

Tubby the Tuba - Part 3

Paul Tripp and an introduction to *Tubby the Tuba*

Douglas Yeo



Figure 2. Paul Tripp as "Mr. I. Magination" (1952). Courtesy David Tripp and Suzanne Tripp Jurmain.

Paul Tripp enlisted into the U.S. Army in May 1942 where he served in the Signal Corps. While he and George Kleinsinger had agreed-in December 1941-to write a new piece for children that featured the tuba, they did not come together to actually complete the piece before Tripp entered the Army. However, later in 1942, Tripp received a 10-day furlough during which he and George Kleinsinger essentially completed *Tubby the Tuba*. As Tripp recalled,

I asked to see the colonel in charge and demanded my ten-day leave.

The colonel wasn't sympathetic to my request. "Haven't you heard, Tripp? There's a war going on."

"I know all about that," I protested. I had been promised my ten-day leave by the draft board.

"Look," said the exasperated colonel, "it's a question of money. If you sell stuff that you're going to work on, how much money will you miss making?"

"Ten thousand dollars!" I said. Not even thinking what I was saying. . . I had never even seen a hundred-dollar bill before. What was I saying?

"\$10,000?" blurted the Colonel. "Furlough granted!" [1]

Looking back, there's no doubt that the furlough was productive-Tripp's \$10,000 estimate was woefully inadequate-and more of that story will be told later. But, before being shipped to India, Burma, and China, Tripp's theatre experience brought him once again to Broadway. In June 1943, the Army's Second Service Command, U.S.A., sponsored a theatrical production, *The Army Play By Play*, that featured five one-act plays by the prize winners (out of 115 entries) of the Soldiers' One-Act

Playwriting Contest. Entr'acte music was provided by the 369th Army Air Force Band. This was a far cry from shooting rifles in the battlefield, but it was part of the patriotic, morale-boosting theme of the home-side war effort. The show opened as a one-night production on June 14, 1943 at the 46th Street Theatre, and the performance was attended by Eleanor Roosevelt, New York City Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia, and the Duke and Duchess of Windsor; over \$100,000 was raised that evening for the Soldier's and Sailors' Club.[2] At the end of the evening, LaGuardia suggested that more performances be given and the Army ran with his idea. An additional 40 performances were scheduled to benefit Army Emergency Relief in the Martin Beck Theatre where it ran from August 2 to September 4. A final performance was given at the White House on October 4, 1943 for President and First Lady Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.[3]

The first of the evening's entertainments was "Where E'er We Go," written by Private First-Class John B. O'Dea of Ft. Lewis, Washington. Corporal Paul Tripp was the play's director and had the role of Tex. [4] The production was highly and widely praised as "one of the most powerful liaison agents between camp and home that has yet been devised to acquaint the home front with the atmosphere, thinking and spirit of the barracks. . .*The Army Play by Play* is good for civilian morale." [5]

Paul Tripp's run on Broadway with his Army colleagues allowed him to stay home-side long enough to do something even more important. On August 8, 1943, Tripp married Ruth Enders. Born in in 1920 in Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, Enders' first acting engagement came at the age of 16, in *Lovers Are Fools* with the Studio Players at the John Drew Theatre, East Hampton, Long Island.[6] While working there with Betty Comden and Ernie Kovaks, she won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London but due to the outbreak of war, she was unable to attend. Instead, she toured the country in a successful one-woman show of her own devising. [7] She made her Broadway debut in George S. Kauffman and Moss Hart's play, *The American Way* (January-June 1938). Enders and Paul Tripp collaborated, as discussed below, in many television and film projects, and theirs was truly a relationship "till death do us part." When Ruth Enders Tripp died on July 28, 1999, they had been married only a week shy of fifty-six years.

Tubby the Tuba changed Paul Tripp's life, and his work as narrator in the piece-as well as a host of other Tubby related pieces and other collaborations with George Kleinsinger-has been mentioned earlier and will be discussed more in upcoming installments of this article. While Tripp had a long and distinguished career as an actor for television, film, and the stage, his commitment to providing educational entertainment for children-which began in 1941 with *Jack and Homer the Horse*-was something to which he remained devoted all his life.



Figure 3. Paul Tripp with his daughter, Suzanne, and wife, Ruth Enders, on the set of "Mr. I. Magination." Courtesy David Tripp and Suzanne Tripp Jurmain.

In our time when children's television is crowded with cartoons and fast paced fare, it is well to remember Paul Tripp's pioneering work in the genre. Conceived in 1949, *Mr. I. Magination* was Tripp's brainchild, and it ran on the CBS television network in several major markets including New York, Washington D. C., and Philadelphia. Readers may recall *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* that ran in various incarnations from the early 1960s until 2001 (and continues today with rerun shows). But it is fair to say that there would not have been a *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* without *Mr. I. Magination*. Fred Rogers is justifiably lauded for his television work for children, but Tripp's now mostly forgotten contribution was actually more important because he-not Rogers-was the true pioneer.

Broadcast weekly for 30 minutes from 1949-1952, the show used what today would be considered low-budget props. But the whole point of the show was to stimulate children's imaginations. The program opened with an early special effect-the viewer was brought onto the show's set while riding a train through a tunnel, a device Fred Rogers would later employ. Set in "Imagination Town," Tripp-always dressed in the striped overalls of a train engineer and referred to by those on the program as Mr. I.-introduced viewers to both historical characters and guests who spoke about and demonstrated their occupations. Tripp's wife, Ruth Enders, was a regular on the show, taking all of the adult female roles. With his "magic whistle" (really a slide whistle), Mr. I. would take guests back in time to visit Christopher Columbus, Annie Oakley, George Washington, Rip van Winkle, and a host of others. All of this was

done with a homey, disarming charm; it was never preachy, but Tripp's sense of humor always came through and children were treated with the utmost respect.

Mr. I. Magination made its debut on April 24, 1949 and met with immediate critical acclaim. The impact of the show was summed up by radio and television critic Sid Shalit's effusive commentary two weeks after its first episode:

For years radio has attempted unconvincingly to bring a convincing children's world into the family living room. But its infant prodigy, television, has finally approached the problem from an adult viewpoint in the new CBS-TV stanza, "Mr. I. Magination." Too many kiddie programs clog the air with patronizing talk on the assumption that children fall in the same category as lovers of soap operas. "Mr. I. Magination" is a refreshing departure. It is written and presented for the youthful set but does not treat them as overgrown infants. It treats them as young adults, and that is why a lot of "older" adults, too, are going to find themselves tuned in on CBS-TV Sundays at 6:30 P.M.

Paul Tripp, author of the children's classic record, Tubby the Tuba, stars as "Mr. I. Magination" and writes the book and lyrics to Ray Carter's bright music. A blend of fact and fantasy in terms of musical comedy and drama, the format features Tripp as engineer of a fairyland train who whisks viewers on fanciful excursions. . . They say imagination plays strange tricks. But the tricks played by "Mr. I. Magination" are more than merely strange. They're vastly amusing, entertaining and, most important, authentically informative. [8]



Figure 4. Ed Sullivan presenting Paul Tripp with the LOOK TV Award for Best Children's Program, "Mr. I. Magination" (January 1951).

Courtesy David Tripp and Suzanne Tripp Jurmain.

Before the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences was established in 1955, Emmy awards for excellence in the television industry were given by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences in Los Angeles, and only Los Angeles based shows were honored. The LOOK TV Award filled the need for national recognition, and in 1951, Paul Tripp and "Mr. I. Magination" were honored as the best children's program of 1950. The award was presented to Tripp by television host Ed Sullivan, who himself was honored as best MC (master of ceremonies) for his show, "Toast of the Town."^[9]

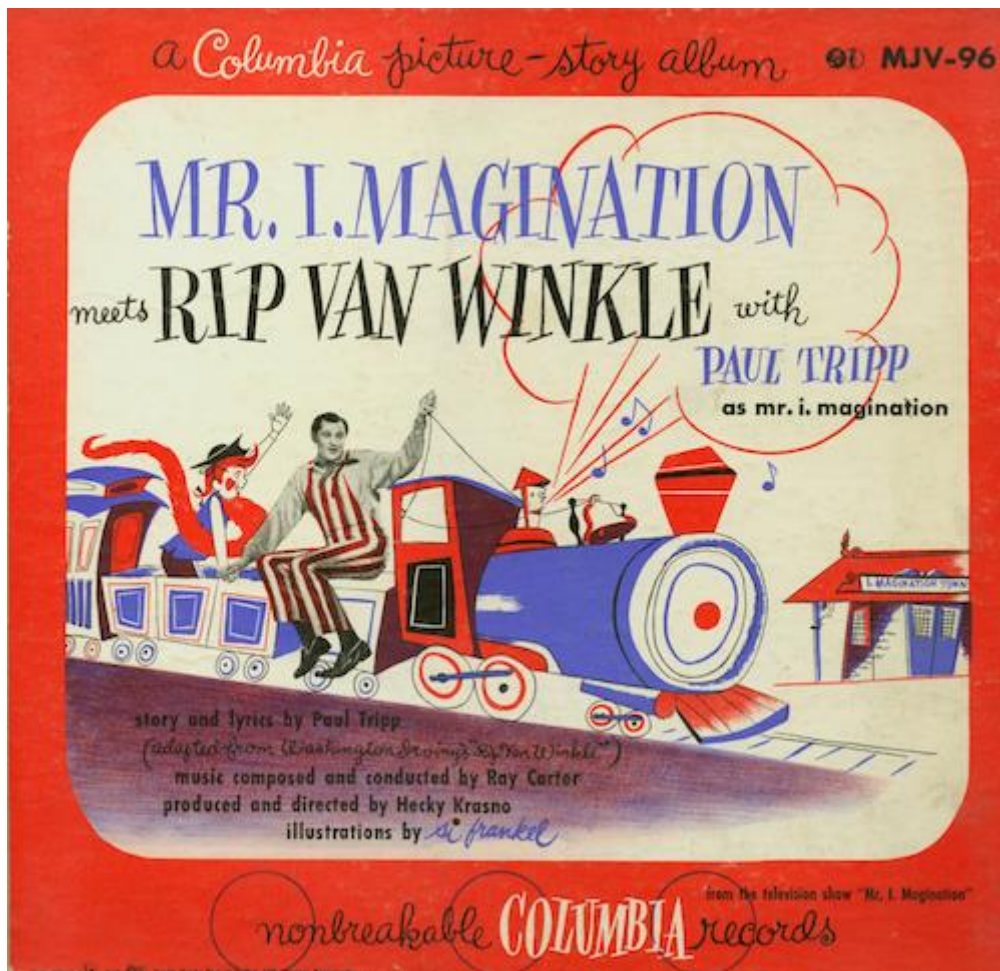


Figure 5. Paul Tripp, *Mr. I. Magination meets Rip van Winkle* (© Columbia, 1951).



Figure 6. Paul Tripp, *Space Ship to Mars* (© Columbia, 1952).

"Mr. I. Magination" spawned several records made in 1951 and 1952 on Columbia (produced by Hecky Krasnow), including *All Aboard the Showboat with Mr. I. Magination*, *Mr. I. Magination meets Rip Van Winkle*, and *Space Ship to Mars with Mr. I. Magination*. With music by Ray Carter, the records were highly successful, praised for their innovative stories. "By following the story," *Billboard* wrote about *Space Ship to Mars*, "kids will hear something of the effect of space and acceleration on gravity and other phenomena." [10] Krasnow's daughter, Judy, appeared on several of the records. "Recording with Paul," she said, "was a joy." [11]

Yet the critical acclaim the program received and the niche it filled in early educational television was not enough to keep it from struggling to keep a sponsor. The program was cancelled by CBS in 1951, and *New York Times* critic Jack Gould thundered against CBS, as he railed against the cancellation of *Mr. I. Magination* and two other children's television shows, including *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*:

The fate of "Mr. I. Magination" has been even more distressing; the program has been taken off the air altogether. Yet without question, this was one of the finest presentations on the air for children. . . There were fresh songs and stories and always they were presented with originality and meticulous taste. . . An advertiser understandably may want to reach only the largest possible audience, but a

broadcaster, on the other hand, has many different obligations, among them serving the minority. Without continuing efforts to that end, the broadcaster's concept of majority rule in programming is only an illusory jest and a form of cultural totalitarianism. [12]

CBS brought back *Mr. I. Magination* after an uproar, what the *Daily News* called a "loud, sustained holler" from viewers. [13] Still, despite being reinstated by popular demand, the program's last show was broadcast only a few months later, on June 28, 1952. In a 1970 interview, Paul Tripp waxed nostalgically about those early days of television, and how his program- *TV Guide* said the show was "based on the premise that children have minds"-did something that, regrettably, had not been continued in earnest in the years that followed. "Television," he said, "has become jaded-it has lost its sense of excitement and adventure. Shows are forced to copy what drew the best rating last year." Children, he felt, have been cheated by "the cartoon age" and have "lost the thrill of identifying with living personalities." [14]



Figure 7. Paul Tripp as he appeared on the episode "The Last Commencement" on *The Law and Mr. Jones* (1961).

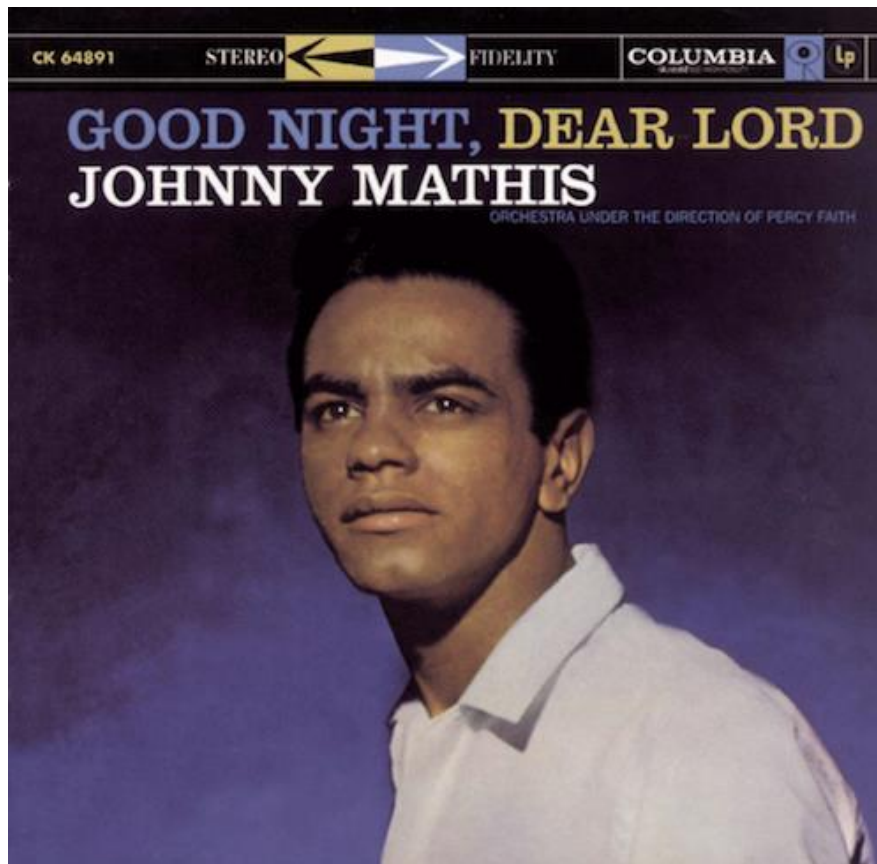


Figure 8. Ray Carter (music) and Paul Tripp (lyrics), *Good Night, Dear Lord*. Recording by Johnny Mathis (© 1958, Columbia).

In the years that followed, Paul Tripp continued writing and appearing in several more children's television shows, including *On the Carousel* (CBS, 1954-1959; the show won the 1956 New York Emmy award for Best Children's Program),^[15] and *Birthday House* (NBC, 1963-1967), a show where Tripp (along with his wife) hosted a real birthday party for a child from the New York City area. The program featured stories, songs, games, and engagement with guests; it clearly built on the earlier model of *Mr. I. Magination*. He also had roles in a host of television programs and series, including *Perry Mason*, the *Dick Van Dyke Show*, *The Law and Mr. Jones*,^[16] and *Kraft Television Theater*. In 1952, he wrote the script for an episode of *Tales of Tomorrow*, "Ahead of His Time," a science fiction television series that ran from 1951-1953 in which he and Ruth Enders also had the leading roles. In the show, Tripp-thanks to time travel-managed to save Earth from destruction in 2052.^[17] And his 1958 song, *Good Night, Dear Lord* (music by Ray Carter), enjoyed success as the title track of a best-selling album of Christian and Jewish-themed songs recorded by Johnny Mathis.^[18] Tripp's work also extended to one man shows, including a theatrical portrayal of Will Rogers (1974) and one on television about Thomas Edison (1979).



Figure 9. Paul Tripp (left) as Sam Whipple with Alberto Rabagliati (right) as Santa Claus, in *The Christmas That Almost Wasn't* (1966).

In 1966, Paul Tripp wrote the script for the movie *The Christmas that Almost Wasn't*, a story/musical about Santa Claus' landlord who planned to raise the rent on the jolly man with the white beard's house, and when Santa could not pay, planned to evict him from the North Pole and keep Christmas from coming. The film was directed by Rossano Brazzi (who also had the role of Santa's landlord, Phineas T. Prune, who was a cross between Dr. Seuss' Grinch and Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge), and featured Alberto Rabagliati as Santa, and Tripp in the role of Santa's friend, Sam Whipple. Ruth Enders and David Tripp (Paul Tripp and Ruth Enders' son) also appeared in the film although they were uncredited. Released in both English and Italian versions, it enjoyed modestly positive reviews, spawned a soundtrack album (music by Ray Carter; lyrics by Tripp) on RCA Camden (the soundtrack was nominated for a Grammy for Best Recording for Children in 1966), [19] and, for a time, enjoyed a cult following with re-airings on television every Christmas.



Figure 10. Paul Tripp (standing) as Benjamin Franklin and William Jennings (seated) as Thomas Jefferson in *1776* (1971).

Paul Tripp's stage acting roles were legion. Among his most notable was the role of Benjamin Franklin in the touring company of the musical *1776*. The show won three Tony awards and the New York Drama Critics award when it opened on Broadway in 1969 (Tripp was not in original the Broadway cast), and a touring company was organized in 1970 that traveled throughout the United States; the cast included William Jennings as Thomas Jefferson, and Don Perkins as John Adams along with Tripp. Due to his television work as *Mr. I. Magination*, Tripp, referred to in reviews as "one of the best-known children's entertainers," was often considered the star of the show, and his performance was widely praised:

As Benjamin Franklin, Paul Tripp is marvelous, smiling his self-pleased, cat and canary smile, a charming old rounder who doesn't miss anything and never intends to. [20]

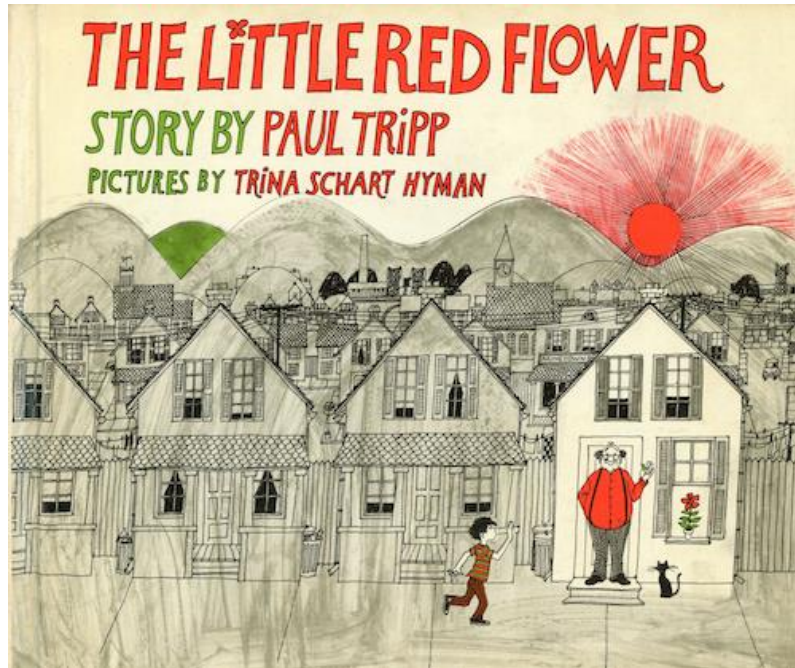


Figure 11. Paul Tripp and Trina Schart Hyman, *The Little Red Flower* (© Doubleday, 1968).

But while Paul Tripp was certainly a kind of theatrical everyman, his hand was never far from the education of children. In addition to his librettos and television scripts, he wrote several children's books, including *The Strawman Who Smiled by Mistake* (Doubleday, 1967; illustrations by Wendy Watson), *The Little Red Flower* (Doubleday, 1968; illustrations by Trina Schart Hyman), and *The Tail that Went Looking* (Doubleday, 1971; illustrations by Tim Lewis). When he died in 2002 at the age of 91, he was eulogized as "a Pied Piper of early children's television," [21] but his most lasting legacy was the story of a tuba who wanted to play a melody and whose oompahs were ultimately redeemed.

An introduction to Tubby the Tuba



Figure 12. George Kleinsinger and Paul Tripp, *Tubby the Tuba* (© CBS/Israeli Broadcasting Authority, c. 1962). Scan by Charles McAdams, courtesy R. Winston Morris Tuba Collection, Tennessee Tech University.

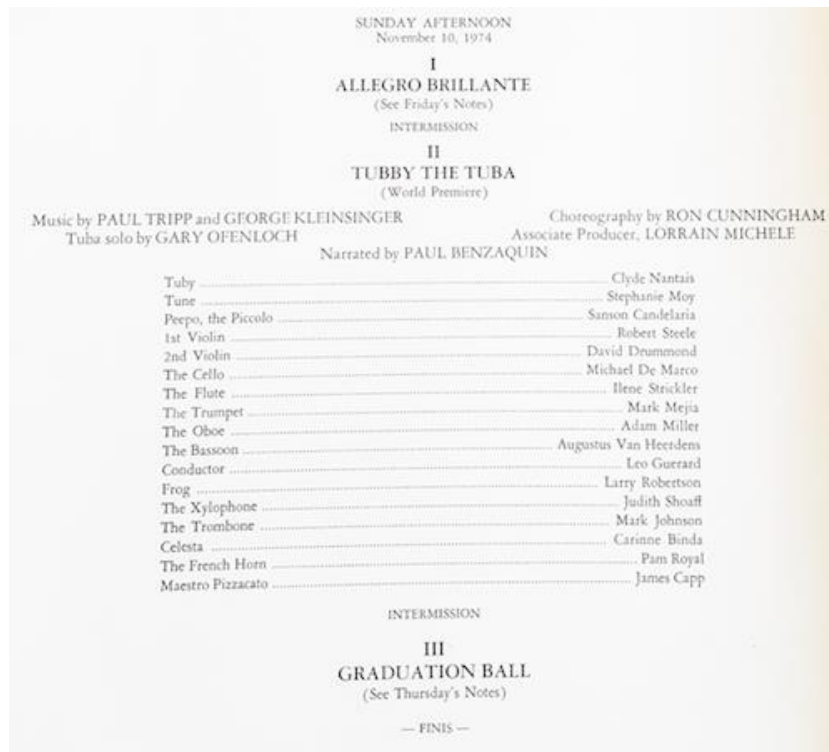


Figure 13. Program from Boston Ballet premiere production of *Tubby the Tuba*, November 10, 1974. Courtesy Gary Ofenloch.

Tubby the Tuba is more than a story, and it is much more than a musical composition. And, as both and more, it is about more than a melody and more than oompah. It became an industry unto itself, spawning recordings (in 78, 45, and 33 ¹/₃-rpm incarnations, as well as cassette, compact disc, and streaming), narrations in English, French, Danish, Norwegian, Spanish, Hebrew, and a host of other languages, cartoons, a movie (featuring the voices of Dick van Dyke and Pearl Bailey), sheet music, and musical arrangements. In addition, it was father to several sequel compositions about Tubby, as well as a three-minute song based on Tubby's story. It was the first children's album to be recorded in Israel (1949) [22] and Boston Ballet premiered a version for dancers. [23] Tubby has been recorded and performed by well-known narrators (including Victor Jory, Danny Kaye, Paul Tripp, José Ferrer, Sonny Fox, Annette Funicello, Julia Child, Carol Channing, Meredith Vieira, and the Manhattan Transfer), and tuba soloists (including Herbert Jenkel, Herbert Wekselblatt, Phillip Donatelli, George Boujje, William "Bill" Bell, Harvey Phillips, Martin Fry, John "Tommy" Johnson, and Chester Schmitz), and the story has been published in book form three times. How many copies have been sold? Did the first recording of *Tubby the Tuba*-as reported in the *New York Daily News* in December 1945-really receive 500,000 orders in the first few weeks after it was released? Did combined sales of *Tubby the Tuba* recordings and books exceed 13 million as the book version of *Tubby the Tuba* by Dutton Children's Books reported in 2006? Maybe? Possibly? Probably? Definitely? Multiple millions, for sure, but estimates are impossible to confirm. Recordings of the *Tubby the Tuba* franchise have been released on dozens of labels, some of which long ago went out of business as others came along and flourished, with *Tubby the Tuba* helping them to keep the lights on at the factory for many years. And as the first bona fide "hit" in the history of children's records, it rocketed the genre into astronomical success, spawning an untold number of stories and recordings about musical instruments that have taught

generations of youngsters to love music and pick up and play the piccolo, and trumpet, and trombone, and violin. And the tuba.



Figure 14. George Kleinsinger and Paul Tripp, *Tubby the Tuba* (incipit, interior record sleeve,

© Cosmo, 1945).

For those who have never known and loved *The Tale of Tubby the Tuba* (as it was first named), the enormity of the phenomenon may come as a surprise. In the course of researching this article, I collected no fewer than 50 recordings of *Tubby the Tuba* and its successor compositions. And they are just the tip of a very large iceberg of Tubby recordings. [24] There are many, many more; there simply comes a time when one must stop obsessive collecting. A copy of the first edition of the book, *The Tale of Tubby the Tuba*, published in 1948, took me over a year to locate. I'm not sure my grandchildren wholly appreciate the fact that the book they love so much that Grandpa has read to them over and over required him to lay out \$100 to purchase the only copy he has ever found—from a book dealer in Tacoma, Washington—but I count it as a prized part of my library. Other rare finds were shockingly affordable (probably because the seller didn't know the rarity of the item), such as when I paid 99 cents for a copy of Mitch Miller's recording of *The Tubby the Tuba Song* with William "Bill" Bell on tuba. Helpful librarians at Princeton University provided me with a (legal) scan of the only known copy of the sheet music for *The Tubby the Tuba Song*, and through the kindness of a collector of tuba recordings, Stephen Shoop, I was able to hear—after an exhaustive search—the Holy Grail, the truest needle in a haystack of the Tubby universe: Harvey Phillips' 1960 recording on Golden Crest Records of *Tubby the Tuba Goes to Town*. Say again? You've never heard of that piece? Well, that is part of the story that unfolds in upcoming issues of the *Journal*. Many stories about Tubby, actually, and the people who brought him to life. Stay tuned.

[1] Leonard Lyons, "The Lyons Den," *Asbury Park* (New Jersey) *Press*, June 11, 1946, 6. Also, Email from David Tripp to Douglas Yeo, November 25, 2019.

[2] Arthur Pollock, "Five Plays by American Soldiers Delight Audience at 46th Street," *Brooklyn Eagle*, June 15, 1943, 6.

[3] Email from David Tripp to Douglas Yeo, November 25, 2019.

[4] "The Army Play By Play," *Playbill*, Martin Beck Theater, beginning Monday, August 2, 1943.

[5] Shirley Frohlich, "The Army Play by Play: One Night of 5 1-Act Scripts Takes in 100G, Proves Morale Shot in Arm to Khaki, Civvies," *Billboard*, June 26, 1943, 13.

[6] "Engagements," *Variety*, August 26, 1936, 83.

[7] Email message from David Tripp to Douglas Yeo, November 25, 2019.

- [8] Sid Shalit, "'Mr. I. Magination' Scores. . ." *Daily News* (New York), May 11, 1949, 23C.
- [9] "The Ford Theater-Look TV Awards." Produced by Garth Montgomery. Program, January 12, 1951. I am grateful to David Tripp for providing this program.
- [10] "New Records to Watch: Space Ship to Mars," *Billboard*, December 6, 1952, 24.
- [11] Judy Gail Krasnow, *Rudolph, Frosty, and Captain Kangaroo: the musical life of Hecky Krasnow, producer of the world's most beloved children's songs* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2007), 260.
- [12] Jack Gould, "Something is Amiss Re: "'Kukla,' Garroway and 'Mr. I. Magination.'" *New York Times*, December 2, 1951, 13X.
- [13] Kay Gardella, "Televiewing and Listening In," *Daily News* (New York), January 5, 1952, 22.
- [14] William Marsano, "Where are they now? It was 20 years ago when Stone and Tripp. . .," *TV Guide*, October 3, 1970, 12-13.
- [15] 1956-New York Area Awards, Presented March 16, 1957, New York (Waldorf Astoria). www.nyemmys.org/media/files/files/b579fba8/1956nyemmyawards1.pdf
- [16] The photograph of Tripp in *The Law and Mr. Jones* (Figure 7) appears on numerous websites, misattributed as a photo of George Kleinsinger.
- [17] Paul Tripp, writer, "Ahead of His Time." *Tales of Tomorrow*, July 18, 1952. www.imdb.com/title/tt0717016/. Also, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOouWLi2Q8c.
- [18] Ray Carter (music) and Paul Tripp (lyrics), *Good Night, Dear Lord*, 1958. Mathis' album of the same title was released in March 1958 in the United States on March 3, 1958, Columbia CK 64891, 33¹/₃-rpm. The album's United Kingdom release (1961) was titled, *Heavenly*.
- [19] *Grammy Awards 1967* (9th Grammy Award ceremony, March 2, 1967), www.awardsandshows.com/features/grammy-awards-1967-242.html
- [20] "Musical history, '1776!' coming for holiday," *Miami News*, August 29, 1970, 6A. Also, "Franklin Role Cast in 1776," *Public Opinion* (Chambersburg, PA), September 5, 1970, 4. Also, "'1776' Opens Monday at Auditorium," *Lansing (MI) State Journal*, October 10, 1970, 43. Also, "'1776' Provides Delightful Musical Drama," *The Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), May 1, 1971, 9.
- [21] William H. Honan, "Paul Tripp, 91, Early Children's TV Host," *New York Times*, September 1, 2002, 34.
- [22] Leonard Lyons, "The Lyons Den." *Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser*. March 26, 1949, 4. No copies of the 1949 *Tubby the Tuba* recording in Hebrew have surfaced, but a later recording in Hebrew was produced by CBS and the Israel Broadcasting Authority. George Kleinsinger (music) and Paul Tripp (story), *Tubby the Tuba* and *Pee Wee the Piccolo*. Israel Broadcasting Orchestra, Shalom Ronly-Riklis, conductor; Itzhak Shimoni, narrator; Michael Tannenbaum, tuba soloist. CBS S 52792, 33¹/₃-rpm,. c. 1962 as per email from Eliezer Aharoni to Douglas Yeo, June 16, 2020.
- [23] "Ballet: Tubby the Tuba." *New York Times*, November 12, 1974, 48. *Tubby the Tuba* was choreographed for Boston Ballet by Ron Cunningham and the performances were conducted by Michel Sasson; Gary Ofenloch was the tuba soloist. Ofenloch recalled, "At the last rehearsal, Mr. Kleinsinger (who flew in for the rehearsal) requested I plug in a cadenza right in the middle to make it longer. I asked him how long he wanted it to be, and he said, 'How about five minutes?' I think it ended up being about two minutes of improvisation in A minor and A major. I even stuck the Mahler Symphony No. 6 tuba solo in it!" Email from Gary Ofenloch to Douglas Yeo, May 25, 2020.

[24] The R. Winston Morris Tuba Collection at Texas Tech University contains 45 *Tubby the Tuba* recordings. Email from R. Winston Morris to Douglas Yeo, May 21, 2020.