers and Dutton Children's Books for providing me an advance copy of the new *Tubby the Tuba* book and compact disk recording, reviewed in this issue of the journal as well as permission to reproduce the cover of the new book. And I do want to thank all of those who wrote to me with their *Tubby* stories. All were delightful and provided much interesting and entertaining reading.

Tubby the Tuba by Paul Tripp and illustrated by Henry Cole. Dutton Children's Books Published by the Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014. ISBN 0-525-47717-9. Price: \$16.99. 2006.



2006 marks the sixtieth anniversary year of the release of *Tubby the Tuba*. Since that time *Tubby* has been heard and enjoyed by countless millions of children and adults. He has sold approximately 13 million recordings, been translated into more than 30 languages and was named to the Library of Congress's Registry of Recordings.

This new release is a joy to behold. Everyone knows the story of *Tubby* and how, with the help of a friendly bullfrog, discovered that he too could play a beautiful melody and that he had his good points just like everyone else.

In the present edition the story is accompanied by some of the most well done illustrations to be found in a children's book. They are not at all the usual overblown garishly colored stereotypical characterizations of the instruments of the orchestra that have become so familiar over the years. The instruments have charm, personality, warm, vibrancy, a little humor and just a sprinkling of seriousness. There is nothing phony about them. They are real. Children and adults will find them as much a part of the story as the words.

What is unique about this book is that not only could it stand on its own as children's literature, but those who purchase this book will receive a bonus in the form of a recording of *Tubby the Tuba*. But not just any recording. No. This is a special recording because it is the last recorded performance of author Paul Tripp narrating. This is a special performance indeed and one that should be in the library of all those interested in the tuba.

Unfortunately recordings of *Tubby* have one glaring omission and that is the name of the tuba soloist is for whatever reason never is revealed. And it is a shame because this recording by the Radio Orchestra of Bratislava under the direction of Stephen Gunzenhauser is one of the best of the lot. And the tuba soloist is first rate in spite of one minor glitch toward the end of the second statement of the *Tubby* theme. The tone is full, rich, deep, dark and never forced and the player has good intonation and a good solid upper register.

All in all, this is one of those products that regardless of the age of the owner will be treasured for all time. Every tuba player should own this book.

Highly recommended!

Barton Cummings

**SideNote: Introducing
*Tubby the Tuba***

by Herb Wekselblatt

It was in early 1945, when I was 17 and a 1/2 years old, a trombone player told me that The Dean Dixon Youth Orchestra was looking for a tuba player. Up 'til that time I had been playing with almost every amateur orchestra in New York City. So, I got the time and the address where the next rehearsal would take place. Unannounced, I arrived at the next rehearsal while the conductor and the orchestra practiced some Mozart and/or Beethoven symphony. Sitting around is nothing new to tuba players but during the break I was led to believe that before the rehearsal would end we would be playing some Tchaikovsky. Well, Maestro Dixon got embroiled in finishing the Mozart/Beethoven symphony and never got to anything that had a tuba part. I was really angry and went to the stage and packed my tuba intending never to go to

that orchestra again. But, before I could really show how upset I was, Dean Dixon came up to me and apologized for letting me sit through the rehearsal without playing a note. I told him that “it was all right,” but I knew I would never see him again. As I was walking away, he told me that “a friend had written a solo piece for the tuba, and it would probably be ready in about two weeks.” He also told me that he would make it a point to make sure that there would be some really good tuba parts at the next rehearsal, if I told him I would be there. I couldn't say no to “some really good tuba parts,” so I planned on being there.



Let me digress for a moment. World War II was still our national concern and most of the eligible males over the age of eighteen were away doing their military service. All that left for orchestra playing were the very young, women, and older people. The really good conservatory musicians weren't around. So, if you were a tuba player of whatever skills and willing to go to rehearsals, you were treated as a very rare and special person. As an amateur musician I played with two orchestras in Brooklyn. In Manhattan there was The Young Men's Symphony Association conducted by Judge Leopold Prince. An orchestra that called itself the Czechoslovakian Symphony, conducted by Fred Dvorch...and other orchestras that I no longer can remember. I

also played with my high school band and orchestra. I played in the All City High School Band and Orchestra. It was great for me. There were very few tuba players available for the amateur orchestras, and I loved being courted by conductors.

Dean Dixon did have some juicy tuba parts at the next rehearsal, and I found myself becoming a member of his orchestra. Our relationship lasted for many years.

A few weeks later, at one of the rehearsals, were two new faces. They were George Kleinsinger and Paul Tripp, the composer and the narrator (word-smith) of *Tubby the Tuba*. Dixon went through the manuscript with the orchestra from beginning to end...words and all. Tubby's solo was written extremely high, at one point I told Mr. Kleinsinger that I couldn't play that high. If I remember correctly, the solo started as we know it but then jumped to high A and B in the treble clef. Mr. Kleinsinger asked me how high I could play, and I told him that the first space F in the treble clef was my limit. All the manuscript parts were gathered up, and Kleinsinger and Tripp said they would be back in about a week. A week later Tubby's solo had been re-written to the way we know it today, and we then started some serious rehearsing. After a few weeks we began to perform it at concerts. We must have performed it four or five times at scheduled youth concerts. It was a big hit with the audiences and was thought of as the equal of *Peter and the Wolf* for young audiences.

In May 1945 I was inducted into the U.S. Navy and left for upstate New York for boot training. About a month later my mother mailed a review from the newspaper announcing, "The recording of *Tubby the Tuba* was selling like hotcakes." This was the recording made by the tuba player Herbert Jenkel and conducted by Leon Barzin. The narrator was Paul Tripp...and as the say, "The rest is history!"

Footnotes:

1. Reminiscence of David Tripp, 2006
2. How Tubby Was Born, Los Angeles Times, October 26, 1980
3. Ibid.
4. Reminiscence of David Tripp. 2006
5. Ibid.
6. How Tubby Was Born, Los Angeles Times, October 26, 1980
7. Reminiscence of David Tripp