

## Musician Spotlights, Issue 1

### International Tuba Day - Mike Knox Spotlight

Happy International Tuba Day! To celebrate, we're spotlighting Mike Knox, our principal tuba, with a little get-to-know-you. This will be the first of many musician spotlights throughout the year, so keep your eyes open for more!



#### **Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?**

I was born in Medford, a 5th generation native Oregonian. My family came to Oregon in 1852 from Illinois. In the upper Applegate there is "Knox Gulch" which was named after my ancestors. My Great Grandfather moved to Fossil Oregon, and homesteaded there, so I have Central Oregon roots as well. My grandfather moved the family back to the Rogue Valley, and we've been here ever since.

I come from a family of accountants (grandfather, father, mother, uncle, two aunts, and two brothers are all accountants) but I became a Social Worker, working with older people trying to address their needs. I'm also the only left hander in my family for three generations either side of me. My wife Barbara is an oboist, our oldest son Eric plays tuba, and our youngest son Chris plays with computers, but also played bassoon and trumpet.

#### **What brought or inspired you to pursue tuba? If you'd like to share one of your favorite pieces of music as well, I'd like to know!**

In childhood I had a recording of Tubby the Tuba, which I still have by the way, and in 4th grade I asked to learn to play the tuba. Medford didn't have a small sized tuba for a 9 year old, but I insisted. Finally a tuba was brought to me, and I never looked back. That was 63 years ago. I did my first solo as a 5th grader at Jefferson School in Medford. Years later upon the death of my first band instructor (Al Huntman) I went to pay my respects to his widow, and discovered that the tuba that was found for me to play was actually Mr. Huntman's own personal instrument! His widow gave it to me, as well as the first method book I used to learn to play, (hardbound at that!!) so now I own my first tuba. I didn't own a tuba until I graduated from college and bought my first (an Alexander CC Tuba from Mainz Germany), I now own over 20.

I played "Bydlo" (movement 4 of "Pictures at an Exhibition" by Mussorgsky) using that tuba. Bydlo has to be one of my favorite pieces to play, I've done it several times through the years with RVSO. It's very hard, and I am flattered to say that Maestro Martin Majkut uses it on his YouTube Channel as the opening page. Other favorites are Mahler 1 movement 3, Brahms 2 movement 4, and Stravinsky Firebird, Petruska, Rite of Spring. My LEAST favorite symphonic work is the Dvorak New World Symphony. The tuba is tacet (silent) in movements 1, 3, 4. And in movement 2 I play a total of 32 whole notes. I think Dvorak was mad at his tuba player, and has punished tubists for all time!

## **What do you enjoy most about being with the Rogue Valley Symphony?**

The camaraderie of the musicians. There's a close knit bond between us, and I love being with my friends on stage. I often say that I have the best seat in the house to enjoy a concert. There is really nothing on earth like playing your heart out with 80 of your friends all focused on the one goal of making music for an appreciative audience.

Memorable times with the RVSO include the dedicatory concert for the SOU Music Recital Hall we played Brahms' A German Requiem. Another time we were playing Great Gate of Kiev from "Pictures at an Exhibition" by Mussorgsky, and the lights went out for the last minute or so. We all kept playing, and finished as the lights came back on. That's how well we learn this music, that everyone knew it by heart and by memory.

## **What do you do when you're not playing music i.e. what are your hobbies or interests?**

My wife and I travel. We've been married 45 years, and have been to 45 countries. Towing our fifth wheel, we have traced both the Oregon Trail and the Lewis and Clark Expedition Trail. Next February and early March (between RVSO concerts of course) I will celebrate my 73rd birthday, camping in Antarctica, my seventh continent.

Other pastimes include house building and remodeling, we've done two complete houses and are currently on our fifth remodel. Birding, sailing, photography, are other interests. We're also Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) volunteers for Ashland Fire and Rescue, and we both have been volunteering to help out with the pandemic vaccination clinics.

## **Finally, one unusual fact, story, or tidbit about you or your instrument?**

People (composers and the public alike) think that large equals loud. So they always want the Tuba to play the loud moments in a piece of music. However, due to the conical bore of the Tuba and the laws of physics it doesn't work that way. I describe it as listening to Whales singing. You know there's power there, but there's gentleness too.

Tuba players last a long time. One of my heroes, Preston Mitchell, lives at the Rogue Valley Manor and in September will be 104. He saw John Philip Sousa perform live, played in the Air Force Band, and played side by side with me in the Ashland City band well into his 90's. I now hold the Preston Mitchell Chair in the Ashland City Band. This coming season with the RVSO will be my 51st. I took two seasons off for grad school, and did not play the first RVSO season, so my tenure is slightly blemished as principal Tuba of the RVSO.

