

A SAMPLE CHAPTER

Reverie

By **Larry Herzog Jr.**
larryherzogjr.com

CHAPTER EIGHT

Intermediate Band

*Intermediate concert band · International Music Camp, International Peace Garden
· Late July 2023*

* * *

The International Music Camp sits on the border, in the Peace Garden, half in North Dakota and half in Manitoba. I went there as a boy. I have already told you about the summer my euphonium section was six German players, a Canadian, and me, and that I sat first chair.

The last session of the season is adult camp. Saturday through Tuesday, end of July. Grown people take four days off work and go to band camp, and there are more of us than you would think.

I went for the first time in the summer of 2023, which put me about a year into playing again.

I had not been on those grounds in thirty-five years.

* * *

I signed up for the advanced band, because of course I did.

There were at least six euphonium players in it.

Here is how the seating worked. There were no auditions. The chairs had been settled some time before I arrived, and the same player had first chair, and she had it the year before that, and she would have it the year after. This is not a scandal. It is a four-day camp and nobody has time to run auditions, and somebody has to sit first, and it might as well be the person who has been coming the longest.

The music was not hard. The section was full. There was nothing for me to do there except be the seventh euphonium in a room that already had six, in an arrangement where the ranking was permanent and everyone knew it.

I lasted one rehearsal.

I want to be honest about my motives, because I have turned this over and I do not come out of it entirely clean. Some of what I felt was a legitimate reading of the room. And some of it was a fifty-two-year-old man who had been first chair everywhere he ever sat, discovering that he was now seventh, and not liking it.

Both. It was both. I have decided to say so rather than dress it up.

* * *

The intermediate band needed a euphonium.

They always need a euphonium. Every intermediate band everywhere always needs a euphonium, and this is the single most reliable fact in amateur music.

I turned up at the second rehearsal and Dr. Monte Grise was delighted to see me. Not polite about it — delighted, in the way a director is when the hole in his instrumentation walks through the door carrying a case.

I sat down and I have never gone back.

* * *

Let me tell you what an intermediate band is, in case you have never been in one.

It is people at every level in the same room. Somebody who played in high school forty years ago and is finding out what is left. Somebody genuinely accomplished on a different instrument, here to try a new one. Somebody who is simply not very good and does not pretend otherwise and shows up anyway. The parts are within reach. The tempos are humane. Things go wrong constantly and nobody dies.

I love it there. I have thought about why, and the answer is the same one I gave a few chapters ago about a Sunday morning slot called special music, and it is the same one I could give about a two-man low brass section in a community band.

Nobody is ranked. Nobody is being measured. The band needs a euphonium and I am a euphonium, and that is the entire transaction.

I had spent my whole youth being the best one in the room. It turns out that being the needed one is better, and it took me thirty-five years and a wrecked decade to find that out.

* * *

On the Tuesday, at the last rehearsal before the concert, the intermediate band goes around and shares.

That is all it is — people say a little about themselves and why they are there. Somebody has not played since 1974. Somebody's spouse died and this was on a list of things to try. Somebody drove nine hours. It is not a therapy circle. It is a group of adults who have spent four days together saying who they are before they go home.

When it came to me, I told them.

I said I was an alcoholic and that I had been addicted to opioids. I said I had been through treatment. I said that I had started playing again about a year before, and that I was only then beginning to understand how much the music had had to do with my still being here.

I had not said that out loud anywhere before. Not in a band room, not to anyone I played with. I had spent the previous fall in Valley City actively covering — managing what the room saw, making sure nobody caught what was going wrong with my hands.

And I said it in the intermediate band. Not the advanced one.

I do not think that is an accident, and I do not think it requires much explanation. You can tell the truth in a room where nobody is keeping score.

* * *

The second year I brought the trombone, because Monte Grise directs the jazz band as well as the intermediate concert band, and once I knew that it seemed like a waste not to. I have been in the jazz band every year since, and in the symphony orchestra — three ensembles across four days, for a man who did not touch an instrument for decades.

The third year I did not come alone.

*This is where the sample ends. The rest of Reverie is the invitation
it opens onto.*

Continue reading — get the book →