**Harvey Phillips and Tuba Christmas**

The tradition began in 1974, the brainchild of Harvey Phillips, a musician called the Heifetz of the tuba. In his time he was the instrument’s chief evangelist, the inspirer of a vast solo repertory, a mentor to generations of players and, more simply, Mr. Tuba.

Most tuba players agree that if their unwieldy instrument has shed any of the bad associations that have clung to it —good for little more than the “oom” in the oom-pah-pah — it is largely thanks to Mr. Phillips’s efforts. He waged a lifelong campaign to improve the tuba’s image. Mr. Phillips died on October 20, 2010, at his home, Tubaranch, in Bloomington, Ind. He was 80 and had Parkinson’s disease.

Like many towering exponents of a musical instrument, Mr. Phillips left a legacy of 200 solo and chamber pieces, students and students of students. But even more, he bequeathed an entire culture of tuba-ism: an industry of TubaChristmases (252 cities last year) and tuba mini-festivals, mainly at universities, called Octubafests.

Harvey Phillips was born on Dec. 2, 1929 in an Aurora, Mo. After graduating, Mr. Phillips took a summer job playing tuba with the King Bros. Circus, attended the University of Missouri and then joined the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, the pinnacle of circus bands. On a circus trip to New York, he met William Bell, the tuba player of the New York Philharmonic. Mr. Bell soon arranged for him to study at the Juilliard School and become his pupil. Mr. Phillips spent two years in the United States Army Field Band but returned to New York playing regularly with the New York City Opera and New York City Ballet orchestras. In 1954 he helped found the New York Brass Quintet. The combination (two trumpets, French horn, trombone and tuba) was not common at that time and became a boon for tuba players. Mr. Phillips also played jazz, performing in clubs and recital halls. In 1975 he played five recitals at Carnegie Recital Hall in nine days.

Writing in The New York Times in 1980, the music critic Peter G. Davis said first-time listeners to Mr. Phillips “could scarcely fail to be impressed, and probably not a little astonished, by the instrument’s versatility and tonal variety, its ability to spin a soft and sweetly lyrical melodic line, to dance lightly and agilely over its entire bass range, and to bellow forth with dramatic power when the occasion demands.”

In 1971 Mr. Phillips joined the faculty of Indiana University. He retired in 1994.

In his tireless efforts to raise the tuba’s profile as well as to honor Mr. Bell, his teacher, Mr. Phillips — perhaps touched by the showmanship of his circus past — decided to gather tuba players for a special holiday concert in Rockefeller Center. (Mr. Bell was born on Christmas Day, 1902.)

He called an official there with the suggestion. “The phone went silent,” he later recounted. “So I gave the man some unlisted telephone numbers of friends of mine.” They included Stokowski, Leonard Bernstein, André Kostelanetz and Morton Gould. “He called me back in about an hour and said, ‘I’ve spoken with your friends, and you can have anything you want.’ ” The Tuba Christmas extravaganzas took off. Volunteers hold them around the country under the auspices of the Harvey Phillips Foundation. Sousaphones and euphoniums are also welcome. At TubaChristmas, the musicians play “Silent Night” in honor of their fellows who have died, Mrs. Phillips said. This year when tuba players gather again at the skating rink, and at Tuba Christmas concerts everywhere, the carol will be played in Mr. Phillips’s memory.

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