



The Taylor Times



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GRAPE STORIES

The trip had been scheduled for months and the daily planning established, or at least considered, for several weeks, yet as the final moments of a twelve-hour drive from Seattle to central California beckoned from my car's odometer, and the gently rippling waters of Clear Lake shimmered under the bright moonlight, there were already indications that the best laid plans were to be somewhat disrupted.

Clear Lake is the largest natural

Lake County, Clear Lake's political territory.

On that late Friday night in August, as I made my final approach to the town of Nice, where Worldmark's condo complex is located, I passed two wineries within about three miles of my destination. For that next day I had originally planned to relax, maybe ride the bicycle I'd brought along, but now suddenly found myself already adding a sidetrip to my previously



Distant view of Mount Konocti and Clear Lake

freshwater lake within the boundaries of California, formed by volcanic eruptions and other tectonic activity. Mount Konocti rises above the landscape in this northern Coast Range setting perched between the heat of the Sacramento Valley to the east, and the Pacific coastal valleys to the west. But despite its altitude and proximity to the ocean, it does get hot there in the summer. An hour south is the Napa Valley, forty-five minutes west are the various valleys of the Russian River system. For those familiar with the wine regions of California, these are areas of prime real estate. So, too, is the growing viticulture of

planned wine-tasting tasks. And, of course, when I realized just how good this wine really was, it was difficult not to include in the week ahead, as much investigation into the potable as possible.

Nearly every day included wine tasting of some sort, whether it was an actual visit to a winery or just sampling something different at dinner after a round of golf. And I only just scratched the surface, calling on maybe 15 vintners out of the literally hundreds within the Napa-Sonoma-Mendocino appellations. I won't say how much I spent, but I did return with

(Continued on page 2)

Clear Lake

(Continued from page 1)

about five cases packed alongside my tuba and trombone in the little car. (Yes, I did take the tuba, but just so I could stop for a lesson with the University of Oregon tuba



The estuary at the northwest end of Clear Lake.

professor along the way in Eugene. No, I did not wake up the neighbors at the condo with it.)

One day was particularly enjoyable. After crossing the mountains to the west, I headed back southeast through the Alexander Valley and the wineries there. The road then wound through another range and back into the Napa Valley at Calistoga. After a couple more wineries and a wonderful dinner at Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen, I walked over to the park in the center of town where wind and percussion members of the Napa Valley Symphony were presenting a concert in the gazebo. On a warm summer night, this was an ideal spot to close out the day and a great memory to bring back along with the many fine wines.

MUSICALLY SPEAKING

This year has seen a number of ups and down musically. In January *Brass Band Northwest* hosted the third annual Northwest Brass Band Festival, word of which is actually beginning to trickle around the world. Well-known band composer-conductor-clinician James Curnow was guest director and served as a great drawing card, but this year's event was spread over two days instead of the usual one, and attendance by both audiences and participants suffered the second day despite the quality and quantity of music. It will return to a one-day format in 2006.

In April, our quintet, the *Black Diamond Brass*, was dealt a significant blow with the sudden death of our second trumpet player Mike McDaniel. It was quite a setback for our burgeoning group but after several months of substitutes and auditions for a suitable replacement, the effort proved fruitful. The group is now more cohesive and enjoyable than ever as we work toward putting some CDs together. Listen to some of the results and read more about our history at the new web site, www.blackdiamondbrass.com.

In the spring I had the opportunity to



The NEW Black Diamond Brass: Toshi and Al, Todd, Jeff, and Lynne

play a concert with the *Seattle Philharmonic*, one of the local community orchestras, and was absolutely thrilled to be back in the classical repertoire with a real orchestra, something I'd wanted to do since I picked up the tuba again. It was intended by both myself and the tubist for whom I was subbing, that I'd play the next season in full, or until he officially resigned, prompting auditions. But the self-appointed brass manager had it in

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

mind to fill the position with one of his associates demonstrating that cronyism lives in the orchestra and effectively leaving me high and dry. I did at least have the chance to play with the *Federal Way Symphony*, a much better orchestra, for their holiday concert later in December.

The *Mahler Festival* was also a kick, up to a point. I was able to make it to three of the four reading sessions this year, during which a large-scale work is first rehearsed, then played as if in performance. Each session is led by a different guest conductor. Mahler's Ninth and Shostakovich's Tenth Symphonies were both great pieces to tackle, but Khachaturian's Second Symphony was perhaps the surprise of all the sessions... a fantastic work that should be performed much more often than it is. Well, of course, you were waiting for the downside to it all and that was that this year I auditioned for principal tuba but did not get the job. While I DID get to play Copland's El Salon Mexico and Barber's Prayers of Kierkegaard, and DID gain the experience of doing an audition, I DID NOT get to play in the Mahler Second, a big disappointment. But it was still worthwhile and I will just keep trying.



I and my tuba.

Brass Band Northwest continues to improve, despite the loss of some key players this season. Others have managed to step in and take up most of the slack. We are making early preparations for a ten-day concert tour of England in 2007, which should include some shared concerts with the local brass bands, certainly some of the best in Europe. It's still early so we'll have to see how this develops.

And, of course, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the *Pontiac Bay Symphony*, the mentoring orchestra with whom I'm now playing for the third season. This group consists of about 2/3 kids, ages 12-18, with the remainder mentoring adults, and concentrates on music from film, theater, and television. Our first concert this fall was well-received and, I think, deservedly so. The kids (and adults, too) played their hearts out. Everybody was quite proud of the results.

I continue to write as well. This year I recently completed a Concertino for Tuba and Concert Band (which I'm hoping I might be able to perform with the *Highline Band* later in the spring), and the first movement of a Woodwind Quintet. I'm also in progress on a piece for trombone (or euphonium) and piano. Then there have been a couple of experimental arrangements for the brass quintet, in particular Elgar's First Pomp and Circumstance March, which I hope will set us up for doing some graduations. If anyone is interested in listening to some of my music go to the quintet's web site, blackdiamondbrass.com, and select the Musicians page. You'll find personal links for individual players there.

Last December I purchased a flute, early this spring I picked up both a full-keyboard electric piano and a bass trombone, and I expect I will be adding a euphonium to the collection shortly, all of which I'm doing my best to practice and play well while not forsaking the necessary work on tuba. So all in all I guess I'm still just a little busy with music.

Other News

The California house is doing well, though it was necessary for me to spend \$4400 to have it connected to a new sewer system this fall. When I purchased it I asked specifically if it was connected and was told it was. Imagine my surprise when the City wrote telling me the sewer line had just been installed down my street and I would now be required to connect to it. Yes, there was a septic field in my front yard that I was totally unaware of. I'm still trying to determine if another party is responsible for the cost of this installation.

And just to further demonstrate how long it always takes me to do things, for more than a year I've been trying to complete a music practice room in my garage. Even though I am writing this article while sitting in front of a computer in that room, it remains unfinished, though at least functional. Much of the ceiling remains to be completed, but enough of it is in place to keep both heat and sound comfortably within the room's confines. It will be a real pleasure when the last of the work is completed.



Various stages of music room construction



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