

AN ARTIST'S CORNER

featuring

Joanna Ross Hersey



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A native Vermonter, tuba and euphonium soloist Joanna Ross Hersey studied with Dan Perantoni at Arizona State University, received a Master of Music in Tuba Performance from the New England Conservatory of Music studying with Chester Schmitz, and earned her Doctor of Musical Arts in Tuba Performance from the Hartt School. As Principal Tubist with the United States Coast Guard Band, Joanna performed throughout the country as a soloist and clinician after winning the position at the age of nineteen. Joanna has played for three U.S. Presidents, performed at numerous state functions for visiting dignitaries, and has appeared on The Today Show and Good Morning America. In her freelance career she has performed with artists including Placido Domingo, Roberta Flack, Marilyn Horne, Arlo Guthrie, Michael Bolton, Lee Greenwood, Arturo Sandoval and Jack Nicholson. Joanna is a founding member of the Athena Brass Band, a group which has been featured at the Brass Band Festivals in Danville, Kentucky and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania with Joanna as soloist. Joanna is currently Principal Tubist with the Carolina Philharmonic and the Carolina International Orchestra.

As a member of the Alchemy Tuba-Euphonium Quartet, Joanna performs throughout North America and Europe and can be heard on the group's recordings Village Dances (1997) and Prelude and Groove (2012). For thirteen years Alchemy has been in residence each February at the Horn-Tuba Workshop in Jever, Germany where the group performs recitals, gives master-classes and conducts ensembles. The quartet also has performed recitals in Linz, Austria as part of the International Tuba Euphonium Conference, and was featured in the outdoor Fest der Natur on the banks of the Danube River. Together with Michael Parker, Joanna is also part of an exciting new duo JAM: Joanna and Michael, who have just released their first CD, featuring tuba, euphonium, cimbasso, and electronics.

Joanna has produced two solo albums, O quam mirabilis (2010) and Zigzags (2015), featuring music by composers including Hildegard von Bingen and Libby Larson in combination with her own compositions. Joanna's research interests focus on brass history and women in 20th Century American music, and her work has been published in the International Tuba Euphonium Journal, the International Women's Brass Conference Newsletter, the Historic Brass Society Journal, the North Carolina Music Educator's Journal and the Journal of Historical Research in Music Education. In collaboration with Parker Mouthpieces, Joanna has debuted the Hersey Artist Model Tuba Mouthpiece, featuring a three component stainless steel design. Visit www.parkermouthpieces.com for more information. Joanna is President of the International Women's Brass Conference, Associate Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, and a Yamaha and Parker Mouthpiece Performing Artist.

Joanna Ross Hersey's Website: <http://joannahersey.com>

What equipment do you primarily use?

I am a Yamaha Performing Artist and currently play on a five valve Yamaha 321 euphonium, with a Parker 4G mouthpiece. I play a 4/4 size Rudolph Meinl CC tuba with five rotary valves, and a Yamaha 621 F tuba, both with Parker Hersey Model Mouthpiece (find it here: <http://www.parkermouthpieces.com/shop/parker-joanna-ross-hersey-artist-model>)

What or who inspired you to play your instrument?

My biggest role models have been my main teachers, Dan Perantoni, Chester Schmitz and Steve Perry. These men accepted me in their studios at a time when young women were rare in powerhouse studios, and did me the honor of pushing me to excel. One important aspect of their teaching is that the tuba can and should be musical, and that clear, accurate technique will free you to do that. Because of growing up in such a small town, I was not aware of professional women brass players until I became one myself, and was involved with the International Women's Brass Conference, where I found out about women like

Susan Slaughter and Connie Welden, both trendsetters in brass performance. I feel honored to now serve as President of the IWBC, to bring more of the history of women in performance to light for the next generations, and to break stereotypes which still exist today.

What are your favorite solos written for another instrument?

The Bach Cello Suites, but I also love the music of Nadia Boulanger, she wrote a work for cello and piano which is lovely.

Discuss your early musical experiences. Why did you pursue music?

I started playing tuba during my eighth grade year in a small Vermont town in the mountains, twenty-seven miles from the Canadian border. East Haven, population two hundred and ninety-eight, had two schools, kindergarten through fifth grade in one small building, and sixth through eighth grades in one classroom next to the town clerk's office. During the time I was in school the state of Vermont was organizing the many small, one-room school house school systems across the state, and had hired a band director to start small band programs in various towns in our region. The afternoon came when we were given instrument rental forms to take home and discuss with our parents. I decided that I wanted to play the violin, however, since no high school anywhere nearby had an orchestra, my mother encouraged me to pick a band instrument. Not seeing anything on the list which struck my fancy, I returned to school the next morning having decided not to play anything.

However, since we were a small class of about twenty students, our teacher wisely decreed that we all must take part, or there would not be enough players to make up a band. Seeing my lack of enthusiasm for the instrument list, the teacher offered me the chance to play a sousaphone which was not being used in a nearby school. This seemed like a great solution, because I did not know what a sousaphone was.

I figured that this sousaphone of which Mr. Hueling spoke must be like a flutaphone, so I accepted the offer thinking I would become a flute player. Imagine my surprise when the teacher made a special trip out to East Haven to bring me the banged-up white fiberglass sousaphone, taking me out of class into the coatroom for a quick how-to. There we stood, surrounded by wool hats, snowy boots and sturdy parkas, in the chilly coatroom, as he put the sousaphone on my shoulders. A trombone player himself, he was excited about the turn of events, while I was in a complete stupor. This was not the flute I had envisioned, and it was

white, plastic and bumpy. "Okay, blow into it," he instructed. I gave a tentative puff in general the direction of the mouthpiece. Nothing happened. Mr. Hueling uttered the now immortal words, "You're going to have to blow a lot harder than that if you want to play the tuba." I took up a large breath and let go with all my might, a large blast rang through the building, students in class looked wildly over their shoulders in alarm, and I had begun to play the tuba.

East Haven was not a wealthy town, and did not provide busing to and from school, so we walked. Since there was only one teacher, the indefatigable Mr. Chip Devenger, if he could get through, school was in session. We rarely closed for a snow day, since snow was so common, as were temperatures dipping to forty below zero on the thermometer. Once a week, before Mr. Hueling's Wednesday afternoon visit for band rehearsal, I would walk home with the sousaphone to practice. We lived on a major trucking route to Canada, and the big rigs would go roaring past, honking their horns at the girl wearing the sousaphone, plodding home on the snowy road. The rest, as they say, is history...

How much do you practice on a typical day?

I do at least an hour of warm-ing up exercises and an additional hour or so of solo and ensemble prep most days, and definitely am a morning practicer.

Do you have a website? If so, what is the address?

<http://joannahersey.com>

Please give some tips for freelancing.

Get back to people right away when they contact you, even if it's to say you got their message and are checking. Don't complain about money, either take the gig or don't but if you take it, it is what it is. And it's totally true what people in this business always say, it matters much more what kind of person you are to spend time with than anything about your playing. Lots of people play well but you wouldn't want to spend two weeks confined with them in a pit. As my good friend and trumpet freelancer JoAnn Lamolino always says, "be cool."

Is anyone else in your family a musician?

My grandfather was a jazz trumpet player during the 1930s, from a poor family in St. Louis, and he played to put himself through school. He met my grandmother

because she would come into the record store where he worked, and spend her lunch money on jazz albums. Then during WW2 he joined the Army, and they trained him as a dentist, so that was his main career. But he held musical evenings at his home, and played the piano all his life. Even though he passed away when I was in middle school, he instilled a love of music in me, and I know he can still look down and see me today.

If you were on a desert island, what are your top 3 etude books for your instrument, solos for your instrument, as well as etudes/solos/albums not of your instrument?

I'd bring Blazhevich, Kopprasch and Rochut for sure, and then the Pablo Casals Bach Cello Suite recordings, and I'm a big fan of the jazz singer Ethel Waters, she'd be great company as well.

What advice would you give to someone interested in majoring in music in college?

Making a living in music today is definitely possible, but it is not easy. To do it well takes thousands of hours, and if you are cool with that there will be no problem. For me, there was never any other option and I never considered anything else. The music field has changed a bit from when I was growing up and everyone was going to become an orchestral tuba player full-time. Many of those jobs are gone, and players need to be open to other avenues such as military band performance, overseas performance, arranging, publishing, recording, chamber music, World music styles, etc. The absolute most important thing is that you can envision yourself practicing all your life. There are more players than jobs no matter where you are.

Music performance is not a nine to five job; it means nights and weekends, holidays, getting in late, catching redeye flights, lack of adequate rehearsal time, many miles on the car, and long hours with the horn on the face. Once that is done however, you are doing what you love for your career, and your "day job" is what you would do anyway, simply because you love it. Many people tried to discourage me from going to school for tuba performance, and I was so passionate about it that I totally ignored them and forged ahead without considering another option, and I have been successful. Someone has to win those jobs, make those rehearsals, get hired for the recording sessions, tours, and chamber music series. The musicians that do that are the ones who kept working when it got hard and discouraging, took the time to excel at their craft, and sought out masters in their field for advice and connections.

What are you listening to currently?

I'm bettering my German, and that's my current playlist. But perhaps because I teach and play all day, I rarely listen to music during my leisure time, that's not related to an upcoming performance or class I'm teaching.

What are you working on right now?

I'm about to leave with the Alchemy Tuba Euphonium Quartet for a week-long German tour, so that music is on my stand. Also I am performing a new work by Theresa Martin for clarinet, piano and tuba, that will be performed next month at the Music for Women Festival in Mississippi. That piece is wonderful but started life as a bass clarinet part, so it's quite tricky. I'm also playing a work for euphonium by Sanae Kanda, Morgandammerung, next month, and that's getting some time currently as well. My Seraph Brass folder is always nearby as we have several upcoming shows this season too!

If you couldn't have a career in music, what would you do instead?

I almost became a chef back in high school, it was that or music, and I still love to cook. That field can also be very stressful as a career, but at home I love to bake bread and desserts especially.

How could we make music education better?

We need to be more diverse with our programming in collegiate music education programs, and to instill the importance of that in our students. It's easy now to find resources no matter the ensemble or level. I have a series through Cimarron Music Press which is brass solo and chamber music by women and minority composers, called the St. Cecelia Series. There are databases like this one by Rob Deemer, of works for band by women, which can be found here <https://adaptistration.com/2018/01/02/an-operational-women-composers-database/> and the International Alliance for Women in Music, which has a whole group of resources on their webpage including databases of music for piano, composers, conductors, info on specific artists, and can be found here <https://iawm.org/resources> and the Temple University Library has a black composers resource to explore, <http://guides.temple.edu/c.php?g=78139&p=509937> I love following new composers on social media and I'd love to see more new music of all types required in our music education canon, from beginner through professional levels.

Do you like to teach? Why or why not?

I earned my Masters from New England Conservatory in Boston, and there they work from the motto "Artist, teacher, Scholar" and emphasize that to truly be serving the community, we need to be all three. So teaching has been a focus all my life, from beginning young players, to retirees returning to the instruments after a lifetime away.

What advice would you give to young women that want a career in music?

The problem is it is still very difficult to navigate this career as a woman. Today, in 2018, you have to put up with the jokes, the snide comments, and in all too many cases, the groping and the assault. And this is a crazy difficult career already. Every day you can be made to feel as if you don't belong, that you are 'other' and should be somewhere else. I think what happens is so many of our young women musicians are super smart, and excel at many things, and they look around and just aren't willing to deal with it all. And who can blame them. You would have to want it more than every other thing, or keep going in a situation where you don't remotely match what people expect, from the thing that moves your soul. It's important to be honest about this. We have not yet dealt with sexism in music performance or education, people carry biases, and their expectations are different for people based on gender and race. Advice for us all? Stop thinking it's all fixed and fair these days. Stop going along with the bad jokes and stereotyping, stop being awkwardly quiet if you didn't join in. Don't fear not fitting in. Don't say you'd rather not discuss it. That's the one that hurts the most, the fear of standing up to it. Just say, as awkwardly as it had to be, that this isn't the place for that, be uncomfortable, but do it anyway. Show the rest of the space that you care. It creates an expectation for behavior. It creates a place where that behavior is questioned. It creates a choice. And to our young women, and those of any type of minority, embarking on this crazy amazing, soul-crunching, horrible but wondrous, frightening but precious and you-wouldn't-have-it-any-other-way career? Be ready for it to be unfair, and don't take it personally, or try not to. Being a creative artist opens us up to such emotional turmoil, but forge ahead recklessly, dodge the bad energy, continue. There will be so much amazing energy too, and head toward that, and keep moving forward with your thick skin. Align yourself with the people who bring you positive joy and creativity. Stay your course and make your art, there is space for you here. You are welcome here.