

# Children as mutes – the practice of stuffing babies and young children into the bells of large brass instruments

*Gavin Holman – March 2018*

How many children have had their lives blighted by their fathers stuffing them into a tuba, and then having that sorry experience recorded for posterity in a photograph? It appears to have been a commonplace activity in the early years of brass bands, though we cannot know how widespread the practice was before the advent of photography, through lack of evidence, though there are plenty of examples since then.



It is clear that the muting ability of such children was not the main reason for jamming them into the instruments – they would have either blocked all sound or wiggled around too much to allow a consistent mute effect.

In most cases it seems that the menfolk were the main suspects in these cases, though there are a few instances where mothers were at least compliant with the activity.

There is also evidence of occasional group activity, rather just there being a single perpetrator.

I am also saddened to report that some corporations condoned the practice, even going as far as using the images to promote their brass instruments to the wide world.

Children were not the only living creatures used as mutes – there is evidence that dogs have also been inserted as a muffler.

It is gratifying to note that this practice is no longer as prevalent as in the past – at least on the basis of recorded offences – but I'm sure that every tuba player (men especially), who has had children, has at least once wondered "what if..."

As a tuba player myself I did not try to put either of my daughters into my instrument that I can recall (albeit when they were much smaller) but it would have made a great family photo!

One can only wonder at the long-term effects of these distressing events on the children themselves, some clearly were affected enough to want to engage further with the brass instrument, hugging it or attempting to blow into it. A few even went further, being so traumatised that they ultimately became brass players.

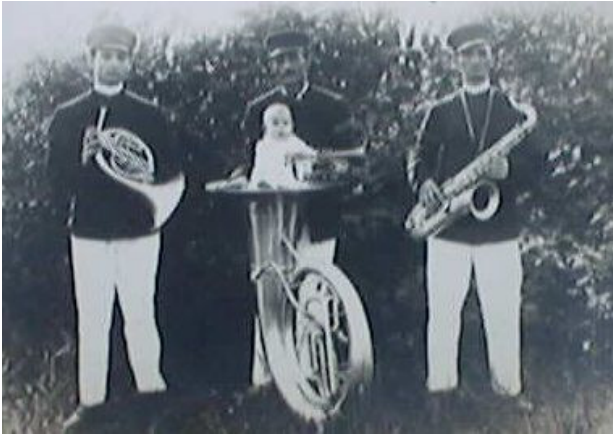
So – here is the evidence of these past crimes – first the mute offences, followed by some of the poor children who became obsessed with brass.











The Bass which I purchased from the C. G. Conn Co. of Elkhart Ind. is giving excellent satisfaction. It is easy to blow and convenient in model.



H. F. Doudt,  
Freeland Pa.

Baby Lewis of Boyne City, Mich., cradled in a standard size American Model Eb Bass made by C. G. Conn Co. of Elkhart, Ind.











