



**The Tuba Whisperer:  
Tuba Recruiting, Fundamentals,  
and All-Level Brass Pedagogy**

**CLINICIAN:  
David Dunham**

**Texas Bandmasters Association  
2016 Convention/Clinic**

**JULY 21-24, 2016  
HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS**

# **The Tuba Whisperer**

## **David Dunham, Fowler MS-Frisco**

### **Recruiting**

- Intelligence (\*\*insert joke here\*\*)
- Stature (“How tall is Dad?”)
- Gender (Not a novelty to have a girl tuba player)

### **Beginner Equipment**

- Mouthpiece (Investment)
- Euphonium (mouthpiece provided by school)
- EE 2000 Tuba Book

### **Beginner Class Structure**

Euphonium until the November demonstration concert (through fast eighth notes)

- Easier to handle
- Class moves 10x faster
- Not as much air needed
- Reads tuba books
- Full range (low and high)
- Develops tuba players with euphonium player mentalities (not just Oompah)

TUBA WEEK!

- Tubas with Clear Kelly 18 mouthpieces (school provided)
- Buzz 2 days, Play 3<sup>rd</sup> day, take tubas home at the end of the week.
- Clear Kelly mouthpieces enable you to monitor the lips.
- Whole note – Whole rest at 70 BPM (for LONG periods), then 60 BPM
- Down to low Bb in 1 full week.
- Learn every song they learned in the book on Euph. by the end of week 2
- For combined class of euphoniums and tubas, put the euphoniums in practice rooms for the first week, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> week they all play. The octave reinforcement helps the tubas match pitch.

Late February with big sounds they can “earn” their Silver mouthpieces (Helleberg)


### **Posture**

- Knees, paper ream, shelf liner, stand (DEG or K&M). Don't place on chair or towel
- Angle and mouthpiece placement (lips on lead pipe)

### **Air**

- Breathing Exercises (2 beat breaths whenever possible)
- Breathe out, not up
- Fill up your Stomach, back, chest in one movement.
- Take in More air that you THINK you need
- Stomach out to touch tuba, then slowly in during playing (Deflating the beach ball)
- Keep face same shape after breaths – HO, HO, HO---> OH, OH, OH
- Get fat with air (No acorn lungs)
- Blacksmith Bellows
- Hold a \$20 Bill against the wall for 8 seconds
- Exhale like a String bass bow note (Pace the air)
- Play at least a measure at a time (not 2-3 note), then 6 beats

## **Embouchure**

- Requires CONSTANT monitoring and feedback
- Anchor the mouthpiece and create a light gasket (no leaking of air)
- Breathe from the corners
- Center of lips NEVER TOUCH (Steamboat/Smoke Rings)
- 3 Kisses of Death  for Brass Players: Teeth too close, Smiling, "Poochy Lips"
- Hide the Cookie!
- Swallow the mouthpiece
- Round vowel sounds
- Keep lips close to face
- Low notes are NOT flabby lips, just OVAL (Gasket).
- Tongue LOW and FORWARD over bottom teeth.
- OH and AWE and the SAME time- "Bruce Lee"
- Popping mouth for Cavern (done right or it hurts!)
- Fish face
- Whistle: World War II falling bomb
- BO
- Teeth!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
- The Lips decide what note you hit, but the teeth decide how the note will sound"
- Low Bb jaw for higher notes

## **Warm-up**

- Buzz Everyday (BERP, or cover  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the end of the shank)
- Buzz should remain airy, not a trumpet buzz
- Tension is revealed in the buzz
- Collection of buzzing songs

## **Tonguing**

- Homer Simpson: Doh!
- Super slow motion "TOH" (Feel the pressure build up).
- Freeze face at the point of attack
- No Anchor Tongue, but slight top of tongue placement
- Air Assist (especially for very low notes)
- Don't just think of tonguing on the beat, think the sound coming out on the beat.
- Re-write notes below "C" in fast passages and marches

## **Ranges**

- Functional range
- Corners in, not back (Rubber Band)
- Zip-lock bag
- Don't back off on air (scared), aim air down.
- Starting on Euphonium range is never an issue
- Two Octave Scale "Bounty"

## **Problems and solutions**

- Respond, Respond, Respond!
- "Puffy cheeks": Students afraid to open mouth enough. Sound is fuzzy because air takes a

detour (not High Def). Feel your cheek against the inside of your mouth against your teeth. Think of an egg sitting on a table top.

-“Bubbles”- students not buzzing correct pitch or air too slow to hold aperture in place.

Poochy lips.

-“Accuracy” – slow air starts. Air must start instantly. Accuracy Exercise-“Teeth” keep bugging them until they are tired of hearing you whine. “CLEAN YOUR ROOM!”. You just have to be relentless.

### **Odds and Ends**

-You would be amazed at what your band sounds like with 4 good sounding tubas

-If you recruit less than high achieving students for tuba you will reap what you sow.

-For a tuba player’s starting note, an Eb sets a little easier than an F.

-G is worst “setting” note of the BBb tuba. The G is closer to A than to F (2<sup>nd</sup> gear)

-High C & B tuning (1st slide) on Miraphone tuba

-High D 1-2 is better in tune, but not good for technical patterns

-4<sup>th</sup> valve, start with 1&3 until the pinky finger is stronger. Insist on 4<sup>th</sup> for anything not longer than a quarter note.

-Tuning problems on certain notes: “make your top lip softer”

-CC Tubas are for high school tuba players who “made” All-State (After, not before).

### **Mouthpieces**

Beginner - Kelly 18 (Clear) or Bach 18

Advanced (late in beginner year) – Conn Helleberg 120S (not 7B), Bach 24AW

Professional – Helleberg like above, Schilke Standard, Perantucci, DEG

### **Instruments**

Beginner Instruments-  $\frac{3}{4}$  Tuba - King 1135BW and Jupiter 378L  $\frac{3}{4}$  Tuba (home)

Advanced Instruments – Miraphone 186S or Miraphone 191 (storage issues)

Alternative Middle School Advanced: King 2341 or Tempest MUNICH (3/4 not 4/4)

CC Tuba – Meinl-Weston (various models -\$\$\$) or Miraphone 188 or 1291

NOT Recommended (in my personal opinion) – St. Petersburg, Cerveny,

**Contact me if I can be of any help:**

**[DunhamD@friscoisd.org](mailto:DunhamD@friscoisd.org)**

**214-455-TUBA**