



Poet of The Euphonium . . . Joshua Walford
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I write as one who was considered by many to be at the apex of euphonium players in my day. I was for ten years soloist with the Chicago Staff Band of The Salvation Army and later played professionally with the late and great Dr. Leonard B. Smith. I say these things not out of immodesty but rather to lend credence to what I have to say about another player. My "day in the sun" was coincidental with the final playing years, and years after, of a man whom I consider the most poetically musical player on any instrument I can name - Joshua Walford. I knew Josh slightly, and wish I had gotten to know him better. He treated me as a colleague, though our ages were disparate. The late bandmaster of the International Staff Band, for which Josh was principal euphonium and legendary soloist for decades, Lt.-Colonel Bernard Adams, asked me if I would consider coming to England to replace Josh who was soon to retire. It was not possible for me to do this, though I consider it perhaps the greatest compliment I ever received.

Josh was a building contractor. I know very little of his life or educational background. He was very supportive and affable toward me. On one occasion I had the honor of playing Ransomed under Bernard at a music camp, giving my own testimony of love for the Lord and dedicating the performance to my friend Josh (I hit it out of the park that night as well!) It is my understanding that the euphonium solo, Ransomed (a.k.a. In Evil Long I took delight) was written for Josh by the late Bandmaster George Marshall. Because it is not as flashy and technically demanding as some of the latter day stuff, it is unfairly accorded a place in the umbra of other much less worthy solos. This concept is the soul of this tome I write.

There are and have been many players who could play more notes per minute than Josh, higher and lower and whatnot, I among them. But just as Ransomed is not about notes but rather about great music, so was Josh not about notes but about musical poetry.

His recording of Ransomed under Bernie Adams with the ISB, though imperfect technically, is magnificent music - musical poetry - a classic. This is especially manifest in the gorgeous slow section of the solo and ensuing cadenza where Marshall is an equal poet to Josh and vice versa. Josh's easy, elegant octave slide to the high C growing softer on the way up is evidence of his command of the instrument and of the muse.

<http://www.regalzonophone.com/audio/MF355%20-%20Euphonium%20Solo%20-%20Ransomed.mp3>

Even the rude, curmudgeon, Commander Harold Brasch (a man well named!), then euphonium soloist of The United States Navy Band in Washington D.C. was effusive in his praise of Josh as artist. This is surprising since Brasch played with a much harsher, mechanical style, nothing like Josh.

I have witnessed people reported to be stellar musicians mock Josh's vibrato as though there were some rule against it in music. Of course brass players are taught that by decidedly unmusical professors of brass at universities and music schools. If vibrato is acceptable on a cello, which it is, then why not on the "iron cello", the euphonium? People who hold to such arbitrary and unmusical ideas are automatons incapable of understanding the soul of music.

Evidence of Josh the poet is also available on various tour recordings of the 1950's and early 1960'. His interpretations in Morley Calverts's For Our Transgressions are breathtaking in his gentle emerging into sound absent the usual evidence of the tongue in action. I believe that if technique is evident it destroys the music. Josh could "breathe" a note into existence so that the note just appeared and then disappeared in perfect alliance with the demand of a certain passage. This was evident in his solo in Treasures From Tchaikovsky recorded for the ISB's American tour of 1957. His entrances on the high A in the solo show no stress or difficulty, just music. And for the record - his vibrato is perfect for the demands of the music. To play the passage absent vibrato would turn beautiful music into a steam whistle.

Clearly I didn't hear every note the man played, but every note that I heard was the very essence of music, poetically delivered. This was nowhere more evident than in Ray Steadman-Allen's magnificent Festival Series piece Emmaus Journey, which I recorded poorly (including cloddish announcer-interruptions!) holding a microphone in front of an old radio, with a flickering green eyeball in the middle, as the International Staff Band, under Adams, presented this glorious masterpiece on Easter Sunday, 1957, at the Hollywood Bowl before thousands. It will never be played better or recorded more poorly! It is interesting that, through no effort by me, the euphonium is picked up more clearly than the rest of the band! Though Josh's part dominates the piece, Roland Cobb plays magnificently as well. In fact it is easy to see why Ralph Vaughan Williams said of this very band "I've heard many bands, but never one with such a fine sense of style - classical style!" As the announcers finish their miscreant deeds, and Jesus Himself Drew Near continues in the background (another Marshall masterpiece!) and Josh adds the little decorations to it, the taste and grace with which he so does should inspire even the musical Neanderthals amongst us.

To the present, some could play more notes, perhaps more accurately, but none has ever captured the soul of music better than our historic "Poet of the Euphonium" Joshua Walford. Thank you Josh!