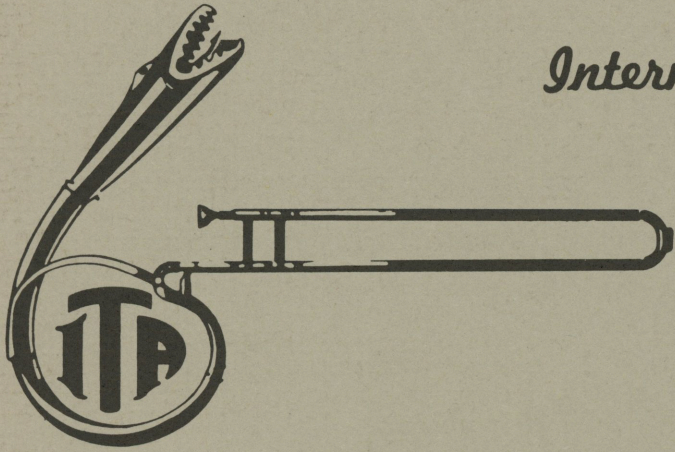


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Edward Kleinhammer
Bass Trombonist,
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Edward Kleinhammer: A Tribute

By Douglas Yeo

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Edward Kleinhammer. Just the name evokes unforgettable responses from every trombonist. Forty five years ago, a young man with that name, just twenty years old, sat down in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and helped change the trombone world forever. This year, on June 15, he stepped down into retirement after one of the longest and most distinguished careers on any instrument in any orchestra. But, Edward Kleinhammer, before you put down the trombone and pick up your golf clubs and jump in your canoe, before you start listening to concerts from the "other" side of the bell, perhaps this would be a good time to reflect on what you have meant to so many of us.



Edward Kleinhammer (around 1960)

Edward Kleinhammer was born in Chicago. Originally a violinist, he switched to trombone in high school and was accepted into the Chicago Civic Orchestra in 1938. In 1940, he was invited to play with Leopold Stokowski in his All-American Youth Orchestra. Kleinhammer played second trombone in that ensemble in a trombone section that included Charlie Gusikoff, Dorothy Ziegler and Howard Cole. After the famous tour of South America (having recorded over 100 78rpm record sides!), he auditioned for and was accepted into the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO). Since 1940, he has recorded over 300 works with the CSO, and can be heard on nearly every Chicago Symphony record made since then. He has performed under every CSO music director with the exception of its founder, Theodore Thomas. The inventor of the detachable "E attachment," he authored the most famous of all trombone texts, "The Art of Trombone Playing." (For an interview with Ed Kleinhammer, see Bruce Tracey's excellent article, "Orchestral Showcase: The Chicago Symphony Orchestra," *ITA Journal*, Vol. VII, No. 2, April, 1980.)

Interestingly enough, Edward Kleinhammer has had the longest tenure in a single position of any trombonist in a top American orchestra. Frank Crisafulli of the Chicago Symphony joined the orchestra two years before Kleinhammer as principal, but has played second trombone since 1955. By comparison Allen Ostrander played with the New York Philharmonic for "only" 29 years, Robert Harper with Philadelphia for 34 years, Ed Anderson with Cleveland for 21 years



CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA LOW BRASS (1972); (left to right) James Gilbertson, Jay Friedman (euphonium), Frank Crisafulli, Edward Kleinhammer, Arnold Jacobs (tuba)

and John Coffey with Boston for 11 years. Elmer Janes, who substituted for Kleinhammer in Chicago during the war years spent 35 years with the Detroit Symphony before his retirement in 1980.

I first met Ed Kleinhammer on a record of Bruckner's "Fourth Symphony." It was 1973, and the CSO was riding a crest of fabulous publicity, having been labeled (by *TIME* magazine) "Sine Qua Non"—without equal—of any orchestra in the world. Hearing that record changed my life, and after a year at Indiana University, I turned my sights to Chicago, where I could study with one of the most respected bass trombonists the world has ever known. As a student at Wheaton College, from 1974 until I graduated in 1976, I took the train each week into Chicago and walked those long blocks up to Michigan Avenue where I learned things I will never forget . . .

It was always the same. I would climb those 10 flights of stairs in the old American Conservatory building (elevators were *not* for bass trombone players—we had endurance) and knock on his door. You could always hear him practicing from the end of the hall. Nothing fancy, just long notes and slurs. He'd open the door, trombone in hand, dressed in his casual slacks and plaid flannel shirt. To him, there were more important things in life than looking the part. And we would start each lesson with about 10 minutes of duets.

The duets were always the best part of the lesson. He only used two duet books—the H. Voxman Rubank duets—but the impact was always the same. The goal was to match the sound. Of course he never said it, but he always gave the impression that he was getting as much out of playing them as you were (he probably was!). Hearing him play those duets was worth the trip.

BASICS. FUNDAMENTALS. How many times did he say those words!!! He never expressed much interest in recitals of solo literature. Sure, we worked on solos. But for two years,

the key thing was LISTEN. SOUND. That was it. Technique was important as were the twins intonation and rhythm. But without SOUND, nothing else mattered.

He always spoke highly of George Roberts, and considered him to have one of the finest trombone sounds around. It seems a bit ironic that one of Kleinhammer's primary models was a studio player, but his admiration for Roberts was endless. George did not possess a stunning technique, but he had the warmest, richest, most beautiful sound to ever come out of a trombone. And Kleinhammer had great respect for that sound and often encouraged me to emulate it.

He would never say, "Do it like me." I always had to choose for myself. But how could you not imitate him? He had played everything with trombone in the literature (or so it seemed) and had recorded most of it, too. When he coached a student on excerpts, it was with the voice of one who had been there. After all, he had recorded "*Zarathustra*" and "*Pictures*" five times each!

YAWN! NO COUGH MUSCLES! USE A "NO" TONGUE. UNIFORM ATTACKS, RELEASES, LENGTHS, VOLUME AND SHAPES. NO FOOTBALLS. TELL ME A STORY. G FLAT MAJOR SCALE, TENUTO. LONG NOTES. USE A TAPE RECORDER. NO FUNNY SHAPES!!!

In 1974, Maurice Andre was doing a concert tour as a soloist with a small chamber orchestra. His only Chicago area appearance was to be at Wheaton College. I mentioned this to Kleinhammer who said he might be interested in taking a lady friend to hear the concert (It turned out to be his first date with his wife, Norma). I got him two tickets and the concert was fabulous. Andre sounded great, and the audience went wild. I had a lesson the next day with Kleinhammer and was anxious to get his impression of the famous Frenchman.

My first words in the studio were, "What did you think of Andre?!" The response was not what I had expected. "An-

dre?”, he said. “I didn’t hear a note he played. BUT DID YOU HEAR THAT BASS PLAYER? HE MADE A CONCERTO OUT OF EVERY NOTE!!!” I should have known. The most famous trumpet player of our time plays a concerto and Ed Kleinhammer is listening to the one bass player in the orchestra, watching him perform his important (but greatly overshadowed) part with true artistry.

Any of my students will tell you that when I am at a loss to explain a concept or verbalize an excerpt, I will stop for a second, take a deep breath and say, usually looking off into space, “Now Kleinhammer would say . . .” That’s how strong the images are that he taught me. And I too play duets at every lesson, because I remember how valuable they were for me.

Ed Kleinhammer set out with one goal in mind—to be the best trombone player possible. It didn’t come naturally or easily. He had to work for it. Every sound that came out of his horn was a product of hours of hard work and discipline. Whether he achieved his goal to be the best is an unanswerable question. But it cannot be denied that he has had a profound influence on the trombone world, and that it will never be the same because of him.

He never sought to be put up on a pedestal. He is an extremely humble man who finds it difficult to accept compliments. When he became recognized as the great artist he is and the trombone world descended on him, he treated people with respect and dignity. He would give of his time to anyone who asked, be he (or she) a seasoned professional or a green high school student. And no matter how badly you played for him, he always had a good word, a bit of encouragement. While the trombone world can perhaps be forgiven when it says, “He can’t retire yet!”, let us be grateful to him for 45 years of inspiration. He has been a model for us all, and the highest compliment we can ever pay him is to emulate that dedicated musician who saw life as being more than just a big trombone. He took time for his family, for students, for leisure activities. And while the trombone was his “baby,” he managed to balance his work, a quiet religious faith and selfless giving. That, perhaps, is his greatest legacy. Thank you Ed Kleinhammer. Enjoy your retirement. You’ve deserved it.

My thanks to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for providing the photographs that accompany this article. Douglas Yeo is the Bass Trombonist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.