BACK TO THE BEGINNING: CARRÉ ON AGAINST ALL THE ODDS

BY CLIFFORD BEVAN

In the beginning... ...there were no tubas.

So, what is a "beginning"?

The dictionary (*Merriam-Webster*) states: "The point at which something starts", which is helpful, so long as you know what "starts" means. But it seems reasonable, whether it's a beginning or a start, to conclude that there must be something to follow it, otherwise it would just be an event. So, what follows in this case?

In this case, it's the appearance of the first ever tuba. Actually, the *Baß-Tuba*. And it was built in the now-familiar pitch of F with the now-familiar number of five valves. You could say it was born fully formed.

I was enjoying reading someone's essay on the subject recently until I realized that some of what was written was not, you might say, totally correct. Or, as you might alternatively (and more accurately) say, was more than a little inclined to give statements based on supposition and conjecture rather than facts. So here I would like to tell you a true story, one about my own journey back to the beginning. It was a long time ago, when the world was young and still trying to recover from the Second World War.

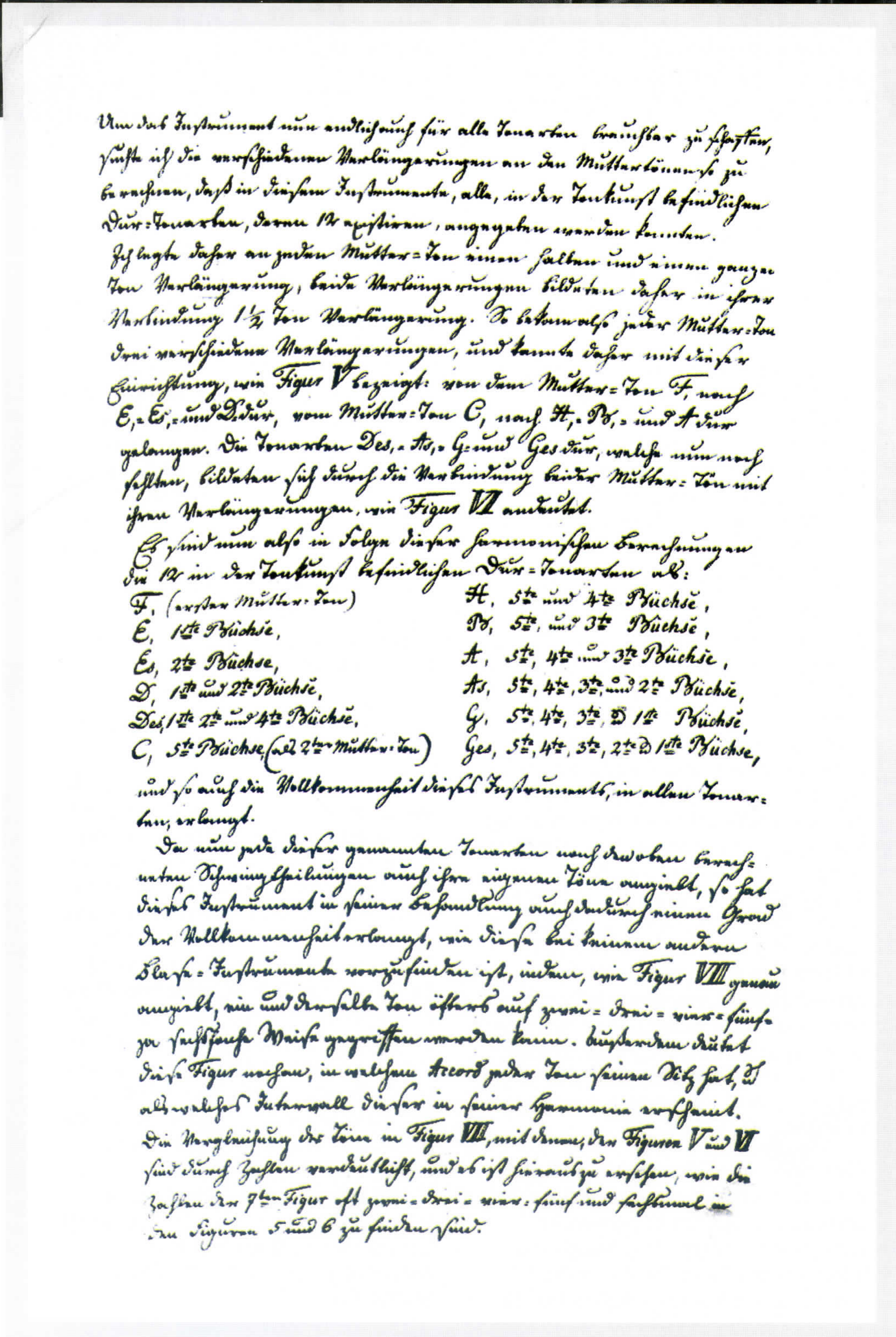
In the 1950s, I was a student at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Not a student of tuba, as it happens, but a student of composition and trombone. Although enthusiastic about both, I didn't really know much about either. Students of ancient history will know that in the 1950s there was no Internet or Google, so sitting comfortably at the laptop to discover available information worldwide was not an option.[1] There were also very few books about brass instruments, so I began to compile notes about the trombone from any sources I could find. I still have them, in a bulging loose-leaf book with foolscap size pages (a size long since abandoned), now firmly tied together with string.

How I came to change to tuba is a story for another time. Sufficient to say that, certainly in the UK, there was a minimal number of tuba students. But having eventually secured a symphonic tuba job, and holding it for eight years, I found that there was even less known about the tuba than about the trombone, so my foolscap folder started to bulge considerably, with tuba information from wherever it could be found. The most comprehensive source was the article by organologist Tony Baines in the 5th edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music & Musicians*, published in 1954.[2] Here, he referred to Wieprecht and Moritz and their groundbreaking invention in 1835: the first *Bass-Tuba* in history. There was even a full page of tuba photographs, including a "Tuba in F, Moritz, Berlin, 1835" (and also a Wagner Tuba, which is something else entirely).

Forward to the 1970s, and freelancing in London, I often worked with one of the BBC orchestras which had no permanent tuba-player. It needed one, though, for a forthcoming visit to Berlin. Berlin, birthplace of the tuba! I bought a map to discover the location of the collection where I knew there was a Bass-Tuba made by the firm of C. W. Moritz.[3] As soon as the plane landed at Templehof and we had booked into our hotel, I made my way to the nearest U-Bahn station and was shortly at the museum.

I can't tell you how exciting it was to actually see the Moritz tuba in the flesh. I stood and gazed, like a pilgrim taking in a holy relic at a shrine. (Which, for me, this tuba actually was.) And then, like any tourist, I bought a couple of post cards and, like any player, went back to blow a few long notes before the rehearsal.

After getting back home I began to wonder about the existence of a Patent document for the instrument—it had been, after all, a new invention. With determination and a dictionary, for I'm no German scholar, I wrote to the museum to inquire. The reply came from Dr. Dieter Krickeberg of the Staatliches Institut fűr Musikforschung, Berlin, who was a tremendous help. At the time, Germany was still divided into East and West. While Dr. Krickeberg was in the West, the Patent was in the East. They were nominally both in the same city, Berlin, just a mile or two from each other, but the only means of communication was by phone to someone in the southern part of West Germany, from where (by some means fortunately known to Dr. Krickeberg) a phone call could be made to the East and eventually through to the Zentrales Staatarchiv.



Um das Instrument nun endlich auch für alle Tonarten brauchbar zu schaffen, suchte ich die verschiedenen Verlängerungen an den Muttertönen so zu berechnen, daß in diesem Instrumente, alle, in der Tonkunst befindlichen Dur-Tonarten, deren 12 existiren, angegeben werden konnten.

Ich legte daher an jeden Mutter-Ton einen halben und einen ganzen Ton Verlängerung, beide Verlängerungen bildeten daher in ihrer Verbindung 1½ Ton Verlängerung. So bekam also jeder Mutter-Ton drei verschiedene Verlängerungen, und konnte daher mit dieser Einrichtung, wie Figur V bezeigt: von dem Mutter-Ton F, nach E,- Es,- und D dur, vom Mutter-Ton C, nach H,- B,- und A dur gelangen. Die Tonarten Des,- As,- G- und Ges dur, welche nun noch fehlten, bildeten sich durch die Verbindung beider Mutter-Töne mit ihren Verlängerungen, wie Figur VI andeutet.

Es sind nun also in Folge dieser harmonischen Berechnungen die 12 in der Tonkunst befindlichen Dur-Tonarten ab:

F, (erster Mutter-Ton)	H, 5te und 4te Büchse,
E, 1te Büchse,	B, 5te und 3te Büchse,
Es, 2te Büchse,	A, 5te, 4te und 3te Büchse,
D, 1te und 2te Büchse,	As, 5te, 4te, 3te und 2te Büchse,
Des, 1te 2te und 4te Büchse,	G, 5te, 4te, 3te, & 1te Büchse,
C, 5te Büchse (als 2ter Mutter-Ton)	Ges, 5te, 4te, 3te, 2te & 1te Büchse,

und so auch die Vollkommenheit dieses Instruments, in allen Tonarten, erlangt.

Da nun jede dieser genannten Tonarten noch denselben berechneten Schwingungstheilungen auch ihre eigenen Töne anzeigt, so hat dieses Instrument in seiner Behandlung auch dadurch einen Grad der Vollkommenheit erlangt, wie dieses bei keinem andern Blas-Instrumente vorzufinden ist, indem, wie Figur VIII genau anzeigt, ein und derselbe Ton öfters auf zwei- drei- vier- fünf- oder sechsfache Weise gegriffen werden kann. Außerdem deutet diese Figur noch an, in welchem Accord jeder Ton seinen Sitz hat, d.i. als welches Intervall dieser in seiner Harmonie erscheint. Die Vergleichung der Töne in Figur VIII, mit denen der Figuren V und VI sind durch Zahlen verdeutlicht, und es ist hieraus zu ersehen, wie die Zahlen der 7ten Figur oft zwei- drei- vier- fünf und sechsmal in den Figuren 5 und 6 zu finden sind.

A page from Wieprecht's Patent document

Here he describes the valves needed to produce "each of the 12 major keys to be found in music." It is interesting to note, by the way, that his computations of harmonics and the number of valves needed to produce a totally chromatic contrabass brass instrument derive from his experiences as a violinist and consequent awareness of the divisions of "a catgut string."

I eventually received a copy of the Patent (paid for in East German Marks; PayPal hadn't been invented either[4]) in the form of a microfilm, which I still have, and which is very precious to me. Was this job done? Not quite, because it was, of course, in German. My neighbor at the time fortunately had a friend who worked for a copyright agency as a German translator, so she took on the task. "Task" (defined by *Merriam-Webster* as "something hard or unpleasant that has to be done") is a precise description, as the Patent turned out to be written in a form of archaic Teutonic script. Fortunately, my translator, Veronica Lawson, had a contact, an elderly lady who could read the script. Translator and tubist then worked on the final translation together as she had no specialized musical knowledge.

This is a plea to students to please refer to the *Baß-Tuba* translation when you need to and not just to guess what Wieprecht had to say about his reasons for inventing your instrument. You will find it in Appendix A of *The Tuba Family*.[5] It's just some words and music notation along with a picture, but remember why you are now able to read it, accurately translated into English: a phone call from a museum curator in West Berlin to someone in the south of West Germany who then made a phone call to someone in East Germany who contacted an archive in the East which then arranged for the document to be microfilmed and sent to me in the UK to then be deciphered and typed out by an elderly German lady for a copyright translator and tuba-player to turn into an English-language version.

The moral is that although it sometimes takes time and effort to discover what you need to know, that's essential if you don't just want to reproduce what someone else thinks. In any case, it's almost certain that somebody else thinks the absolute opposite.

East and West Germany? Microfilm? This research was like something from *The Spy Who came in From the Cold*.[6]

Notes

1. Sir Tim Berners-Lee invented the Internet in 1989.
2. Eric Blom, *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th edition (London: Macmillan, 1954).
3. C. W. Moritz carried on the business founded by J. G. Moritz (maker of the first *Baß-Tuba*) after the latter's death.
4. PayPal was devised in 1999–2000.
5. Clifford Bevan, *The Tuba Family*, 2nd edition (Winchester: Piccolo Press, 2000): 513–524.
6. A spy story set in Berlin by John le Carré and made into a film in 1965.

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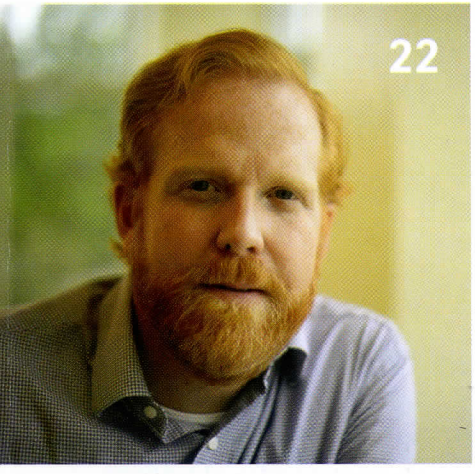

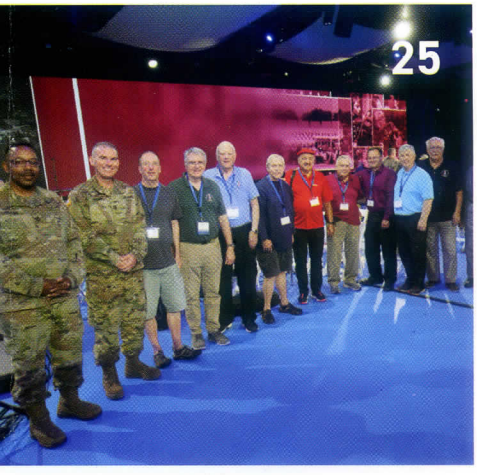

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Before a sunset concert in Sardinia, Italy. Photo submitted by Øystein Baadsvik.

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