

Reflections of My Time with the Cape Symphony by Stu Gunn

I joined the Cape Symphony around 1985. At the time, I was 41 years old, and I had been playing around the Eastern New England area since my college days. I had earned two music degrees, separated by a three-year stint in US Army bands, and had been freelancing in the Boston area for a few years. I also played frequently in traditional jazz bands on the Cape.

One day I received a call from Chris Wells, personnel manager of the Cape Symphony, asking if I could play a cycle of concerts in a few weeks. I was glad to say yes, as I knew of the orchestra, and a couple of friends played there. I don't remember the program, but in rehearsal, I was seated in back, right behind the woodwinds. Near the end of the first rehearsal, the second clarinetist, Janice Murphy, turned around and asked if I was going to be permanent. I said I didn't know anything about that. I was just a sub.



The Cape Symphony's conductor at the time, Royston Nash, was complimentary about the amount of volume I put out, saying that he thought I encouraged the trombones to play more forcefully, which he liked. I was flattered at the time. I had been personally encouraged by some of my teachers to "play strongly when you see FF until you see the conductor's hand in your face." I had also been influenced by the arrival of Chester Schmitz at the Boston Symphony, who blew the roof off of Symphony Hall.

A short time after this series, I received another call from the Chris Wells asking if I was interested in joining on a more permanent basis, and would I come in to "chat about it." Ultimately I learned that the position was called a "ringer position." I would only attend the last two rehearsals of each cycle. I will say that Royston Nash almost always programmed at least one piece which called for tuba, even if it were only an overture.

Before I was actually hired, Mr. Nash asked me to come and play for him, which I did. It was still a local orchestra, and things were not as formal, but he did like what I played and what I said when we chatted. He was happy to hear that we had a house in Wellfleet, and that I had played a lot on the Cape. He was also glad that I played Bb and Eb tubas, which were the instruments he was familiar with in England.

After a couple of years went by, I petitioned Wesley DeLacy, the Symphony's chief executive officer, to designate the tuba position as a principal position. The board agreed, and the next year both tuba and harp received that designation.

Mr. DeLacy gave regular talks on musical subjects at the King's Way residence complex, where he lived. He asked me to come and talk about living the tuba life. In his introduction, he paid me a compliment which floored me. He said that my coming made the biggest improvement to the orchestra that he could remember.

I remember chatting with Mr. Nash about favorite orchestral pieces of mine, and I mentioned Prokofiev's 5th Symphony and Sibelius's 2nd Symphony. He programmed them both over the next two years.



Concerts were held at the auditorium of the Mattacheese Middle School for many years before we moved into the Barnstable Performing Arts Center, which brought about some changes. Because of the larger hall, we began giving two performances instead of three. Rehearsals were increased and consolidated to the week of the concert instead of one rehearsal per week.



There are several players still in the orchestra from before I started, including Cully Beasley, Mark Miller, Janice Murphy Smith, Deborah Bradley, and of course Betsy Doriss, who just recently retired.

When Royston Nash decided to retire, we knew it would make for big changes. We auditioned several candidates, but we didn't even get through them all before settling on Jung-Ho Pak. Suddenly, we were a much different orchestra. As the years have passed, we have adopted more standardized audition procedures

and the orchestra has improved gradually as we've been joined by many highly qualified players. The changes under Jung-Ho Pak, with the support of the board, staff, and community, have led to an ensemble made up of skilled musicians from all over Eastern New England and beyond.

