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During the twenties, a tuba player was made—"Jake"!

First, a year at Oberlin as a cornet major with dreams of emulating Herbert Clarke; then a year at the Conway Band School in Ithaca, a year marked by the transition from cornet to tuba; and after that, a three-year tour of duty in the West Point band—an interim period.

One important event at West Point involved a recruit who turned up in the "squad-room" bearing on his shoulder a new Sousaphone in gleaming silver with a polished gold bell. He offered it for sale for \$125. The price was right but who in his right mind would buy an instrument when the army, MacArthur and the United States government would supply one without charge?

So I bought it—and took another step toward a career as tuba player.

After three years, the urge to return to Ithaca and the Conway Band School became irresistible. Getting a Sousaphone to Ithaca proved to be an ordeal and I shall not forget the train-ride to Hoboken, the understanding of the trainmen and the astonishment of my fellow passengers.

Pat Conway was very pleased to have the Sousaphone added to his band. The group was now larger with better instrumentation and included two men destined to be largely responsible for building the excellent music department that now exists at Ithaca College: Craig McHenry and Walter Beeler.

After several months of private lessons Pat Conway decided that "Jake" deserved a recommendation to the manager of the Sousa band. At the time I was working as waiter in the Seneca restaurant and picking up the usual ten-cent tips. While I was on duty the letter was delivered, inviting me to bring my tuba mouthpiece and play one of the gold-plated Sousaphones provided by the band. The excitement of being selected to play for John Philip Sousa in his world-famous concert band was shared by everyone who entered the restaurant. Before reporting for the first rehearsal of the season, a uniform was ordered and a wardrobe trunk and other necessities of travel were obtained.

The first rehearsal with a truly professional organization will be long remembered. The gold-plated Sousaphones in their trunks were assigned. Jack Richardson, the first tuba player, Gabe Russ, and Loren Kent were in various stages of preparation to play when Mr. Sousa came to the podium. I seemed to be the only one ready to play and by this time I had dry lips, had forgotten all the fingerings and was in a state of panic. I'll never know how we started but fortunately the others made the down-beat and I didn't faint. The band had three morning rehearsals to prepare for a month on the Steel Pier in Atlantic City and a transcontinental tour of the United States and Canada.

With four hour-long concerts each day, the ability to sight-read was essential. Only the Sousa marches were repeated as encores. All concert music was changed for every program, so it was a case of "play it now or never."

Mr. Sousa was a wonderful person, both on the stage and in the intermissions when he was kept busy autographing programs. The manager usually had to terminate this activity so the program could continue. Mr. Sousa had some well-planned devices to keep the members of the band alert. After a concert number he would

REMINISCENCES OF A TUBA PLAYER

BY

ELVIN L. "JAKE" FREEMAN

acknowledge the enthusiastic applause with leisurely bows—and then turn to the band announcing the encore march as he brought his baton down. Most of the veteran players knew the marches and started to play, while the second man on the stand turned frantically to the right page. This worked well most of the time except for some encores sung by the vocalist, or marches which had not been played for some time.

He also had a trick to let the players know that he was alert and knew who had made a mistake. He watched the section until he decided which player was responsible. The person who had "blurbed" usually tried to keep his eyes on the music but eventually he looked up to get a slight bow from Mr. Sousa—that was the only reprimand necessary. The men were more keenly aware of the musicians around them than they were of the audience. Everyone always tried to play his best, although it often seemed that one's neighbor was playing better than he was.

Some stages were so small that part of the band had to be seated off-stage. During "The Stars and Stripes Forever" it was customary for the trumpets (mostly cornets) to march across the front of the stage; on some of these small stages, this required their stepping up on the podium, marching three steps and then stepping down to stage level. On one such occasion I became fascinated with watching this up-over-down activity and there were no sounds coming from my tuba. Mr. Sousa noticed the absence of my sonorous tones and brought me back to

Continued on p. 6



Outstanding Sousa Band bass section in 1928. Jake Freeman second from left.

Freeman (cont. from p. 5)

reality by puffing out one cheek and then the other, as some non-professionals do in playing low notes. It was certainly a mild reprimand and was done with a twinkle in his eye. It was this sort of thing that made all the members of the band love him for the great person he was. This magnetism was also apparent in the response of all audiences, whether in the most magnificent auditorium or in "the largest garage in town"—a location used in one back-country town in a western state.

Mr. Sousa had worked out a little act with Gus Helmecke, the bass drummer, which actually involved the entire band. A Sousa march played without changes of dynamics or accents would be a dull thing, but Mr. Sousa and Gus would bring it to life by exaggerated swings of the baton and bass-drum beater, or sudden changes to pianissimo, or by placing accents in unexpected spots. Mildly amusing, perhaps, but we all enjoyed the twinkle in his eye on these occasions.

Those of us who were privileged to play under the baton of John Philip Sousa now know that "a bit of star dust" fell on our heads. The affection and respect we have for his memory and his works will live eternally in the hearts of those who hear his inspiring marches. "The Stars and Stripes Forever"—The March King Forever!

Author's Note:

This article has been edited by Maurice Whitney, long-time friend of "Jake" and co-author of "The Freeman-Whitney Band Reader." In other words, "Jake" says, "Moe augmented some of the events with correct punctuation without diminishing the verbiage. This is a major contribution in giving a sharp meaning to a natural sentence to keep it from going flat and to make a musical ending. Fine. ♪"



(l to r) DuPont, John Philip Sousa and J. P. Morgan in Wilmington, Delaware.



"Jake" Freeman in Atlantic City, July 1927.

Dedication:
ELVIN L. "JAKE" FREEMAN
Former member of the
tuba section in the
John Philip Sousa Band

Becoming a tuba player is not an over-night transition. In retrospect, however, the man hours of preparation do not seem long; helpful friends and lots of luck made the route much smoother.

For me, as for many nine-year-olds, the piano was chosen as the only way to get a little culture. My step-mother played piano, so I was destined to learn it one way or another—usually the hard way; turning the clock ahead, becoming suddenly ill, cutting my finger, or any other stratagem to eliminate practicing. My father had ulterior motives in developing my musical talents. As a Baptist Minister, he thought I should play the hymns for Wednesday night prayer meetings. My own prayers were never answered and my Wednesday night efforts continued for several years.

As time passed, the urge to play the cornet became strong; it appealed to me as a means of disturbing the neighborhood and of getting even with my parents. We lived near Cleveland, Ohio, so a catalog from an instrument company gave me a chance to read about the

various models of cornets—quick change to A, 16 inches long, silver-plated with gold bell, plush-lined case. All this was read and re-read until finally I earned enough money to order this object of my devotion.

A neighbor told me how to blow it so I "blow'd it." Soon I was trying Herbert L. Clarke studies, which required breath control to play a full page and a technique equal to the author. Herbert L. Clarke was probably the greatest cornetist of the century my idol. I deluded myself into thinking that I was the second greatest!

In 1919 I heard my first good cornet playing and my first good concert band—the John Philip Sousa Band with John Dolan as cornet soloist. This experience encouraged me to register at Oberlin College for a course in music. I was still fired with the ambition to emulate Clarke and Dolan and never dreamed of playing the tuba. Yet my piano study and my struggles with the cornet were only preliminaries to the transition to the bass instrument and, in 1927, I was ready for my first rehearsal as a tuba player with the Sousa band. 