

Exploring nineteenth-century tuba-composer relationships

The early nineteenth century was a tumultuous period in the history of the orchestral lower brass. The serpent, a rudimentary medieval instrument designed to support plainchant in sixteenth-century French church choirs, was being pushed ever further out of its comfort zone by orchestral composers seeking new sounds and aesthetics. To aid with chromatic pitch production, instrument manufacturers began to experiment with keys (which had recently been added to woodwind instruments), and, following its patenting in 1814, with various types of valve. The invention of the *Baß-Tuba* in 1835 and *saxhorn* in 1842—the most direct ancestors of today’s modern tuba family—is broadly seen as the culmination of this developmental process. However, such instruments were created exclusively for use in bands. These two inventions certainly acquired wide popularity at great speed across Europe, but the aesthetic desires of composers and the practice traditions of performers did not align overnight. A lack of strong working relationships between composers and tubists persists to this day; a performer is unlikely to be aware of which lower-brass instrument a nineteenth-century composer had in mind for their music (or indeed which instrument was used for the première), and a composer today is equally unlikely to be able to determine which tuba-family instrument might be used in their latest work.

In my research exploring tuba-composer relationships, I have been making audio-visual recordings using the lower brass instruments for which nineteenth-century composers may have written in their symphonic and operatic works, and also creating a guide for composers and tubists (to be published by Bärenreiter-Verlag in May 2020), so that they may better understand contemporary tubas and their requisite techniques. In this paper I will demonstrate my historical research to date, presenting newly made recordings on early instruments to compare with live demonstrations on modern instruments. As case studies I will address in particular the music of Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner, discussing how their choices of lower brass instruments developed during their careers, and how significant an impact the employment of particular instruments can have on wider issues regarding performance practice of their music today.



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Jack is a performer-researcher on the tuba, promoting his instrument through collaborations with ensembles, composers and academic institutions. Recent work includes ensemble performances with Klangforum Wien and Ensemble Modern, music theatre productions at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and Philharmonie Luxembourg, collaborations on solo works with Georges Aperghis and Michael Finnissy, premières at the BBC Proms and Darmstädter Ferienkurse (winner of the 2018 scholarship prize), and recitals in New York and

Buenos Aires, as well as giving papers at conferences in Paris and Cologne, seminars at the Royal College of Music and Columbia University, and writing reviews for *TEMPO* and *Music and Letters*. He has also worked with orchestras ranging from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra to Spira Mirabilis, particularly on the serpent and ophicleide. He is currently working towards his PhD under supervision from Prof. David Horne and Prof. Martin Iddon, supported by the North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership.