TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids: An Intergenerational Community Music Event

by

Sarah Powell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music Education
in the University of Michigan
2023

Thesis Committee:

Professor Marie McCarthy, Chair
Professor Colleen Conway
Professor David Zerkel
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Marie McCarthy for your patient guidance and feedback throughout this process. I have treasured your mentorship and encouragement over the years on my journey as a music educator.

I am also deeply indebted to Dr. Colleen Conway and Professor David Zerkel for giving your time and insights while serving on my thesis committee. I am so grateful for your thoughtfulness and dedication.

This endeavor would not have been possible without the members of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas. Thank you for your encouragement, enthusiasm, openness, and for being so welcoming. Thank you for sharing your time and your stories, for breathing life into this paper.

Many thanks to my amazing cohort members at the University of Michigan for your support and friendship throughout this degree. I am grateful and proud to be considered your peer and can’t wait to see what you will achieve next.

Thank you to all of my tuba-euphonium teachers who inspired my love and passion for the instrument with your skill, professionalism, and incredible musicianship. I am thankful for you every time I perform and honor your contributions to the tuba at each TubaChristmas.

Thank you to my friend Vanessa for your encouragement and volunteering your time and energy to assist with this project. I will never forget your support.

To my parents, thank you for your unwavering belief, support, and love. I am the luckiest daughter to have you. I love you!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................... ii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... v
List of Appendices .......................................................................................................... vi
Abstract ............................................................................................................................ vii

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................... 1
Framing the Study .............................................................................................................. 2
Rationale for Study .......................................................................................................... 2
Development of Tuba Culture ........................................................................................ 8
Harvey Phillips ................................................................................................................. 8
TubaChristmas ............................................................................................................... 9
Purpose Statement ......................................................................................................... 12
Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 12
Summary ......................................................................................................................... 12

Chapter Two: Literature Review ..................................................................................... 14
Introduction ................................................................................................................... 14
Intergenerational Music in Communities and Schools .............................................. 14
Intergenerational Brass and Wind Ensembles ........................................................... 25
Tuba and Euphonium Ensembles ................................................................................. 28
Holiday Traditions and Intergenerational Music Making ......................................... 33
Summary ....................................................................................................................... 35

Chapter Three: Methodology ......................................................................................... 37
Introduction .................................................................................................................... 37
Research Design .......................................................................................................... 37
Researcher Positionality ............................................................................................... 38
Preparation for Study ................................................................................................... 39
Setting and Context ....................................................................................................... 40
Selection of Participants ............................................................................................... 42
Types of Data ............................................................................................................... 42
Research Procedure ..................................................................................................... 44
Timeline ......................................................................................................................... 45
Trustworthiness ............................................................................................................. 46
Organization of Findings .............................................................................................. 46
# Table of Contents

**Chapter Four: 2022 TubaChristmas Pictures and Portraits** .............................................. 48
  - Introduction ........................................................................................................... 48
  - 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas .................................................................... 48
  - Portraits of Interview Participants .................................................................... 51
  - Survey of Musician and Audience Participants .................................................. 57
  - Summary ............................................................................................................... 58

**Chapter Five: TubaChristmas Participant Experiences** .................................................. 59
  - Introduction ........................................................................................................... 59
  - Analysis .................................................................................................................. 59
  - Musician Participant Experiences ........................................................................ 59
  - Audience Participant Experiences ....................................................................... 68
  - Summary ............................................................................................................... 73

**Chapter Six: Meaning Making and Participation in TubaChristmas** ............................ 74
  - Introduction ........................................................................................................... 74
  - Tradition ................................................................................................................ 74
  - Intergenerational Connections ............................................................................ 78
  - Community Building ............................................................................................ 81
  - Uplifting Tuba Culture ......................................................................................... 83
  - Uplifting Others .................................................................................................... 87
  - Summary ............................................................................................................... 88

**Chapter Seven: Synthesis and Conclusion** .................................................................. 89
  - Introduction ........................................................................................................... 89
  - Benefits .................................................................................................................. 89
  - Challenges .............................................................................................................. 95
  - Implications for Ongoing Practice ....................................................................... 100
  - Recommendations for Future Research .............................................................. 101
  - Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 102

- References ............................................................................................................... 104

- Appendices ............................................................................................................. 111
List of Figures

Figure 1: Rehearsal Set Up ........................................................................................................49
Figure 2: Performance Set Up ....................................................................................................50
Figure 3: Participant Overview ................................................................................................52
Figure 4: Andy’s Signed TubaChristmas Carol Book-January 12, 2023 ...............................86
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix A: Survey Protocol</th>
<th>111</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Participant Interview Protocol</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in the TubaChristmas Study</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Director Rehearsal and Performance Notes</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event as an intergenerational community music-making opportunity. Research questions for this study included (1) How do musician participants in TubaChristmas describe their experiences in an annual intergenerational community ensemble? (2) How do audience participants perceive and experience the event? (3) What meanings do musician participants draw from their experiences in TubaChristmas? and (4) What elements of the TubaChristmas event provide perceived benefits to musician participants, and what elements provide challenges? Data included observation of the event, individual interviews with musician participants, survey of audience and musician participants, and documents collected from the event and from prior events. Analysis involved coding and categorizing observational data, survey results, and transcripts of individual interviews into themes as related to the research questions. The findings from this study showed that musician participants described the event as an enjoyable, inclusive musical experience that builds community. Audience participants described it as a fun musical tradition centered on connecting with family. Musicians drew meaning from TubaChristmas through sustaining a tradition, community building, intergenerational connections, uplifting tuba culture, and uplifting others. Finally, musician participants perceived musical, communal, and social benefits from the event, while experiencing challenges such as venue, tuba/euphonium needs, and elements of unpredictability.

Keywords: community music, intergenerational music, lifelong learning, music education, tuba, euphonium
Chapter One

Introduction

There are various ways in which generations can come together, including in families, churches, schools, and community events. Whatever the venue, music can be a particularly powerful mode for these interactions to occur due to the intrinsic value of music in humanity and its inherently social nature. In my own experience, playing trombone with my father and grandfather as a young music learner cemented the joy and application of playing music in contexts beyond school band, and provided me with special moments to bond and contribute equally to a common goal with my family members. As a young adult, community and alumni band participation has helped me develop treasured relationships with seniors and a feeling of belonging to my community as a whole. The shared love of music and desire to perform and further grow musical skills inspired these intergenerational interactions in my life. These various experiences were framed through family, community, and school, and each played an important role in shaping my perspective on what it means to be a musician, on aging, and being part of a community. This study investigated one intergenerational music event that occurs annually in Michigan: the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas.

I have participated in TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids, MI as a performer since 2015, and since that time traveled to other cities to participate in their TubaChristmas events as well. The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas has become a beloved tradition for myself, my friends, and family, and provides an annual opportunity to come together as a tuba euphonium community in celebration of the holiday season.

This chapter begins with a definition of the terms “intergenerational music program” and “community music” as used in this study. The definitions are followed by a discussion of the current gap between young and old generations in American society, and the musical, physical, socioemotional, and communal benefits that are observed in conjunction with intergenerational music programs. I discuss the challenges faced by many of these intergenerational
opportunities, along with the potential benefits of one shot versus long term, sustained programming. Next is a discussion of tuba culture and the history of TubaChristmas in the United States and in Grand Rapids. The purpose statement and research questions of this study conclude the chapter.

**Framing the Study**

A primary focus of this study is intergenerational music programs. I define it based on Ayala and colleagues’ (2007) study of such programs in Ontario: the purposeful bringing together of people from different or multiple age groups in “mutually beneficial” musical opportunities “to increase cooperation, interaction or exchange between the generations via sharing of knowledge, skills, and/or experiences” (p. 47).

In this study, intergenerational music making occurred in the context of a community in Grand Rapids, Michigan. According to Bartleet and Higgins (2018), community music is music made by and with communities to express “local identities, traditions, values, beliefs, aspirations, and social interactions” or as a musical intervention to “establish or restore peace or a sense of well-being in social, cultural, and political situations” (p. 2). Community music is often vital in providing opportunities for intergenerational interactions and concerns itself with “inclusion, community responsibility, excellence, creative opportunities, diversity, and acknowledgement of the importance of music-making across the lifespan” (p. 3).

**Rationale for Study**

**Gap Between Young and Old**

America’s increasingly mobile society and reduced numbers of multigenerational households can result in feelings of isolation in seniors living alone or in residential communities, and the tendency of children to experience limited contact with older adults, including their own grandparents (Frego, 1995). In 2012, Belgrave stated: “As the aging population has grown, there has also been an increase in the development of senior housing facilities. Independent living, assisted living, skilled nursing care, and continuing care retirement
communities are the most common options in senior housing facilities” (p. 1). Camareno (2019) added that relationships and accessibility, in addition to location, can seriously hinder the community engagement of older adults. This generational disconnect can result in age-related stereotypes that harm communities, damage children’s ability to hold a positive view of aging, and hinder seniors from experiencing their golden years with a sense of dignity and belonging.

Intergenerational programming is used to reduce the harm of these issues and can be mutually beneficial to all involved (De Vries, 2012; Kennedy, 2003). Therefore, the successful implementation and availability of these programs is important for everyone: the elderly in our communities as well as the children and young adults who will one day be in their shoes, participating in the circle of life.

Benefits of Intergenerational Programs

**Musical Benefits**

If an intergenerational program is based around musical engagement or education, it should be expected that commonly perceived benefits of these activities are musical in nature. Participants in several studies reported that there was increased teaching and learning of musical skills due to the intergenerational nature of the interactions (Kennedy, 2003; Varvarigou et al, 2011). Reciprocity in learning allowed these musical exchanges to be mutually beneficial for participants, a key component of intergenerational programming (De Vries, 2012).

Heightened performance is another documented benefit of bringing multiple age groups together. In several studies, the joining together of groups with different experiences and physical maturity allowed choirs to produce a different group sound than they would have on their own (Conway & Hodgman, 2008; Sutherland, 2017). Being able to contribute to a sound outside of their usual experience was an exciting and appreciated benefit for singers. In Sutherland’s study, the ability to perform large-scale works inaccessible to either group alone was seen as especially valuable.

**Physical Benefits**
Music therapy programs, rather than those grounded in formal music education settings, have specific goals for participants that may relate to cognitive or physical wellbeing as opposed to the teaching and learning of music. Camareno (2019) reviewed literature that documented intergenerational music programs as having increased breath support, diaphragmatic control, physical endurance, muscle relaxation, and respiration regularity in older participants as outcomes. Music education programs that include intergenerational interactions have anecdotal evidence of health and wellbeing findings for seniors as well, such as increased energy following program participation (Varvarigou et al, 2011). Intergenerational music programs encourage physical activity outside of many participants’ typical daily motions, and it can help reduce the effects of sedentariness as well as the natural physical changes that occur with aging.

**Social-Emotional Benefits**

One of the most heavily documented findings resulting from participation in intergenerational music programs is its social-emotional benefits. Considering that a major issue facing the elderly population is feelings of isolation and stereotypical attitudes resulting in ageism, these findings are extremely important and often are considered one of the primary reasons for connecting younger and older musicians. Using the *Age Group Evaluation and Description (AGED) Inventory*, attitudes toward youth and seniors have been documented as significantly improving toward the opposite generation following participation or observation of intergenerational music programs (Bowers, 1998; Darrow et al, 1994, 2001). In qualitative research, both younger and older participants were found to have reduced stereotypical views toward others, reduced feelings of isolation, and an increase in community engagement (Cusicanqui & Salmon, 2005). Other examples of social-emotional benefits include improved social engagement, an increased feeling of being valued and mutual respect, and a growth in social networks (De Vries, 2012; Kennedy, 2003). These and similar benefits are often a major
draw for people to attend community music events and are a common goal for most intergenerational music programs.

**Communal Benefits**

Communities as well as individuals have something to gain when intergenerational music programs are in place. Although intergenerational programs can have different goals or purposes, one type as described in Ayala and colleagues (2007) is an intergenerational program where “older people and youth [collaborate] to support their community” (p. 47). Qualitative benefits to communities have been found as fostering a sense of family and a communal culture of singing, as described by Sutherland (2018), but benefits can also be more measurable. In describing the Amabile Boys Choir that Beynon founded in London, Ontario, Beynon and Alfano (2013) found that the number of boys’ choirs in elementary and secondary schools in the region, as well as the number of males singing in the community, increased over the years succeeding the creation of the intergenerational choir. Additionally, the original intergenerational association expanded from one to four choirs throughout the development of the organization, allowing the program to become accessible to more and more people. The range of benefits of intergenerational programs from personal to communal expands the meaning of these programs as being “mutually beneficial” (Ayala et al, 2007, p.47). The community hosting the activity becomes an entity itself that can both give and receive in these experiences.

**Challenges of Intergenerational Programs**

While there are many reported benefits of bringing young and old generations together to make music, some challenges have been identified in the process as well. Challenges in implementing these programs often relate to difficulties in accessing the proper resources and in missed opportunities relating to program preparation.

Access to resources can create barriers for intergenerational music programs. Appropriate curricular resources that can address the learning needs of both seniors and
youths are required so that programs remain mutually beneficial and don’t condescend to or ignore one generation over the other (De Vries, 2012; Tsugawa, 2021). Access to other resources such as funding, transportation, spaces that can mitigate health concerns, facilities, and sufficient and trained staff and volunteers are also potential barriers to implementing successful programs (Beynon et al, 2013; Cusicanqui & Salmon, 2005; Varvarigou et al, 2011). Personnel trained in music education, social group work, and in working with children and the elderly can impact the success of a program, but may be difficult to recruit in some situations (Beynon et al, 2013; Cusicanqui & Salmon, 2005).

In preparing for intergenerational music programs, several researchers have found that intentional planning or lack thereof for specific outcomes in the program’s schedule can influence the success of the program as related to those outcomes. For example, if a program aims to help participants build social relationships, a portion of the schedule should be set aside for social activities. In Sutherland’s (2017, 2018) studies, both younger and older choir members felt like they had missed an opportunity to make connections with the opposite choir, because rehearsals didn’t allocate time for social interaction between groups. Cusicanqui and Salmon (2005) described a lack of communication and clarity of purpose to their participants that resulted in feelings of uncertainty and decreased participation for some people in the group.

These challenges are important for leaders of intergenerational music programs to address in order to prevent issues for their participants. By doing so, music directors and organizers can provide the most positive experiences possible in their programs and increase the likelihood of their sustainability.

**Potential Benefits of Short vs. Long Term Programs**

The variety of formats and structures for intergenerational music programs ranges widely depending on the context and purpose of the program. Programs differ not only depending on whether they are instrumental or vocal, formal or informal, or based in schools or communities, but also in the duration in which they are implemented. Some programs are created for the
purpose of research and are afterwards discontinued (Bowers, 1998), while others were in existence before researchers got involved and have continued after the study was concluded (Sutherland, 2018). Even in programs existing only for the duration of the related research and funding, however, structures differ greatly on the frequency and longitudinal period of interactions.

TubaChristmas occurs only once a year, however it is an annual tradition that participants can anticipate and look forward to each holiday season. It is ongoing, but in a different way than an intergenerational program with weekly rehearsals. The benefits surrounding TubaChristmas participation therefore may be different than other programs, related to its history, tradition, and rituals.

It seems likely that the potential benefits of intergenerational music programs could be linked to the intensity or duration of each format. In a study of informal intergenerational music interactions of three older Australians, De Vries (2012) found that the ongoing nature of the participants’ intergenerational activities likely was an important factor in their perceived benefits from taking part. Additionally, the communal benefits observed in some studies may take prolonged engagement to take effect, like in Sutherland’s (2018) and Beynon and Alfano’s (2013) studies of permanently in-place programs.

However, musical, physical, and social-emotional benefits have still been documented from programs implemented over a relatively short time and then ended, making the argument that pop-up intergenerational music programs are still worthwhile endeavors (Cusicanqui & Salmon, 2005; Kennedy, 2003; Varvarigou et al, 2011). Short-term or once-off programming can still provide some benefit while partially mitigating the challenge of locating long-term funding, facilities, and personnel (Beynon et al, 2013; Cusicanqui & Salmon, 2005), since the required commitment would be much less than in a recurring program. While the benefits may not be as intense as from long-term programming, the costs of implementing a program in the short term are less. This trade off in fewer benefits for fewer challenges seems to be worthwhile in many
cases, or at least a good starting point for communities. A once-off program that happened successfully creates more benefit than a long term program that was too expensive or impractical to implement.

**Development of Tuba Culture**

The tuba family of instruments has a relatively short history when compared to most other orchestral and wind band instruments (Boone, 2011). Since their invention in the mid-1800s, the reputation of the tuba and euphonium has fluctuated from being seen by the public as humorous and clumsy, to the instruments being acknowledged as viable for serious musicians (Lair, 2010; Reifsnyder, 1980; Stern, 2001). Changing the stereotype around tubas was something that prominent tubists strove for. This was achieved gradually as influential players created professional organizations and ensembles, were taken on as faculty by universities, and made public performances that displayed the capacity of all the instruments (Lair, 2010).

However, although the tuba and euphonium currently hold a much more respected position in musical communities than in the mid-twentieth century, some public stereotypes of the tuba being only an “oompah” instrument persist, if less so than before, and many people are still unfamiliar with the euphonium (Boone, 2011; Cottrell, 2004). Despite this history of fluctuating public views of the tuba family, and perhaps because of it, there is generally a strong feeling of identity and camaraderie among musicians who play these instruments. Foundations laid by early proponents of the instrument in order to create a strong tuba community, like the formation of tuba ensembles, the International Tuba Euphonium Association, and events like TubaChristmas, continue to serve tubists and euphoniumists today (Boone, 2011; Lair, 2010).

**Harvey Phillips**

Harvey Phillips, or “Mr. Tuba,” was a major contributor to the advancement of the tuba during his lifetime (Phillips, 2012, p.172). Born in 1929, Harvey grew up in a large farming family in Missouri, and picked up the tuba in high school when the previous tubist left to join the
military, leaving a spare instrument. After high school, he spent the summer playing with the
King Bros. Circus on recommendation from his high school band director. He was so
successful, that although he left the circus to study the tuba at the University of Missouri, he was
hired by the prestigious Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey circus band. It was during one
of the circus tours through New York City that Harvey met his teacher William (Bill) Bell, who
would later inspire Harvey to create TubaChristmas in Bell’s honor. Bell arranged for Harvey to
attend Juilliard as his student, and continued to mentor and have a close relationship with
Harvey for the rest of his life. Harvey led a successful career as a performing artist in such
renowned ensembles as the New York City Opera, the New York City Ballet, the United States
Army Field Band, as well as being a founding member of the New York City Brass Quintet.

Harvey’s high performance standards, efforts in promoting the brass quintet as a
performing chamber ensemble, as well as the hundreds of works for tuba he commissioned
from a variety of composers well known and upcoming, contributed to the growing reputation of
tuba performance as a serious endeavor (Phillips, 2012). He also made many connections
throughout the music industry during his role as orchestra contractor for several famous
conductors including Igor Stravinsky among others, and his time working as the vice president
of financial affairs for the New England Conservatory in Boston. Harvey left New England to
take over the tuba professorship at Indiana University from William Bell and remained in that
position until his retirement in 1994. Harvey’s accomplishments and contributions were
recognized nationally in 2007 when he became the first wind instrument player to be awarded
entry into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame, although this award was only one of
many he received during his lifetime. Harvey passed away in 2010 leaving a legacy of respect
and appreciation for tubas and the musicians who play them.

TubaChristmas

Harvey Phillips organized the first TubaChristmas in 1974, in honor of his teacher
William Bell who was born on Christmas day in 1902 (Lewis, 1988). Over 320 players
assembled at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City on December 22, 1974, and under the direction of Paul Lavalle, played 19 carols arranged for the occasion by Alec Wilder. Since the initial performance, TubaChristmas events, known for bringing mass tuba-euphonium ensembles together to play carols, have been coordinated through the Harvey Phillips Foundation, Inc. in hundreds of cities each year (Tubachristmas, 2022, “Where is Tubachristmas?”). Though initially conceived as a tribute to his mentor, Phillips expressed that through honoring Bell, the event was also about representing the larger tuba community to the general public. The TubaChristmas website proclaims that the events are a time to “reflect on our heritage and honor all great artists/teachers whose legacy has given us high performance standards, well structured pedagogy, professional integrity, personal values and a camaraderie envied by all other instrumentalists” (Tubachristmas, 2022, “Attention All Tuba and Euphonium Players”). Additionally, the intergenerational aspect of TubaChristmas was not lost on Phillips who shared that an important feature of the event was “to see a nine-year-old player standing next to a tubist from the symphony orchestra, next to a 75-year-old enthusiast, all surrounded by college players” (Lewis, 1988, p.88). In an interview with Lair (2010), Phillips emphasized the inclusiveness of TubaChristmas and that “no tuba player is turned away” (p. 81).

TubaChristmas has clearly had a significant impact on the visibility of tuba-euphonium ensembles to the public (Lair, 2010). Tuba ensembles are in most cases relatively isolated in academic settings such as university recitals or instrument association performances (Boone, 2011), but TubaChristmas reaches thousands of spectators who are there for the holiday spirit and who might never consider attending formal recitals (Lair, 2010). Not only does TubaChristmas provide an opportunity for a wide variety of audiences to experience tuba ensembles, but it might be the only opportunity for amateur or non-collegiate tubists and euphoniumists to play in such an ensemble due to their lack of prevalence outside of universities or professional settings (McLean, 2016). However, while there has been plenty of news coverage and articles covering TubaChristmas since its foundation, there is little empirical
research that speaks to its impact on the tuba community and beyond. At best, TubaChristmas occasionally received a mention in studies on more “serious” tuba and euphonium topics, such as in Boone (2011), Keathley (1982), and Lair (2010). Therefore, a study of a TubaChristmas event, specifically the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event, contributes to the literature on both intergenerational music programming and tuba-euphonium ensembles.

**TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids**

TubaChristmas first came to Grand Rapids in 2006 at the St. Cecilia Music Center, organized by Karen Dunnam and directed by Dan Clouse (Dunnam, 2021). It was held in conjunction with the Grand Rapids Community College instrumental holiday concert, and 33 musicians came out to the event. The event continued at St. Cecilia's as part of the college’s holiday concert until 2011, when Grand Rapids TubaChristmas moved to Grandville High School for a year, performing with a New Horizons band and was directed by Geoffrey Saint. From 2012-13, the event moved back to St. Cecilia Music Center, this time hosted by Hark Up, a music ministry based in West Michigan. In 2014 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas moved to Fountain Street Church where it remained until 2021. From 2014 on, Grand Rapids TubaChristmas occurred as its own standalone event and has been directed by Matt Palmieri. For 2022, a new venue had to be arranged due to calendar conflicts at Fountain Street Church, and the event landed at the Grand Rapids Public Museum.

Musical selections have remained mostly from *Carols for a Merry TUBACHRISTMAS*, arranged by Alec Wilder for the original TubaChristmas in New York City and later edited by Norlan Bewley. Occasionally other songs have been included, for example, the addition of Bewley's “Santa Wants A Tuba For Christmas” in 2017. The attendance of musicians at the event has ranged from 26 (during a winter storm) to 70, with a registration fee of $10 that includes an annual commemorative button and a pizza lunch. Karen Dunnam has organized Grand Rapids TubaChristmas every year since she introduced the event to the city in 2006, pausing only in 2020 in response to the Covid pandemic. The event then returned in 2021 with
its largest attendance up to that point, only to break its attendance record a second year in a row with 98 musicians in 2022.

**Purpose Statement**

Intergenerational community music programs can be powerful venues for bridging the gap between young and old, providing musical, physical and socioemotional benefits for participants and their communities. There are many studies documenting the benefits these programs provide as well as the challenges in implementing them successfully. However, the unique context of each community suggests more research is needed to explore the factors that can help or hinder success in various intergenerational music interactions. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the intergenerational experiences of musician and audience participants in the 2022 TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids event. The study findings may be useful for those working in communities and schools to be aware of how this program works and the benefits it provides and the challenges it presents.

**Research Questions**

This study specifically sought to provide evidence related to four research questions.

1) How do musician participants in TubaChristmas describe their experiences in an annual intergenerational community ensemble?

2) How do audience participants perceive and experience the event?

3) What meanings do musician participants draw from their experiences in TubaChristmas?

4) What elements of the TubaChristmas event provide perceived benefits to musician participants, and what elements provide challenges?

**Summary**

In Chapter One I showed how intergenerational community music programs can help mitigate issues for individuals and communities created by a generational gap and natural aging. Benefits from these programs can be musical, physical, social-emotional, and communal, but challenges in implementing the programs are also present. The development of tuba culture,
the improving public image of the tuba family of instruments, and Harvey Phillips’s contribution toward promoting tubas through TubaChristmas was also discussed. A study on the 2022 TubaChristmas event furthers the inquiry on intergenerational community music programs, seeking evidence related to the four research questions. In Chapter Two I will include a review of the literature on intergenerational music programs as found in communities and schools, intergenerational brass and wind ensembles, tuba-euphonium ensembles, and holiday traditions and intergenerational music.
Chapter Two
Literature Review

In this chapter I review the research studying intergenerational music programs and their documented forms, implementation, benefits, and challenges as well as the research studying tuba-euphonium ensembles. The review includes research conducted within the fields of music education and music therapy, and it seeks to provide context for where and in what form and community contexts intergenerational music programs are found. While the overall structure and details of individual programs are shown to vary widely, many commonalities are discovered when looking at the outcomes of each program.

The literature regarding intergenerational music programs will be presented in the following categories: intergenerational music in communities and schools, intergenerational brass and wind ensembles, tuba-euphonium ensembles, and holiday traditions and intergenerational music.

Intergenerational Music in Communities and Schools

This section reviews research on intergenerational music programs or music making situated within communities and schools. These studies include programs initiated by or housed within schools, music making such as that found in established community ensembles, local musical productions, and partnerships between establishments like daycare centers and residential homes, as well as music performed as extracurricular activities, at home, or in garage band style groups.

One documented benefit of intergenerational music programs is their potential to positively influence attitudes toward those outside of one’s age cohort. In Darrow and colleagues’ (1994) study, high school students and senior community members were given the Age Group Evaluation and Description (AGED) Inventory before and after participating in an extra-curricular intergenerational choir for two semesters. Their purpose was to show the effect of sustained participation in an intergenerational choir on cross-age attitudes. The researchers
used $t$ test procedures to determine the results, which showed a significant improvement in attitudes toward male seniors and an insignificant but still improved attitude toward female seniors and male/female teens. The findings of this study seem to indicate that intergenerational music programming can be useful in both providing music education for participants and in helping different generations communicate with each other.

Bowers (1998) took the same idea but applied the study to attitudes between college students and seniors. This quasi-experimental study combined college music education, music therapy, and non-music majors who were members of a Women’s Glee Club ($n=15$ for the first semester, and $n=12$ for the 2nd semester) and members of the Senior Singers community choir ($n=15$ for both semesters) for a two-semester period in a previously established “Adopt-a-Choir” program. Participants were administered the AGED Inventory before and after the program, and survey results were compared using the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs test. Data analysis showed significant increases in all domains for both college students and seniors after the post test. In addition to the survey results, informal predictors such as rehearsal attendance and informal observations of senior and college students’ appreciation pointed toward the successful implementation of the program. The findings of this study show that intergenerational music programs can have a positive impact on college-age students’ and seniors’ cross-age attitudes, as well.

In a follow up study, Darrow et al. (2001) used the AGED Inventory to test the effect of an intergenerational choir concert on the audience’s cross-age attitudes. While the effect of participation in an intergenerational performance had already been examined, their purpose was to study how viewing an intergenerational choir’s concert would affect the audience. Using a similar design to the 1994 study by Darrow and colleagues, high school students ($n=223$) and seniors ($n=171$) were given the AGED Inventory as a pre- and post-test to viewing a one-hour concert by an established intergenerational choir at a school assembly. Survey data was analyzed using $t$ test procedures and resulted in positive changes in attitude toward all groups,
with significant increases in senior attitudes toward all age and gender groups. Knowing that audience members can learn and benefit from intergenerational performances provides more possibilities for music educators and music therapists looking to positively impact people’s lives and increases access to [these] music performance opportunities.

In one community, a church and the community at large came together to put on a production of Britten’s opera *Noye’s Fludde* (Kennedy, 2003). Britten purposefully stated in the introductory notes to the score that this opera was meant to accommodate a diverse cast, so Kennedy as researcher-participant cast a wide array of people to fill the stage, ranging from ages 6 to 89, with abilities from beginner to professional. Kennedy sought to discover what types of music learning took place throughout the production of the opera, using interviews and informal conversations with 16 cast members and a video of the penultimate performance. Both musical and non-musical learning were reported by participants, with analysis resulting in the categories of vocal/choral development, musicianship, and socialization. Among all of these areas, findings indicated that although the learning outcomes were different for each participant depending on their individual backgrounds, everyone had something to gain from the diversity of experience brought to the table by the cast. Kennedy noted that an essential element to bringing their cast together for a successfully enriching musical and social experience was the “mutual respect” among participants and the “community spirit that pervaded the company” (p. 41).

Cusicanqui and Salmon’s (2005) study described the development and implementation of an intergenerational singing group between 10-11 year olds in a dropout-prevention program and seniors in a settlement house residence in New York City. As research-participant, Cusicanqui documented the planning and processes of the program in a personal exposition, and described how the singing group occurred, along with its benefits and challenges, using a literature review and artifacts from the project. Artifacts from the study included informal interviews with participants, transcripts of the program’s meetings, and a poem written by the children in the study in honor of one of the senior members who passed away during the
program. Musical and social benefits were observed for both young and old participants, including improved musical skills, reduction of stereotypes, reduced feelings of isolation, and increased community involvement. The researchers emphasized the importance of “clarity of purpose” (p. 189) in designing group work as well as access to adequately trained staff toward ensuring these collaborations are successful.

Another example of an intergenerational college and community choir program is a qualitative study by Conway and Hodgman (2008). Rather than focus on measurable changes in attitude toward self and others, this study examined the experiences of participants from a phenomenological perspective, aiming to describe the perceived positive outcomes and challenges of the intergenerational collaboration. The study collected data over four months of a “collaborative intergenerational performance project” (CIPP) where college and community choir members rehearsed, traveled, and performed together (p. 221). Data collection began with focus groups (n=8) from each of the choirs at the beginning of the CIPP, and included written journals (n=16), individual interviews at the end of the project (n=16), and the teacher-researcher’s personal logs. These were individually and comparatively analyzed, resulting in the emergence of both positive outcomes and challenges in the CIPP. Perceived positive outcomes were a “heightened performance experience, a better understanding of others, and no signs of an age barrier,” while challenges within the experience were related to the “importance of preparation for collaboration and issues regarding placement of singers in the ensemble” (p. 220). These findings support other intergenerational music studies that have shown benefits can be inherently musical for participants, as well as social, like in Kennedy’s (2003) study, and that the preparation for collaboration in regard to set up and schedule almost certainly affects various musical and social outcomes (Cusicanqui & Salmon, 2005).

Alfano (2008) conducted a qualitative study to gather older adults’ reflections on being co-participants with high school teens in a rather unique instrumental program: a fully funded intergenerational daytime band program in a Canadian public school. This unusual program had
been running since 1994, successfully bringing seniors and teens together as co-learners in a music education and school setting. Alfano used ethnographic tools to gather data, as well as questionnaires and an instrumental case study approach. Seniors reflected on personal, social and intellectual benefits from their participation in the intergenerational music program. The model of this particular program, which brought generations together as equals in a music learning environment, was concluded to bring “a greater understanding, acceptance, care, respect, and appreciation of one age group for another,” certainly benefiting all involved (p. viii).

One example of an intergenerational music program that connected elementary school students and seniors was a branch of the Music for Life Project in East London. Varvarigou and colleagues’ (2011) program of study was part of a larger project on music and seniors, but their research focused on contextual factors of intergenerational music activity that impact active musical engagement. The intergenerational general music program they studied included two trained music leaders, primary school students and their teachers, and seniors from two housing schemes in East London. The project occurred over two months and ended with a formal concert at the Barbican Centre. Interviews, written responses, and drawings from participants were coded into five main categories: “(1) affective responses, (2) health and wellbeing, (3) social relationships and interactions, (4) teaching and learning and (5) performance” (p. 210). The researchers pointed out that in addition to social emotional impacts, the peer learning and musical skill building aspects of the program were appreciated by participants and considered to build confidence and self-efficacy in musical ability. This supports that music education’s involvement in intergenerational programming is important for music’s inherent value to humans as well as the social emotional benefits it provides. It is notable, however, that this program incorporated trained leaders, financial support, and a certain level of planning and preparation that doesn’t always appear to be present or available in intergenerational programming including young children (Beynon et al, 2013), which might speak to the seemingly overwhelming success of the project.
In contrast to the formal community choirs brought together by Cusicanqui and Salmon (2005) and Kennedy (2003), De Vries (2012) conducted a phenomenological study of three different informal music makers in Australia. The three older adults were selected for De Vries’s study by purposive and snowball sampling because they all participated in intergenerational music making in some way. Irene (67 years old) played piano with her granddaughter (11 years old), Margaret (75 years old) volunteered as an accompanist for a local school’s choir and taught one student (8 years old) the violin, and Bruce (72 years old) invited a friend’s son (15 years old) who played saxophone to join his 1950s style rock band. De Vries looked to describe their lived experiences of those activities. Open-ended, one-on-one interviews were the main source of data along with informal conversation, and data were analyzed with an inductive approach to identify themes. Five key themes emerged about intergenerational music experiences including augmented social engagement, improved intergenerational attitudes, the valuation of choice from seniors in their music making, increased feeling of being valued and respected, and a reciprocity in learning between age groups. De Vries noted that the ongoing nature of Irene, Margaret, and Bruce’s music making with their younger counterparts was likely crucial to their perceived benefits from participating. Another perceived benefit from the study was the expanded social networks of each of the adults, especially the two women who lived alone. All three felt that their musical interactions were valuable and hoped to continue with their intergenerational engagement.

Beynon and colleagues (2013) described the state of intergenerational singing programming in a specific geographic region in Ontario, Canada. The authors looked for the frequency, form, and characteristics of current intergenerational singing activities within a 50km radius of their target city in order to guide planning for future programs. Their method involved identifying organizations serving older adults, such as long-term care residential facilities, and/or young children, such as day-care facilities, and then conducting telephone surveys to determine where intergenerational singing programs were located in the community. Out of 170 total
organizations, 134 responded to the survey, and of those only 36 housed any sort of singing program with children and senior adults together.

In-depth interviews from seven respondents who had indicated the presence of a program were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a content analysis to procure the study’s findings. The authors found that the frequency of intergenerational singing programs was very low, although the perceived benefits of participation in these programs was widespread. All of the respondents stated that they hoped for the intergenerational singing experiences to continue in some form, but acknowledged challenges in this type of programming, such as health concerns, transportation and accessibility, facilities, and personal issues. Despite the barriers, respondents described perceived benefits for older adults, children, and shared benefits from these activities. Takeaways from the study suggested a need to delve further into the benefits of intergenerational singing programs, make accessible best strategies for utilizing intergenerational singing curricula, and find ways to overcome barriers of access to help seniors and children get together to sing.

The Glamaphones are an LGBTQI mixed-voice community choir in Wellington, New Zealand with members ranging in age from their early 20s to 70s. Bird’s (2017) research studied the purpose of this recently formed choir and the benefits of singing in such a group for individuals and the surrounding community. In order to collect data, techniques included artifact analysis, concert observations, audience intercept surveys, and semi-structured interviews. Bird used a feminist post-structural framework to complete the analysis and discovered emergent themes. The findings showed that the Glamaphones choir created a space for members to affirm and maintain their LGBTQI identities, as well as a community space and “a political and educative voice for LGBTQI-identified people” (p. 193). In addition, the intergenerational and mixed-gender relationships were valued by choir members as people in various stages of their walks of life came together to form community. In this example, the intergenerational music
making in the Glamaphones was secondary to its purpose of providing an LGBTQI space in the community, but nevertheless provided an element of value for participants.

A sustained school-based intergenerational choir in West London provided rich enough data in a case study that Sutherland (2017, 2018) was able to report findings in two articles: the first focusing on high school students’ perspectives on their experiences and the second on the adults’ point of view. The setting for this intergenerational choir was within an all-boys school with a flourishing choral department, where the student Chamber Choir and adult Choral Society primarily rehearsed separately and came together on the day of the concert. In Sutherland’s first article, the research was examining what factors influence students’ experiences in collaborating with adult choristers, and if a communal culture of singing is enhanced by these interactions. Four choir students participated in open-ended interviews, which were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and discussed in relation to Intergroup Contact Theory. The findings in this case showed musical and social benefits from the collaboration between the choirs, as well as some challenges or missed opportunities in bringing the two groups together. The students reported great appreciation for the musical experiences and outcomes provided by the opportunity to sing together with the adult Choral Society, particularly by being able to perform large-scale works, in addition to feeling a great sense of community and unity within their choir. However, the students’ sense of community did not extend to the adult choristers and they felt they didn’t get a chance to connect socially and develop relationships between choirs. In that sense, while the program fostered a communal culture of singing, the chance for intergenerational music making to provide the social and emotional benefits shown in other research appears to have been missed (Alfano, 2008; Bowers, 1998).

Looking at the same West London program through the lens of older adults’ experiences, Sutherland (2018) investigated the perceptions that older people have of younger people in intergenerational music making. Data for this case study was also collected from open-ended interviews, in this instance with four participants from the adult Choral Society. The
methodology was grounded in the social constructivist worldview and Sutherland used thematic analysis to reach the findings. Adult participants’ responses were categorized into four themes. Benefits that the adults perceived included an increased sense of family and choral community within the school, enjoyment of musical challenge and reward, and the professional characteristics of their choir. Similar to previous findings, intergenerational disconnect was found to be a source of frustration, however. The participants “liked singing with the boys but wanted a more shared sense of purpose and belonging” (p. 267).

Findings from Sutherland’s (2017, 2018) studies resonated with previous research on intergenerational choral collaborations (Conway & Hodgman, 2008). In both intergenerational choral collaborations, the musical benefits of singing in a large, intergenerational choir were perceived as important to participants, in particular the “powerful sound” that could be produced with the joining of these different voices (Sutherland, 2017, p. 8). Challenges in both were found to be in encouraging social interaction between generations, which rarely happened within a rehearsal context. In these three articles, the researchers noted that designating specific time toward socializing may have resolved the perceived disconnect between some of the musicians.

In a middle school-based instrumental music study, Kustec-Barringer (2019) used a teacher research approach to investigate a collaborative project between 7th grade band students and community band members. The purpose of the project was to promote lifelong musicianship, which emerged from four community band members’ intergenerational interactions with 46 students, and to provide information for Kustec-Barringer to inform their own teaching. The data collected in the study included surveys, small group interviews, and a video recorded class discussion, as well as the teacher/researcher’s journal log. Several elements were found to impact the likelihood of lifelong musical engagement, such as creating a classroom environment that grows and honors students as musicians, providing more opportunities in classrooms, connecting the school to the community, and increasing the visibility of music in school. Kustec-Barringer found that “partnerships between adult and
student musicians are an essential step” in making the leap from being a school music student to an adult musician, naming the importance of intergenerational relationships within schools (p. 97). Bird (2017) also indicated that bringing in musicians to school music programs can help musically invigorate students and provide a connection to ways that music is performed outside the classroom. However, considering the older adults’ needs in these types of musical transactions is important as well.

Tsugawa’s (2021) intrinsic qualitative case study examined the intergenerational interactions between preservice music teachers and senior adult musicians. The preservice music teachers were taking a string methods course as part of a teacher education program in the western United States, and the senior musicians were members of the university-sponsored New Horizons ensemble. The purpose of the study was to examine three questions about the experience of the college students: 1) How did the participants describe their interactions with the senior musicians while teaching in the New Horizons ensemble? 2) What did participants experience and learn about teaching during their time working with New Horizons orchestra members? and 3) What connections did the participants make from their time in New Horizons to their future careers as music educators? Data collected included “written reflections and essays, verbatim interview transcripts, and researcher notes of video and embedded observations of students teaching New Horizons orchestra members” (p. 5). It was analyzed using NVivo12 data analysis software.

Three themes emerged in the findings of the study. The first theme was “learning how to interact with senior adult musicians” (p. 6). Preservice music teachers felt nervous at first about teaching someone much older than them, and they had to adjust to deal with age differences, such as utilizing a more collaborative approach to conducting. The second theme related to the preservice teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge. The college students felt that with few classroom management worries, they were able to focus more on their teaching than they would have in a K-12 setting. The third theme was how preservice teachers connected what they’d
learned working in the New Horizons ensemble with their future teaching in K-12 classrooms. Tsugawa suggested a need to investigate the specific needs of adult learning and development to “help create best practices to assure that the missions and objectives of both music teacher education programs and cooperating adult ensembles support and enhance each other” (p. 14). While there are many similarities in the needs of adults and children learning to play an instrument, the differences should not be overlooked as senior adults have as much to benefit from in music education as do preservice teachers learning to hone their skills.

The value of intergenerational music making in the community is shown to be mutually beneficial and applicable to a variety of contexts depending on local structures and needs. In Wellington, the need for an LGBTQI space created an intergenerational opportunity (Bird, 2017), whereas in Kennedy’s (2003) study a church’s performance of an opera made lasting impacts on its participants. The strength of community-based intergenerational music programs seems to lie with its freedom to exist on its own terms and perhaps have more continuance for individuals without needing to exist within the structure and schedule of schooling.

The most common type of intergenerational music programs researched in this review were found to be programs initiated by or housed within schools. Clearly, the resources that schools and universities have access to can be conducive to these arrangements. Schools often have structures for music making already in place, the availability of trained music educators and leaders on staff, and of course, the presence of children and young adults. Yet even within this category, many possibilities for the types, purposes, benefits, and challenges of these programs exist. In school-based intergenerational music programming, there were several recurring themes throughout the literature. Themes included the importance of programs to be mutually beneficial for all ages, the need to provide appropriate curricular and instructional support for older adults, and the need to plan room in the schedule for social interaction if that is an aim of the program. Continued research on the possible forms and outcomes of
Intergenerational music programs in school systems can help educators spread the benefits and mitigate the challenges of these programs in more communities.

**Intergenerational Brass and Wind Ensembles**

Much of the established literature on intergenerational music making is centered around choral groups, with findings considered likely to be generalizable to instrumental ensembles. However, there remain unique aspects of playing wind instruments that could lead to varying results, including mechanical requirements of playing the instrument as well as cultural contexts for where and when these groups perform.

Rohwer and Coffman (2006) compared the relationships between wind band membership and high or low activity level, to spirituality and quality of life in adults aged 30-86 in the United States. Their study also sought to describe band members’ perceived health changes since joining a band. Wind band members (n=269) were recruited through New Horizons Bands across 11 states, and each of them was asked to recruit a non-band member friend for the study, for 480 total respondents. Each participant was given a Quality of Life scale, a Spirituality scale, and open ended questions concerning activities and health changes. After calculating ANOVAs comparing each of the subjects, significant differences were found between high and low activity levels and quality of life, favoring high levels of activity, and between band membership status and spirituality, favoring non-members, with no other significant differences. The most common health changes described by participants were positive, relating to mental health and improved lung capacity or breathing. Rohwer and Coffman noted that “limitations in sampling procedure should be understood when weighing the results,” considering that the study “recruited friends of the band participants as the comparison group” and may not be representative of the entire adult non-member population (p. 26). This may have led to the non-member group having characteristics that were conducive to achieving higher scores, and so further study that deals with the sampling issue could clarify the results.
One band director became intrigued by the increased camaraderie between members of his intergenerational community brass band in Perth, Australia during a three-month ramp up of rehearsals toward a national competition. Lowe (2013) decided to investigate whether wellness needs were perceived as being met by band members, using an evolutionary biological theoretical framework. Lowe distributed a 40-question survey that used a Likert scale to 32 band members, who were aged 12-60. Twenty-one valid surveys were returned, and data was coded and analyzed using an SPSS PASW statistics 18 program, descriptive statistics, and exploratory factor analysis. Results showed that while all items tended toward the positive end of the scale, items “relating to co-operation, the value of achieving short-term goals, personal involvement, self fulfillment and comradeship all rated very highly” (p. 71). The factors that had the least positive results included items related to spontaneity and creativity, which could be expected in an ensemble relying on group performance of set pieces. Some limitations of the study suggested follow up research could include surveying a larger sample size, conducting in-depth interviews with participants in order to draw out deeper meaning making, and searching out challenges, in addition to the benefit, that arise from participating in brass bands.

Continuing the work begun by Lowe (2013) on his group in Australia, Williamson and Bonshor (2019) sought to uncover the benefits and challenges of participating in brass band ensembles. The study’s purpose was to discover the positive and negative impacts of playing in a brass band, in the categories of physical, psychological, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being, with an additional category of “other” to allow open responses from participants. Members of Brass Bands England, which has 200 bands in its organization, received an online survey and were encouraged to forward it to other brass band contacts in order to achieve snowball sampling, with a total of n=346 respondents. Williamson and Bonshor noted that there was a visible intergenerational aspect to the brass bands based on the reported ages of participants. Survey data was analyzed using an applied thematic qualitative analysis protocol in order to code themes and valence from survey responses. The results from the survey indicated
89.87% reports from brass band members were related to positive impacts, with about 10% related to negative or mixed impacts, and were largely overlapping with benefits reported in choral research. Benefits and challenges that are unique to brass bands, however, were uncovered, including improvements in upper body strength, cognitive engagement from hand-body-eye coordination and other considerations unique to instrumental technique, and intergenerational role models. Challenges included hearing issues and reports on maxillofacial musculature related to pain and Repetitive Strain Injury, as well as mixed valence reports on the “highs and lows” of brass band life that stem from the “stresses and victories of competition and involvement in emotional events, such as Remembrance parades and other memorials, long standing community traditions, and Christmas concerts” (p. 13). Overall, the authors found that the impact of group music making in brass bands on well-being is very similar to that of found in group singing. However, the unique instrumentation and cultural context of the ensemble resulted in notable differences that suggests a need for further research and education for leaders in charge of such ensembles.

Previous research has studied the impact of community band participation on its members; however, the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 disrupted people’s lives in myriad ways, including the ability to participate in wind band rehearsals. Talbert and Edelman (2021) conducted a descriptive study to determine the impact of Covid-19 related to the well-being of wind band members. The purpose of the study was to find out what specific circumstance led to suspension of rehearsals for their ensemble, what participants miss most about playing in a community band, what considerations there are for returning to in-person rehearsals, and finally what are participants’ perceptions of remote music making opportunities. Participants (N=1089) were from New Horizons Bands and other community bands throughout the United States, and the sample included fourteen participants living in Canada. Results showed that band members missed the social aspect of their rehearsals and performances the most, and they were negatively affected by the suspension of activities. Additionally, fewer than
20% of participants had remote learning opportunities with their New Horizons Band, and over half of participants “indicated no desire to participate in virtual rehearsals” (p. 198). However, the band members who did have remote learning activities appeared to be “embracing their new normal” and many enjoyed virtually connecting with band mates and “the experience of learning new technology” (p. 198). While the effects of the pandemic are ongoing and changing as new variants emerge and recede, Talbert and Edelman’s study suggests that the inability to participate in community bands negatively impacted members particularly in social areas, and that mitigation strategies, including remote learning opportunities, could be worthwhile for adult community music ensembles as well as school music groups and classes.

The research in the area of intergenerational bands, either general wind bands or brass bands, seems to generally overlap with the research on intergenerational choral activities, agreeing that intergenerational music making is mostly a positive experience for participants, though not without some challenges. Unique details related to the instrumental ensembles, however, suggest a continued need to research further in this area.

**Tuba and Euphonium Ensembles**

The history of the tuba and euphonium is dynamic and from their advent, has taken many twists and turns as advocates continually seek to enhance the instruments’ reputation. Research over the past fifty years has documented the history and growth of the tuba family and tuba ensembles, with regard to musicians, composers, and the general public’s view.

In a 1980 dissertation, Reifsnyder examined the apparent problem that the euphonium as an instrument was suffering a decline in status and role in concert bands. Over the previous 15 years, prominent euphoniumists Leonard Falcone (1975), E.J. Robbins (1966), and Brian Bowman (1975) had written articles suggesting possible reasons for a decline being that modern composers were not interested in writing lyrically or melodically for any instrument, favoring rhythmic styles instead, that some composers did not understand the capabilities of euphonium in playing lyrically or melodically, and that other instruments were being given the
“bass soloist role once reserved for the euphonium” (p. 30). Since these factors had been discussed in subjective articles, Reifsnyder (1980) examined the ideas in objective studies to determine the validity of those claims, asking how widespread the change in style had recently become, which of the suggested factors might have led to the change, and how had the change affected the status of euphonium in school band programs. Following separate studies for each of these questions, Reifsnyder concluded that there was indeed a visible trend for the role of euphonium in contemporary band music to have “1) less prominence in scoring 2) less melodic writing [and] 3) less important status with respect to other instruments” (p. 92). The studies confirmed that the increase in prominence of other instruments in the same register, such as saxophone and horn, and the decrease in familiarity with the euphonium by contemporary composers could have led to the trend. However, it was not found that the performance level of high school euphonium students had declined as a result.

Chamber ensembles are recognized as an important part of music education and developing technique in musicians, but until the first brass quintets and tuba ensembles were formed in the 1950s and 60s, many low brass students did not have an opportunity to learn from them. In the early stages of these ensembles, there was little music written for them, making programming difficult, as well. Keathley (1982) sought to address the unique difficulties and considerations of composing and arranging for tuba ensemble, which are exacerbated by the “[lack of] standardization…and little understanding of the number of parts for the works written for it, or assignment of instruments within those parts” (p. xiii). Keathley claimed that due to this lack of understanding, many young tubists do not have opportunities to play in tuba ensembles, leaving them to play in brass quintets, which while still valuable, do not offer the same opportunity to learn certain skills as the more homogenous tuba groups, and leaves euphoniumists with no chamber opportunities at all.

Keathley’s (1982) study encompassed a history of the tuba family of instruments, a survey of the instruments used in tuba ensemble, and a survey of the literature. Findings
suggested that there are several ways composers have addressed the “acoustical restrictions in the low register and technical or equipment restrictions in the high register” but “the fact remains that the tuba family consists of a large number of instruments which can be combines [sic] in an almost infinite number of combinations” (p. 108). With the diversity of the instruments all belonging to the tuba family, the varying availability or proficiency of each type of tuba within different settings, and the relatively recent advent of the tuba ensemble at several universities in the mid-1960s, Keathley’s findings are not surprising but encouraging as the “tremendous and sometimes disorganized growth” (p. 108) of tuba ensembles led to more frequent attempts at serious composition for the medium, and increasing understanding of the instrument by composers.

Stern (2001) undertook a study to determine the historical background of the role of euphonium in wind band literature, and if the trend of the declining use of euphonium as a melodic and solo instrument in wind band literature found by Reifsnyder (1980) had continued. Twenty works for wind band that were composed since 1980 were selected and surveyed for their treatment of euphonium within the work. Stern additionally interviewed four prominent professional euphonium players on their ongoing experiences with wind bands to supplement the analysis of the scores. The findings concluded that the use of the euphonium as a soloistic and melodic instrument had increased during the twenty years of the study. Stern suggested several factors that could be behind the reversed trend, including composers from European brass band traditions writing for wind band, the growth of the Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic allowing euphoniumists to show their capabilities, and the establishment and growth of the International Tuba Euphonium Association (I.T.E.A.). A special note of concern from the participants interviewed was for the use of euphonium in lower grade works, which were not analyzed in this study. John Mueller, who was principal euphoniumist with the United States Army Band, stated, “What I’m a little more concerned with are the lower grades of music, especially ones you see in middle school, that are-the composition isn’t so melodically driven”
Stern’s concluding remarks indicated that although now moving in a positive trend, there should be continued effort in utilizing the “strength, versatility, and lyric nature” of the euphonium in wind band literature (p. 268).

Cottrell (2004) researched ways in which euphoniums could gain broader usage and prominence in modern musical culture. The study examined first the history of the usage of euphonium since its advent in 1843 in military, brass, and wind bands, which were popular music at the time, and how its usage did or did not change. Then the twentieth-century usage of euphonium in ensembles was compared to its early stages, and finally the most modern uses were compared to the euphonium’s beginnings as well. Examining the historical usage of the euphonium revealed it had been extremely popular in military, brass, and wind bands, but as those fell out of favor due to the invention of the radio and newer popular musics like jazz, rock, and country, the euphonium did not make the leap to newer ensembles and fell out of favor as well. Its general exclusion from orchestras in favor of tubas limited the visibility of euphoniums from general public view, resulting in “few musicians or audiences …even aware of the euphonium’s existence” (p. 1). However, Cottrell found a modern trend of the instrument moving back toward performances of popular music, within non-traditional ensembles. This was seen as a way to promote a more positive attitude toward the instrument, in addition to other opportunities to promote or educate about the euphonium.

As tuba-euphonium ensembles had only begun appearing in the United States in the 1960s, Lair (2010) found there was little to no historical documentation of the advent of the tuba chamber ensemble and its growth from something seen only as a humorous gag to a serious musical endeavor. Lair documented the history of the development of tuba-euphonium ensembles in the United States, including written and oral history drawn from interviews with influential and prominent tubists and euphoniumists. The public image of the tuba prior to the 1960s was stereotyped as a humorous, unwieldy background instrument that was not capable of the same melodiousness or technical performance as others in the orchestra. And, as Cottrell
(2004) noted, many people outside of school or professional music communities were not aware of the euphonium at all.

In the 1960s, this image slowly began to change as full-time tuba faculty positions became available in universities wanting to establish faculty brass quintets, and instructors such as Constance Weldon and Winston Morris established tuba-euphonium ensembles for their studios at the University of Miami and Tennessee Technical University, respectively (Lair, 2010). They commissioned new works for the ensemble and had their groups perform frequently. Other events in the 1970s that enhanced the reputation of tuba included the founding of the Tubists Universal Brotherhood Association (now I.T.E.A.) and Harvey Phillips’s traditions such as Octubafest and TubaChristmas, which put tuba ensembles in a much broader public view. Over the next twenty years, tuba-euphonium ensembles composed of professional musicians, and not just university ensembles, were formed and played concerts at nationally recognized venues and conferences like Carnegie Recital Hall and the Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra Conference. Lair concluded that “by the 1980s and 1990s, the early twentieth century stereotype for the tuba and its players had been altered to a more respectable position in the world of music” and that the tuba euphonium ensemble’s respectability had moved parallel to that of tubists in general (p. 46).

Like Keathley (1982) and Lair (2010), McLean (2016) emphasized the importance of chamber music in developing young musicians’ skills and interests in performing. Keathley sought to help composers understand the unique capabilities and requirements of the tuba family of instruments in order to write more appropriate music for them; however, since then many original works have been successfully written for tuba ensemble. McLean’s goal was instead to point to the tuba euphonium quartet as a premium tool for educators wishing to enhance their low brass students’ growth. Specifically, McLean’s study examined the tuba and euphonium parts in selected works for tuba euphonium quartet and for wind band, grading them via a rubric in order to assign each an appropriate difficulty level. Each piece was analyzed and
graded for separate technical aspects, and then given an overall score. Results showed that the average difficulty score of tuba euphonium quartets were a full level higher than the tuba and euphonium parts in wind band pieces, and that the differences were sometimes even greater when considering specific technical aspects present in the pieces. Considering that the tuba euphonium quartet music offered a greater challenge, more personal responsibility, and opportunity to apply skills not required in the wind band literature and otherwise found only in technique books, McLean concluded that opportunities for tuba and euphonium students to play in quartets together is invaluable to band directors, private instructors, and college professors alike.

Research has shown that the reputation of tuba and euphonium as serious musical endeavors has grown significantly over the past fifty years, alongside the growth of tuba euphonium ensembles and quartets. The value of chamber ensembles that allow tubists and euphoniumists to participate and develop different techniques than that required by wind band or orchestral literature has been demonstrated as well. However, studies reflecting the current state of the instrument and impact of continuing programs could show if there has been further progress or change in attitudes toward the instruments. Such insights could be useful for those seeking to increase opportunities for amateur and/or professional tubists.

Holiday Traditions and Intergenerational Music Making

Music plays an important role in the traditions of many cultures and communities. These traditions may be centered around holidays, family, special occasions, or other events of religious or cultural significance. In communities that celebrate Christmas, the sound of seasonal tunes on the radio, in homes, and in stores, as well as caroling, sing-alongs, and special concerts help people get in the holiday spirit. Christmas is also a time where many families and communities gather together in observance of the holiday, creating a natural intergenerational opportunity. Music has been identified as a contributing factor in developing
cultural, communal, and familial coherence during the Christmas season, with a few studies documenting its significance.

Hebert and colleagues (2012) used an ethnographic collective case study to describe Finnish *joulumusiikki* (Christmas music) events in Helsinki and the meanings attendees make from them in the context of contemporary Finnish society. The study described five events at different church buildings, which included three choir concerts and two Christmas carol sing-alongs. At each event, an average of ten people were asked to interview, with a resultant 46 interviews conducted either directly before or after the concert, and four of the five event organizers were also interviewed. Field notes taken during observation as well as artifacts from the event, such as lyric booklets, brochures, and repertoire, were also collected. Results were found from two stages of thematic analysis, first through within-case analysis and second through cross-case analysis. The *joulumusiikkii* events were found to be meaningful to people in that they can act as rituals that simultaneously sustain important cultural traditions and help members to navigate social changes as they evolve with modern Finnish society. The events help people situate themselves within generations of tradition and culture, both in the past, and in the future, as *joulumusiikki* events continue their annual rhythm.

Research conducted by Petrone (2014) used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to determine meaning making themes from young adults' experiences making music with their families. Data was collected in semi-structured interviews with ten participants aged 20-30 whose families had used music to help strengthen their intergenerational relationships. The results were categorized into seven themes, with one overarching theme, “I have experienced bonding among/with my family members through the use of music” (p. 38). Six other themes branched from that starting point, further exploring how the participants achieved the bonding with their families. One of the resultant themes was that participants found music “meaningful during a holiday(s), tradition(s), or religious or cultural experience(s)” (p. 38). The young adults in the study indicated that the use of music during a holiday, tradition, or religious or cultural
experience had a positive impact on their relationships with their family. Examples of the use of music in these occasions included attending concerts, family gatherings focused on musical instruments and singing, and simply the sound of particular songs or genres of music in the background of gatherings, invoking a significant atmosphere.

The prevalence of music in holiday traditions including but not limited to Christmas indicates the importance of its role and place in culture. The previously discussed studies showed that musical events enhanced familial and intergenerational bonds, as well as a sense of self within a larger community. The scope of research studies involving music and Christmas traditions does not match the frequency of attendance and participation in musical activities at Christmas time, however, so further research is warranted to analyze what is clearly an important element in many communities in different countries.

Summary

The studies included in this literature review reveal a multitude of benefits for participants in intergenerational music making, as well as some challenges and missed opportunities that can occur in implementing intergenerational programs. Because the range of forms in which the programs can take shape in both school and community is so wide, further research is recommended in locating intergenerational music programs in diverse contexts to determine factors that influence positive or negative outcomes. The demand for bridging the gap between the generations is clear so providing community and school leaders who are motivated to develop such programs with the information needed to ensure a successful experience is crucial.

A study of the experiences of the 2022 TubaChristmas event in Grand Rapids provides further insight into a specific annual, ongoing, community-based intergenerational music program that takes the shape of a mass tuba euphonium ensemble. Many similar TubaChristmas events are found throughout the United States and internationally, and so an examination of the Grand Rapids event may help music educators in West Michigan or other
regions know what to expect when sending their students to the program or encourage other communities to start their own.

In Chapter Two I reviewed the related literature regarding intergenerational music programs in community and school settings, intergenerational wind and brass bands, tuba-euphonium ensembles, and the impact of holiday traditions on intergenerational interactions. In Chapter Three I will describe the method and procedures for data collection of this study.
Chapter Three
Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine intergenerational experiences in the 2022 TubaChristmas event in Grand Rapids, MI. The guiding questions of the study were: 1) How do musician participants in TubaChristmas describe their experiences in an annual intergenerational community ensemble? 2) How do audience participants perceive and participate in the event? 3) What meanings do musician participants draw from their experiences in TubaChristmas? 4) What elements of the TubaChristmas event provide perceived benefits to musician participants, and what elements provide challenges?

Research Design

This study took the form of an intrinsic case study. The working definition of case study in this research is Simons’s (2009) description: “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a ‘real life’ context” (p. 21). Intrinsic case studies use a design in which “the focus is on the case itself … because the case presents an unusual or unique situation” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.99). In intrinsic case studies, the purpose is to study the case itself due to the case’s inherent interest and value rather than attempt to generalize findings to a broad range of contexts. Case studies are used to provide a deep understanding of a specific subject through a conceptual or analytical framework, as “aspects of the lived experience of music teaching and learning are often too nuanced, contextualized, and interdependent to be reduced to discrete variables” (Barrett, 2014, p. 114). The case in this research was bounded by the event of the 2022 TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids, beginning with the rehearsal and ending with the performance on the same day with follow-up interviews with participants.

The case study design facilitated multiple methods of data collection that helped provide evidence toward the research questions. Barrett (2014) noted that “fieldwork, observation, interviews, document analysis, and other items of material culture are commonly utilized” as
data collection in case study designs (p. 114). By gathering a variety of data using multiple approaches and sources, a rich description of the event was developed that generated a better understanding of the TubaChristmas event. A rich description “allows the reader to come close to lived situations, feel their pulse and tensions, and weigh how they might extend to other settings and situations. Verisimilitude, when achieved, extends the immediacy, impact, and practical significance of cases” (p. 114). Although no two TubaChristmas events are exactly the same, an intrinsic case study of the 2022 Grand Rapids event may help music educators and community members in West Michigan and beyond the region to better understand the opportunities the tradition offers and could potentially be transferable to events located or created in similar communities.

**Researcher Positionality**

I have been a participant of the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event since 2015. I have come to know several of the other participants who also regularly attend the event, as well as play in the Grand Rapids Symphonic Band with some of the musicians throughout the year. I know the organizer from the Grand Rapids event in addition to both of us having attended TubaChristmas in other cities. I also occasionally perform in a brass quintet with the director of the event. As a regular member of the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas ensemble, I have become a member of the annual community that it creates.

Outside of TubaChristmas, music and music education play an important role in my life. I am an elementary general music teacher, teaching children ages 5 to 11 how to sing, speak, and move rhythmically, dance, play, and create music. Prior to my current position, I started my career in education in a small district teaching K-12 music and band for two years. I have been playing euphonium since I was 8 years old and have always relished any opportunity to play music with others. I have played euphonium in concert bands, brass ensembles, chamber groups, marching bands, and drum and bugle corps. However, I didn’t discover TubaChristmas
until I was an adult. I believe as a growing musician I would have loved the opportunity it provides and enjoyed sharing it with my friends and family.

**Preparation for Study**

I piloted the study by attending the 2021 TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids event as a participant-observer. Schmidt (2014) encouraged the use of a pilot study when using observation because “a pilot study in the prospective or a similar setting may provide opportunities to identify potential benefits and challenges, as well as to practice and refine observation techniques” (p. 228). During the 2021 version of the event, I practiced taking field notes during the rehearsal and looked for opportunities to move along the participant-observer continuum throughout the day, and also looked for ideal locations for taking video of the rehearsal and performance. While participating in and observing the rehearsal, I sought to identify opportunities of interest for study in 2022, including ensemble members who might provide particularly interesting insight into the event and band directors who typically invite their students to attend. Additionally, I collected pre-existing documentation, such as the TubaChristmas carol book, ads for the event, and promotions on social media, to determine what may be available as event artifacts in 2022. As a result of the pilot, I decided that in order to facilitate taking field notes and increase their frequency and clarity, in 2022 I would watch the rehearsal as an observer and join in the performance as a participant, having the same level of participation as the event organizer.

**Description of Pilot Research Site**

The pilot research site was located at Fountain Street Church in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan. Registration took place in the main lobby, and the rehearsal and performance were in the sanctuary, with room to accommodate at least 70 tubas/euphoniums. Fountain Street Church is home to a magnificent organ, a multitude of artwork including oil paintings, murals, mosaics, and painted glass, and beautiful stained-glass windows. It is a large community space that is well cared for and has ideal acoustics for live music events.
Setting and Context

Grand Rapids is the second largest city in Michigan, situated in the western region of the state, with a population of 198,917 in April of 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Kent County, Michigan; Grand Rapids City, Michigan, n.d.). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the racial makeup of Grand Rapids is 58.2% White, 16.3% Hispanic or Latino, and 18.1% Black or African American. The median household income in 2020 was $51,333, with an estimated percent of persons in poverty at 19.9%. The surrounding Kent County, like Grand Rapids, has undergone a period of growth since the 2010 Census, with a bloom of new housing and businesses being built in the area. The city has a lively and growing cultural arts scene, with over 100 live music venues featuring a wide variety of performances (Experience Grand Rapids, 2022). Grand Rapids has its own professional symphony orchestra as well as Michigan’s only professional ballet company.

The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event draws adult participants primarily from local community or college bands, and youth from county schools where band directors are aware of the event or whose families also participate. The event also draws participants from across the state, with musicians who live more than 100 miles away showing up to the event every year (Dunnam, 2021). Compared with some of the largest cities nationally that are major tourist destinations as well, such as New York City and Chicago, however, the Grand Rapids event draws fewer attendees from out-of-state, although there have been known to be some. Many musicians return to the event year after year, or include the Grand Rapids event in a tour of performing in multiple TubaChristmas’s across the state and country.

Venue

The Grand Rapids Public Museum, which hosted the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, was founded in 1854 and claims to be Michigan’s oldest museum (n.d.-a). It began as the Grand Rapids Lyceum of Natural History and over the years grew into a space meant to “cultivate curiosity, with a focus on history, science, and culture” (n.d.-a). The
museum’s mission, vision, and diversity, equity, and inclusion statements are posted on its website, and they describe an intent to create a learning experience that is inclusive and accessible to all. In 1994 the Museum’s current facility, located along the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids, opened to the public. The building, also known as the Van Andel Museum Center, has three floors to explore, along with a planetarium, carousel, theater, cafe, and gift shop. The Grand Rapids Public Museum School opened in 2015 in a partnership with Grand Rapids Public Schools, the Museum, Grand Valley State University, and Kendall College of Art and Design. The school serves students in 6th-12th grade and is currently housed in the Museum’s previous location on Jefferson Ave. The Museum is widely supported within Kent County, whose residents approved a joint millage with the local zoo in 2016 to cover operational costs and improve facilities and programming.

Perhaps the Museum’s most iconic artifact is its finback whale skeleton which is displayed hanging over the first floor in the main hallway, and visible from the second and third floors. “Finny” is about 75 feet long and was acquired by the Museum in 1905 (Grand Rapids Public Museum, n.d.-b). Finny makes an impressive sight, and is also somewhat of a mascot for the Museum, which has merchandise designed after the whale, as well as a monthly giving club named “Finny’s Friends” which helps provide summer camp programs at the museum and other educational experiences.

The Grand Rapids Public Museum regularly hosts cultural events, including its Cultural Heritage Festival, Anishinaabe Culture Day, stage plays, lectures and panel discussions, organ concerts, and Concerts Under the Stars (local musical and visual artists performing in the planetarium) (n.d.-c). When the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas organizer, Karen Dunnam, was looking for a new venue for the 2022 event due to Fountain Street Church being fully booked on weekends, the Museum responded enthusiastically about hosting such a unique musical event. Museum staff were very welcoming and helpful in planning and promoting the event, allowing Karen and some other tubists to take promotional pictures with their instruments in the space
ahead of time. They used the Museum’s media outlets to advertise TubaChristmas in addition to the TubaChristmas website and Karen’s Grand Rapids TubaChristmas Facebook group and other social media.

**Selection of Participants**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling procedures in order to find “information rich case[s]” and to fit specific criteria (Patton, 2014, pp. 243-244). The criteria used in participant selection included: participants must be members of the 2022 TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids event, must be over 18 years old, and should represent a variety of longevity within the event, for example long term participants versus first time participants. By selecting participants with varying longevity within the event, participants provided multiple perspectives on the intergenerational experiences of the event. Members who have attended many TubaChristmas events in years past, multiple TubaChristmas events within the same year, or who are first-time TubaChristmas attendees provided unique viewpoints on how they experienced TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids. All members of the TubaChristmas ensemble and all audience members were invited to answer a survey, and musicians indicated as part of the survey whether they were interested in being contacted to schedule an interview or not. The director of the ensemble and event organizer were also interviewed as part of providing a rich description of the case.

The interview participants are described in detail in Chapter Four. There were 8 participants selected for interview from the ensemble, as well as the director and the event organizer/coordinator. The rationale for choosing so many participants was to increase the diversity of perspectives while studying a single event.

**Types of Data**

**Observation**

Data was collected through observation of the case event. As participant-researcher and someone who has attended the event many times in the past, I switched between minimal
participation and active participation throughout the day to collect field notes along with collecting video of the performance. Specifically, I sat out of the rehearsal in order to observe and introduce the study and survey to the musicians, and returned to participant during the performance. In accordance with Schmidt's (2014) description of the Participant-Observer Continuum, I functioned as both a participant and observer in this study. To passively participate “involves minimal interaction with the participants, as when the researcher sits in a corner of a classroom taking notes,” while complete participation “involves the researcher in a setting in which he or she is a full participant, as in … an examination of the implicit workings of an ensemble of which one is a member” (p. 230).

To make in-the-moment observations during the rehearsal process or social lunch break, I took field notes by hand. Schmidt (2014) advised, “To separate their own feelings and interpretations from description of what is observed, researchers may find it helpful to record field notes on a divided page, using one side to describe events and the other side to describe the researcher’s own thoughts or questions” (p. 236). I used this process to help separate my own thoughts as a participant from what I observed in the event.

**Survey**

All participants in the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas ensemble and all audience members were invited to answer a survey during the event (see Appendix A). Survey data was used to more fully develop attendee demographic information as well as include perspectives from the audience in an annual community event. Surveys were distributed during registration via QR code and available to complete electronically, with paper copies available as well. They were brief in order to encourage participation during transitional moments at the event. Completing the survey during the event helped reduce errors in response to memory bias and failure to recall.

**Individual Interviews**
Individual interviews with the director, organizer, and 8 ensemble members were conducted by phone or over Zoom within one month after the event on December 18, 2022. The interviews were used to collect data related to the participants’ perspectives and meaning making based on their experience of the 2022 TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids event and others they have attended in the past. The interviews included mostly open-ended questions as they are “more likely to generate rich, in-depth descriptions, and may be used to elicit detailed stories, or initiate new topics within the interview as a whole” (Roulston, 2014, p. 260). Additionally, the interviews were phenomenological in nature in order to “generate in-depth descriptions of participants’ experiences” as related to their meaning making of the event (p. 251).

The interviews with participants who hold unique roles within the event were semi-structured, as they “provide freedom for interviewers to pursue further detail concerning topics that arise in discussions with individual participants” (p. 251). The director of the ensemble and organizer/coordinator of the event were likely to draw different meanings from their experiences within TubaChristmas due to their leadership roles, and so the semi-structured interview allowed more space for the interview to follow their line of thinking into new topics.

Interviews with participants who are musicians performing within the ensemble were formally structured in order to gather responses that could be compared closely with each other (see Appendix B).

**Documents**

Documents collected include video recordings, photographs, programs, schedule of events, ads, the program website, attendance records, director notes, and the TubaChristmas carol book. As a point of reference, I compared the 2022 program with previous Grand Rapids TubaChristmas programs to develop a more complete understanding of the traditions and transformations of the event over the years. Video recordings, the program website, and director
notes in particular helped serve to triangulate data from musician and audience surveys and interviews.

Research Procedure

After the thesis committee's approval of the proposal, I applied for IRB approval to conduct the study. In September 2022 I requested permission from Karen Dunnam the TubaChristmas coordinator to carry out the study and to obtain video of the event, and secured materials for observation and interviews such as a field notebook and an audio/video recording device. In November and December I communicated and collaborated with the organizer, director, and museum contact to plan the logistics for data collection during the event. The organizer of the event posted a message on the event website and social media advertising the study and call for participants (see Appendix C).

I arrived at the TubaChristmas 2022 event on December 18, 2022 prior to the beginning of registration in order to set up a survey table and scout audience survey locations. I administered the survey to musician participants during the registration and pizza lunch period, and a volunteer friend gave the survey to audience participants prior to and during the concert. Throughout the day, I gathered, as available, video recordings, photographs, programs, schedule of events, the program website, attendance records, and the TubaChristmas carol book. During the rehearsal, I started as a minimal participant and moved to an active participant for the performance.

Individual interviews were conducted within four weeks of the event, online over Zoom or by phone. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Member checking was used post-analysis to ensure credibility of interview findings.

Timeline

- September 2022: obtained permission from Karen Dunnam, Grand Rapids TubaChristmas coordinator
- October 2022: obtained permission from the IRB
● October 2022: collected required resources (research site permission, field notebook, audio/video recording device and storage)
● November 2022: communicated data collection plan to event organizers
● Day of the event (December 18 2022):
  ○ 11:15 AM Arrived at Grand Rapids Public Museum prior to registration to set up survey table
  ○ 11:30 AM-1:00 PM Distributed and collected surveys
  ○ 1:00-2:30 PM Observed as minimal participant/observer during the rehearsal and social time and collected documents or other media as available
  ○ 2:30-4:30 PM Participated in the ensemble during the concert. Obtained a video recording of the performance.
● Within one month after the event: conducted individual interviews with participants and collected interview consent forms (see Appendix D)

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend using at least two of the following strategies to provide credibility in a qualitative research study: triangulation of multiple data sources, peer review, clarification of researcher bias, member checks, and thick, rich description. I used triangulation of multiple data sources as one strategy to provide credibility: observation notes, interview transcripts, concert programs and other documents. Triangulation of data included comparing the content of individual interview responses, and observational data. Comparing the ensemble participant interviews to the Organizer and Director interviews also provided triangulation of data, as the different types of participants in the study view the same event from different angles. Interview findings were member checked to ensure participants' responses were represented accurately and ethically. Finally, a thick, rich description of the research process and the data contributed to credibility by providing as much detail as possible for the reader.

Organization of Findings
The following four chapters provide a description of the event, participants, and findings of the study. Chapter Four provides a rich description of the event as well as descriptive portraits of participants. Chapter Five presents the findings and themes emerging from research questions one and two. Chapter Six presents the findings and themes from research question three. Finally, Chapter Seven includes the findings and discussion from research question four, conclusions of the study, implications for ongoing practice, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter Four

2022 TubaChristmas Pictures and Portraits

In this chapter I describe the events of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas through a narrative of the day of the event. I then introduce each interview participant via a descriptive portrait. I conclude the chapter by presenting survey findings to complete the context building for the event and to describe the demographics of the participants.

2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas

The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event began on Sunday December 18, 2023 in the morning with the organizer Karen Dunnam and Grand Rapids Public Museum staff working to set up the event space. Registration was held in the Green Room on the second floor of the museum, with rehearsal in the nearby auditorium, and the performance in the main hall of the first floor, seated under Finny, the giant finback whale skeleton. I arrived early to set up a table at registration for surveys and interview interest sign ups and to check out the location for the performance and scout good locations for the audience survey distribution. I also assisted Karen with a few tasks as needed, such as setting out the pop and paper plates and napkins for the pizza lunch. Karen had a volunteer to assist with registration this year, a self-described “band mom” who was looking for more opportunities to help and participate in musical groups now that her son had graduated. Musician participants began to arrive early as well, leaving plenty of time to check in and socialize prior to rehearsal. As musicians signed in, they received their commemorative 2022 TubaChristmas badges and had the option to take my survey. Then they began to adorn their instruments, chatted with other participants, enjoyed a pizza lunch, and found a place to sit in the rehearsal space. A record number of musicians registered, making it the biggest Grand Rapids TubaChristmas to date with 98 tubas and euphoniums.

Rehearsal began in the auditorium with the deep, resonant sounds of a mass tuba ensemble. Musicians filled the stage and spilled over into seating normally reserved for an
audience, leaving Matt Palmieri, the director, to conduct with musicians on all sides, as seen below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Rehearsal Set Up**

During the rehearsal Matt used many techniques to reduce embouchure fatigue, proactively address common mistakes in certain pieces, and improve individual technical and ensemble skills. The rehearsal atmosphere was light hearted and relaxed. After a while I left rehearsal to meet with a friend who had volunteered to help distribute the audience surveys and ensure everything was in place for the performance, and then returned to the auditorium for the remaining practice. Karen, the organizer of TubaChristmas, took a moment to ask ensemble members the traditional superlatives for the event: Who traveled the farthest? Who is the oldest, and youngest participant? What kinds of tubas and euphoniums are present? And who has the
oldest instrument? Then the sea of tubas and euphoniums made their way downstairs to claim a seat for the performance.

The concert began. We angled our chairs toward the podium to help create a sightline to the conductor, since there were so many musicians and the chairs had been set up in long, straight rows rather than a more typical arc (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Performance Set Up**

Matt addressed the crowd between pieces, and made sure musicians knew which piece was up next before starting. Throughout the concert several quartets, one from Grand Valley State University and two “instant quartets” composed of musicians who volunteered during rehearsal, performed as interludes to the whole group pieces, giving everyone else a break from playing. A
solo tubist from the Holland Symphony Orchestra and a piano accompanist played “Elegy for the Whale” by Alec Wilder, the composer who arranged the first half of the tunes included in the current TubaChristmas Carol books. The tuba professor from Grand Valley State University and a solo singer featured in another special piece, “Santa Wants a Tuba for Christmas,” which Harvey Phillips himself had performed in TubaChristmas’s for years. Karen announced the superlatives of the year to the audience, with the furthest traveled musician flying in from Pennsylvania, the oldest (90) and youngest (9) performers, the various types of tubas and euphoniums present, and the oldest instrument (a 1903 Conn double bell euphonium). The concert ended with its traditional “We Wish You a Merry Christmas,” singing the second time through, swapping out “merry” for “tuba,” and holding the instruments over our heads in a final tuba salute. A full set list of pieces performed during the concert can be found in Appendix E.

As musicians and audience members began to leave, museum staff began to clear chairs and Karen, her volunteer and I cleaned and packed up the registration area, chatting with people as they came through to grab their cases. People were able to share some feedback on how the event worked in a new space, as well as simply give well wishes. Karen was also able to talk to her museum contact and the museum director before leaving, who had been very pleased with the event, its uniqueness, and the number of people it brought in, already bringing up the possibility of hosting it at the museum again in the future.

Portraits of Interview Participants

I interviewed 10 musician participants from the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, including the organizer of the event and the director of the ensemble. The following section introduces a brief portrait of each participant interviewed. In this section, participants’ full names are used if they elected to have their real names used in the study, otherwise they are referred to by pseudonym. In the analysis in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, only first names or pseudonyms are used for all participants. Figure 3 below displays a brief, comparative overview of information for each musician.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Primary Instrument</th>
<th># of Tuba-Christmas’s</th>
<th>Profession in Music or Other</th>
<th>Other Musical Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karen Dunnam (Organizer)</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Other/Dance caller</td>
<td>Plays tuba in protests, parades, festivals; Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt Palmieri (Director)</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Band director</td>
<td>Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Horn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Band director</td>
<td>Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Loree</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Johnson</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Trumpet</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Organizes Kalamazoo, MI Tuba Christmas, German polka band, Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Persky</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>Euphonium</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Band director</td>
<td>Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Other/Studio professor/Part time professional tubist</td>
<td>Plays paying gigs year round</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Started clarinet lessons with his daughter recently, Community band</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Laufersky</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Only plays during TubaChristmas, attends with daughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim Cary</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Tuba</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>German polka band, Community band</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leadership

Karen Dunnam

Karen Dunnam is the organizer of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, bringing the event to Grand Rapids in 2006. She attended her first TubaChristmas in Baltimore, Maryland in 1985 after seeing an advertisement in the local newspaper. Music holds a prominent role in her life outside of TubaChristmas as she plays tuba year round in community bands, parades, and protests, joins in traditional folk music sessions, and is a professional contra dance caller. Karen is in the 61-70 age group and started her love for low brass in high school after attending a University of Michigan football game and observing the Michigan Marching Band. She started in her school band as a flute player, but couldn’t see any flutes on Michigan’s field and began learning to play baritone so she could audition for a spot in the band herself. Karen is a well practiced community organizer, having organized TubaChristmas in Detroit in the 1980s as well as put together other community events such as protests, musical groups for parades and other live events. I first met Karen at the 2015 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas and have also participated with her in the euphonium section of the Michigan Marching Band’s Alumni performances during Homecoming for several years.

Matt Palmieri

Matt Palmieri is the director of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, holding the role since 2013. Matt is in the 41-50 age group and got his start with TubaChristmas when his tuba teacher in eighth grade directed him toward the Kalamazoo Tuba New Year in 1982. He attended Kalamazoo’s event every year following through college, and then as often as he could after. He coordinated TubaChristmas events one year in Grand Haven, MI and one year in Muskegon, MI as well as attending every Grand Rapids TubaChristmas since Karen began running the event in 2006. His wife and daughters attend TubaChristmas in the audience every year. Matt is a band director and has taught middle through high school bands in the West Michigan region. He plays in community bands and brass ensembles, as well as giving private
lessons on tuba and teaching sectionals for a local marching band. I have been playing in the Grand Rapids Symphonic Band with Matt since 2014. I also performed in a brass quintet, Beer City Brass, with him for a few years, in addition to knowing him as the conductor of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas.

**Ensemble Members**

**Amy**

Amy is a 5-12 middle and high school band director in the Grand Rapids area. She is in the 41-50 age group and is primarily a horn player, although she frequently plays trumpet and can play all of the band instruments as her job requires. Amy has played in some community groups on horn beyond the weekly playing she does as a band director. The 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas was the first TubaChristmas that she attended, after having it advertised through colleagues in the Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association (MSBOA), including the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas director, Matt Palmieri. She had been encouraged by some friends who are not tuba or euphonium primary players who had done it and had a good time in previous years.

**Andy Loree**

Andy Loree is in the 61-70 age group. He started playing tuba in high school and college, but not owning his own instrument had caused an interruption in playing until his daughter was about 3 or 4 years old and they began attending village concerts in Pentwater in the summertime. Andy heard the band playing familiar tunes and thought he was up for playing again, and finances were in better shape for acquiring an instrument than they had been fresh out of college. The Pentwater summer band is another open call ensemble, like TubaChristmas, but plays weekly through summer months using the same book of tunes each time. Since picking up the tuba again, Andy has played in multiple community bands in the West Michigan region. Andy has a 1925 Conn 46K Grand Jumbo Sousaphone that he plays in the Pentwater summer band as well as TubaChristmas, and said in his interview that although many Jumbo
sousaphones have been relegated to museums, he thinks it’s important that people can hear what they sound like. Andy also has a copy of the TubaChristmas carol book signed by several prominent tubists, including Harvey Phillips, the originator of TubaChristmas.

**Bill Johnson**

Bill Johnson is primarily a trumpet player, but has also been playing the Eb alto horn and euphonium for about 10 years. He initially started bringing his Eb alto horn to TubaChristmases, and when his son joined in and played with him, he would play a borrowed baritone instead. Bill is in the 51-60 age group and performs regularly with several groups in the Kalamazoo, MI area, including playing trumpet in the Kalamazoo Concert Band, the German band Ein Prosit, singing in the Edelweiss choir, and performing in various other groups as they arise throughout the year. He attended his first TubaChristmas in Kalamazoo when it was tied into the Christmas concert his band was already playing, and was invited to play by the organizer of the event. Since then, Bill has continued to participate in TubaChristmases in various locations throughout Michigan and the Midwest, and is now the organizer of Kalamazoo TubaChristmas and Tuba New Year. I first met Bill when attending the Kalamazoo TubaChristmas.

**Bob Persky**

Bob Persky is a retired middle school band director and has been playing the euphonium since sixth grade after switching from trumpet. He is in the 61-70 age group and the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas was the first TubaChristmas he’d ever played in, although he had heard about it much earlier through students and friends who’d attended. Bob is an active musician and has been playing euphonium in the Grand Rapids Symphonic Band since 1978, and Con Brio Vocce, a brass ensemble, for the last several years. I first met Bob when I joined the Grand Rapids Symphonic Band in 2014 and have played in the euphonium section with him since. He has a double bell euphonium that he brought to the TubaChristmas event, which he has also loaned to me to use at previous TubaChristmases as well.

**Brian**
Brian is a semi-professional tubist in the West Michigan region. He started playing trombone in sixth grade, switched to tuba in seventh grade, and has been playing tuba since. Brian is in the 31-40 age group and, although he works a day job at a credit union, he plays and performs frequently, usually between 30 and 45 concerts a year in different orchestras, brass quintets, and a German polka band. He also teaches low brass lessons at a local college. Brian played in his first TubaChristmas as a freshman in college about 20 years ago in Kalamazoo, MI, and has participated when able in local TubaChristmas’s since. During this year’s TubaChristmas event, Brian was also invited to perform a solo with piano accompaniment as a featured performance.

James

James is an active musician at 90 years old. He started playing drums, then baritone, and then finally tuba during his grade school years. He continued playing tuba through college in marching band, and since then has participated in several community bands, and is currently playing in one. James also began learning the clarinet several years ago alongside his daughter, who was then in her sixties. They began taking clarinet lessons, playing duets and practicing together. James had attended the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas about 15 years ago as an audience member, but this was his first year playing in the ensemble after being encouraged by a section mate in his community band.

Tim Cary

Tim Cary is an active tubist who performs in several community bands in the West Michigan area, as well as a German polka band. Tim is in the 51-60 age group. I first met Tim in the Grand Rapids Symphonic Band, where he has been playing since 1988 and additionally has served as board president for the group. Tim has been playing tuba since eighth grade, switching to the instrument after starting on cornet. He works as a software support analyst and enjoys being an active amateur musician in his free time. He said in his interview, “It’s kind of the high point of what I do. Some people play golf and sports and stuff, and I guess I’m a tuba
player.” He first started playing in TubaChristmas in Lansing, MI in college in 1985, after being invited by his tuba teacher. Since then he attends whenever he is able, and still has one of the original TubaChristmas books.

**Randy Laufersky**

Randy started playing the tuba in middle school, but didn't have much opportunity to play after college until his daughter was old enough to take up an instrument as well. He is in the 51-60 age group and works selling veterinary ultrasound. When his daughter started on tuba, her middle school band director suggested she play in the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas. When she asked Randy to play with her at the event, they rented an instrument from a local music store for him to use, which he now owns and plays every year in Grand Rapids TubaChristmas alongside his daughter and friends. While he had played in a community band for a while, he now focuses his annual tuba playing around TubaChristmas as the main event. His group that attends TubaChristmas together has a tradition of dressing up in various super festive and decorative outfits as part of the fun. While Randy has only been to the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas so far, he has plans to visit his daughter, now out-of-state in college, and participate in the TubaChristmas with her there.

**Survey of Musician and Audience Participants**

The following data from the musician and audience surveys are described in order to provide context for the rest of the ensemble and audience participants in attendance.

Fifty-seven of 98 musician participants responded to the survey, providing general demographic information for those attending the 2022 event. The age of responding participants included 33% under 18, 19% 18-30, 9% 31-40, 7% 41-50, 11% 51-60, 9% 61-70, 7% 71-80, and 5% over 80, showing a wide age range of attendees. Musicians had a similarly wide range of years of experience in playing the tuba or euphonium, with 12% having played one year or less, 21% 2-5 years, 19% 6-10 years, and 48% 11 or more years. Seventy-five percent of musicians play the tuba or euphonium as their primary instrument, however 14% only play the
tuba or euphonium at TubaChristmas. Seventy-two percent of musicians play another instrument besides tuba or euphonium outside of TubaChristmas. Sixty-three percent of musicians reported traveling 20 miles or less to the event, with 12% driving from over 50 miles away. When answering the question, “Do you think you will attend a TubaChristmas again in the future?” 90% of musicians responded that yes, they would, with 10% responding maybe, and none that they would not attend again. Fifty-three percent of the respondents reported that the 2022 event was their first TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids, with the other 47% having attended at least one other year, and 7% having attended more than 10.

Forty-eight of an estimated 200 audience participants responded to the survey. Twenty audience participants were first time attendees at a TubaChristmas event, 16 had attended two to four times, and 12 had attended five or more times. Twenty five percent of audience respondents said that they had attended a TubaChristmas in a city other than Grand Rapids. Thirty five of the 48 respondents listed “Family/Friends” as a motivation for attending the 2022 event. When answering the question, “Do you think you will attend a TubaChristmas again in the future?” 44 audience members responded that yes, they would, with 4 responding maybe, and none that they would not attend again.

Summary

In Chapter Four I described the events of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas. Next, I introduced each interview participant, and finally, I presented the data from the musician and audience surveys. Survey data showed that a wide age range of participants took part in the event with a similarly wide range of experience levels playing an instrument. Participants almost unanimously responded that they would attend a TubaChristmas event again. Chapters Five through Seven will discuss the analysis and findings from the research questions of the study.
Chapter Five

TubaChristmas Participant Experiences

In this chapter I discuss the analysis of the data and findings from the first and second research questions: 1) How do musician participants in TubaChristmas describe their experiences in an annual intergenerational community ensemble? and 2) How do audience participants perceive and experience the event?

Analysis

Observational data, transcripts of individual interviews, survey results, and documents were coded and categorized as related to the research questions, and interpreted around themes that emerge from the data. I read through each data source several times, and began by taking notes and making a list of words, phrases, or ideas that recurred throughout the data. I then used the list to comb through the data again, and extracted each instance of a coded word or phrase into a separate document to determine the number of references to each idea. From these patterns identified from the data, overarching themes emerged that respond to the research questions.

Musician Participant Experiences

This section will discuss the themes that emerged in relation to the research question: How do musician participants in TubaChristmas describe their experiences in an annual intergenerational community ensemble? The themes include describing the event as fun, community building, a musical experience, and inclusive. Several sub-themes emerged from the data as well.

Fun

The most dominant theme apparent from participant interviews in their descriptions of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas was that the event was fun. Thirty-four responses spoke to having a good time at the event, with seventeen responses focusing specifically on the event being “fun,” twelve on the sub-theme “low stress,” and five on the sub-theme “festive.”
Most participants described having had fun at the event. More than half of interviewees specifically used the word “fun” when talking about the event, and when discussing their motivations to attend and why they would consider going again the next year.

Brian said, “Just come and have a good time, that to me is what the epitome of TubaChristmas is.” He described the event as “kind of the silliest concert of the year, you know. So for me, it’s always just funny and enjoyable.” The contrast between playing in a symphony orchestra and caroling with dozens of other tuba and euphonium players, playing instruments that traditionally are seen as support to other melodic instruments, creates the silliness and funny aspect of the event. Fellow musicians and audience members pick up on the fun that the silliness brings as well. Brian described what it’s like to explain TubaChristmas to others and invite them to attend, “Generally they smile, then they laugh, and they say, yeah, that sounds ridiculous. I’ll try to be there. Like…it’s those three things every time, and that to me is what TubaChristmas should be.”

Randy expressed a similar sentiment, and stated, “I really like it, it’s fun to do it. It’s fun to play the music, and to see all the people out there, and knowing all the songs.” Randy continued, “From my standpoint, the experience that you have with the TubaChristmas was so far better than the experience with the community band.” Randy mentioned he would have been more motivated to stick with participating in a weekly community band if he’d had as much fun as he does each year in TubaChristmas.

Andy brought up that being able to perform in different places is also part of TubaChristmas. He said: “It’s been fun and interesting to play in some of the venues where it's been held.” For the 2022 Grand Rapids event, playing under the whale skeleton Finny in the Grand Rapids Public Museum was a unique experience for most if not all of the participants. Most amateur musicians, without an event like this one, would never get a chance to play music in such places. Randy also mentioned that it was “cool, playing under the whale like that.”
The various reports from participants having fun at Grand Rapids TubaChristmas align with Karen and Matt's goals for the event. Karen said, “The performers, I want them to have fun.” Matt similarly stated, “my goal every year is to make it a fun and musical and hopefully somewhat educational experience for the young kids and the older kids and the adults as well.” Organizing the event itself has also been a source of enjoyment for Karen as well, who said “It’s been really fun to do it. It’s been a great ride.”

**Low Stress**

Several participants mentioned that the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas was a low stress event. Musicians emphasized that TubaChristmas is an event that puts no pressure on participants and doesn't require a lot of preparation to attend.

Several participants explained that one quality of TubaChristmas that is enjoyable to them is that, as an all-call event, there is no pressure for anyone to perform at a particular standard. Brian said, “There’s no pressure on anything you’re going to play” and talked about a fellow tubist who might not get to play as much anymore as he continues aging. He said that it’s great “to have an outlet where there’s no judgment, he doesn’t have to be in shape. He can just come and have a good time.” Tim also stated that “That’s what I like about it. Like I said, TubaChristmas is pretty laid back.” Bob compared the lack of pressure on performers to his other music making experiences, and said “I didn’t feel any kind of performance anxiety at all like I normally would if I were directing a high school group or even playing in the Grand Rapids Symphonic Band,” and that “It’s pretty anxiety free, pretty stress free for you. It’s just plain fun. I mean, it was really low key.” Bob continued, that “It was really nice to not feel that, to be able to sit down and play and just enjoy the whole experience without feeling like I’m in the spotlight, or something can go wrong, or I have to troubleshoot something. It was nice just to play and enjoy it.”

Participants also agreed that the event does not require a lot of preparation on the part of ensemble members, which added to the enjoyment. Amy, a band director who normally
organizes concerts herself, said “It was good for me, it made me very happy, I didn't have to organize anything, I could just go play.” Bob expressed that “I didn't have to go out of my way to get real dressed up. It was nice to be casual going in” and that “It doesn’t take a lot of preparation. It doesn’t take up a whole lot of time, it's pretty convenient and fun.” Karen explained that although as organizer she had lots of preparation to attend to, she intentionally tried to reduce preparation for others by providing food at the event. Karen noted:

I’ve continued that (including a pizza lunch) because I like to not stress people and make them go through McDonald’s on their way, and if they can grab something to eat that’s not Christmas cookies, and then they can hang out and relax a little bit, and it turns out a lot of people say they really like my TubaChristmas. I think that maybe the pizza is part of it.

The ‘no pressure’ and low level of preparation required to participate in the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas were consistently reported by participants as features of the event that contributed to its enjoyability. However, Bob pointed out that although these features help differentiate the event from other music making opportunities, it doesn’t make the event without expectations or importance. He said, “It’s hard to put it all into words without making it sound like it was a less important event, because the event itself was really great.”

**Festivity**

As an event that centered around performing carols and with Christmas in its namesake, the festivity that was present was also notable to participants. The music chosen for the performance was, as Matt put it, a mix of “the big, fun, popular carols that everyone knows, while fitting in a few less well known ones.” Besides the music itself being festive, the attire of people attending and the decorations on their instruments stood out to interviewees as well and were part of the expectation. Tim said that “Grand Rapids TubaChristmas has been good, because people actually seem to dress up for it with Christmas stuff.” For Randy, it’s part of his
family and friends’ tradition to “always get something super Christmassy to wear” and have fun making the festive attire part of each year’s event.

**Community Building**

The community gathering and bringing together people from all over was another prominent theme emerging from participant interviews. Thirty-three responses related to being in community with others, with seven responses focusing on “large ensemble,” 15 responses on “togetherness,” three responses on “appreciation for audience,” and eight responses on “family.”

**Large Ensemble**

The large size of the ensemble struck most participants as memorable from the event and a motivation to attend. The 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas had a record number of musician participants with 98 tubas and euphoniums, with a previous record of 70 that had been set the previous year in 2021. Prior to 2020, during which the event took a pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic, attendance had fluctuated from about 20-50 participants. Tim noted that he’d had “motivation to play in that big group,” and Amy said that she was struck by the “sheer number of people.” While it is impressive to gather one hundred musicians for any community event, having almost one hundred tubas and euphoniums gathered was extra notable for its uniqueness. Bob also described his memory of the size of the ensemble:

I think the thing that was most memorable to me was seeing the size of the group when we sat down in the lobby of the Museum, and seeing the people on the balcony looking down … I sat kind of down on the end so I could look across the group. And I couldn’t even see the end. I mean it was like a sea of tubas and euphoniums. It was pretty impressive. That, I think, struck me the most.

**Togetherness**

All of the participants described a feeling of togetherness created by the event. Each participant described attending either with family, colleagues, band mates, or to see others who regularly attended the TubaChristmas. Randy said that he enjoys “the getting together” and that
you can “kind of see the same people every year.” Karen described the event as “like going to Homecoming.” Several participants mentioned the aspect of playing music together with others as being especially memorable. Amy said one of the most memorable aspects of the event for her was seeing the large number of people “enjoying being there and making music together from all sorts of different places.” Brian noted that a major element of TubaChristmas was having fun making music and “showing up and enjoying and sharing that with people.”

**Appreciation for Audience**

Several participants mentioned a connection with the audience as part of their event experience. Musicians inherently rely on audience participation in various ways to create a successful performance. Without an appropriate audience and their willingness to attend to what performing musicians are trying to share, musicians could feel that an event missed its mark. Referring to the 2022 TubaChristmas event, Tim said “We had a pretty good audience at Grand Rapids, and we always have.”

**Family**

Six of the interview participants mentioned the TubaChristmas as being a family event for themselves or others. Four of the participants said that their family had attended in the audience, with one, Amy, who saw one of her students who was attending in the audience to see his aunt perform. One participant, Randy, described TubaChristmas as an event he traditionally performs in with his daughter, who also plays tuba. The first TubaChristmas they attended was when his daughter was in middle school and had been invited by her band director, and they have been returning to play in Grand Rapids TubaChristmas as often as they can ever since.

**Musical Experience**

Being a rehearsal and concert event, the musical experience of TubaChristmas is another theme that became apparent from participant responses. Twenty responses related to the musical experience of the event, with five responses focusing specifically on the sub-theme
“a chance to play other instruments,” and six on the sub-theme “appreciation for historical instruments.”

Amy described the flow of the event as sight reading and then two hours later performing, contrasting it with her usual musical experiences that have weeks of rehearsal, except for a few last-minute gigs. Bill also talked about the “thrown togetherness” that “makes it so unique and different” and how the “conductor will try to get the best music possible.” Many of the participants acknowledged that due to the all-call nature of the event, with no limitations on who can show up to perform with the group, the musical performance was not as polished as expected in other concerts. However, the experience of playing in the group was still enjoyable for them. Tim remarked that “Those carols are a little bit slower than I’d like to hear them played, but it’s completely understandable.” He went on to say:

The level of preparedness for the entire ensemble is different than in other groups, but it’s nice to play in a setting, though, as opposed to those things where it can be a little bit more intense, to play in something where you can be a little bit more relaxed playing…. You actually, I think, play better because you can focus in on your musicianship rather than, I better not screw up.

Bob, who had known about TubaChristmas long before attending for the first time at the 2022 event, said “It exceeded my expectations for musicality. I had low expectations going in, and I thought it really sounded great. It was kind of shocking, to be honest with you.”

For Karen, who often plays tuba improvising in parades, protests, and festivals, TubaChristmas as a musical experience is more organized and predictable. Karen said, “At TubaChristmas, I’m familiar with the repertoire and stuff, and somebody’s telling me what to play and giving cutoffs.” The familiarity and predictability of the music to be played is part of the expectation for both the musicians and audience.
Brian, who plays tuba semi-professionally, viewed the musical experience at TubaChristmas as an opportunity to utilize his playing ability to support the ensemble's overall sound. Brian shared:

At the end of the day, we play an auxiliary instrument. My entire job in every ensemble that I’m in, whether it’s an orchestra or a brass quintet or TubaChristmas, is to just make other people sound better. That’s literally what I’m there for. And if you have that kind of mentality, whenever you show up, you’re gonna have a good time, no matter what.

An example Brian gave of supporting the ensemble was his ability to choose which part to play to fill in where needed, particularly in the middle parts, to make the group sound better.

**A Chance to Play Other Instruments**

For several participants, the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas presented an opportunity to play instruments that they don’t normally get to. For Brian, who plays tuba frequently in paying gigs or for professional ensembles, TubaChristmas is a chance to play euphonium in a performance that is low stakes. Four participants own historical models of tubas or euphoniums that, although they have fallen out of favor in modern performance, are more than welcome in TubaChristmas, in which you can perform on any instrument in the tuba/euphonium family. Tim brought a helicon, an older type of sousaphone with a non-adjustable bell, to the 2022 event, and Andy played his 1925 Conn 46K Grand Jumbo Sousaphone. Andy said “I do like to get out with the sousaphone, at least some time other than village band concerts.” Both Bob and Bill played double bell euphoniums at the event. Bob said, “I could play an instrument that I normally don’t pick up and use my double bell euphonium, which I really love to mess around with. But I don’t get a chance to play it often.”

**Appreciation for Historical Instruments**

Participants also described an appreciation for the more unique tubas and euphoniums that musicians brought to the event. This interest in historical instruments is built into the tradition of TubaChristmas, with TubaChristmas coordinators encouraged by the Harvey Phillips
Foundation to highlight the various instruments as well as the oldest instrument present each year to the audience. At the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, Bill had the oldest instrument, a 1903 Conn double bell euphonium, which he enjoyed being able to share at the event. Andy said about TubaChristmas, “You might be more likely to see a double bell euphonium or some unusual tubas. Yeah, just older instruments.” Bob, who also brought a double bell euphonium to the event, said “It was nice to be able to play it in that setting, because there’s more interest in that instrument. You know, by the other players. It’s kind of a curiosity thing.” Tim appreciated the older instruments as well, and said “I always like seeing the double bell euphoniums. Bob has the one and other people have had them. Then there are different designs and stuff like that, but they’re interesting instruments.” He added, referring to historical instruments more generally, “Those old horns don’t play very well, but they have character,” and about his own helicon, “It’s an interesting horn, it kind of attracts a little bit of attention. It’s different.” Karen referenced the reputation TubaChristmas has for being a showcase of the tuba/euphonium family of instruments, and spoke about Bob’s bringing a double bell euphonium to his first event, “It’s like he read the playbook. How do I do TubaChristmas right? Weird instrument. Colorful outfit. Get there early. Sit around and schmooze for a while.”

**Inclusive**

The final theme that emerged relating to research question one was that participants describe the event as inclusive. Seven responses related to inclusivity and ways in which the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas made the event a welcoming space for people from a variety of ages and experiences.

The ease of the music was one element that stood out to participants as being inclusive. Andy noted, “Most anybody can do it. Doesn’t take a great depth of talent” when talking about the event. Bob, a retired middle school band director, said “It’s not a very difficult book, because it’s written so that everybody of all ability levels can participate to some extent.” The arrangements used in the TubaChristmas carol book are kept somewhat simple and in friendly
key signatures, with split parts so musicians can choose a line that more closely matches their range.

The 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event also made adaptations to support all ability and experience levels being made to feel welcome to perform. Bob said that he was “very impressed with Matt and the way he rehearsed the group. Outstanding for a group like that, with all the ability levels, and just the whole kind of semi chaotic excitement of the event.” He added that “Matt is such an excellent musician, and he’s just so good with the adults and with the kids.” Bob noticed and appreciated how Matt, the director, both included instructional support for those with less experience and extra challenges for the experienced players, and how his demeanor in interacting with the group didn’t condescend to any age level. Matt confirmed in his interview that it is his goal to “create a good experience for everyone in the group by understanding the needs of all ability levels, what’s easy on tuba and euphonium, and what an all-call group expectation should be.” He also referenced the different age groups represented in the ensemble, and said that he wanted to “make it fun, musical, and educational for young kids, older kids, and adults as well.”

**Audience Participant Experiences**

This section will discuss the themes that emerged in relation to the second research question: How do audience participants perceive and experience the event? The themes include fun, musical experience, family, tradition, and challenges.

**Fun**

The first theme explored in this section is that audience members experienced the 2022 TubaChristmas event as fun. In the comments section of the audience surveys, several participants wrote in comments specifically pointing to the lighthearted and enjoyable nature of the event. Comments included “It’s so much fun!” and “I love that it is informal.”

Eight data points pulled from musician interviews and the audience survey point to TubaChristmas as being a fun event for the audience. In the musician interviews, several
participants talked about the connection between the musicians and audience and how they perceived the audience as reciprocating the good time the musicians had at the event. Brian commented that when musicians are able to attend the low-stress event and just enjoy themselves performing, “the reflection of that that you get back is that everybody that’s there audience wise just has a good time.” Matt made a similar comment, and said that although his main goal is providing a good experience for the ensemble, “if the ensemble is having fun, the audience is going to have fun.”

**Musical Experience**

Audience participants described their musical experience at the event in the audience survey and as related through musician interviews. Twelve data points related to this theme, with eight responses relating to the overall sound of the concert and four responses relating to the familiar and popular tunes that were performed.

The unique sound of a mass tuba euphonium ensemble was well received by the audience. Some comments from the audience survey included: “Great concert!” “Very nice music.” “Love the deep sound,” and “I love low brass!! : )”. One comment from the audience survey showed a participant thinking about ways to possibly compliment or enhance the tuba euphonium ensemble and wrote “Adding a bell choir for one piece might sound interesting.” The survey data also showed that only 11/47 audience participants chose “Listen to tuba/euph” as one of their motivations to attend the concert, which suggests that TubaChristmas might therefore have helped elevate the sound of these instruments to people who might not normally listen to them. Two musician participants relayed audience feedback to the concert through their interviews, as well. James, who had his family, children, and grandchildren in the audience, said that they were “amazed at the rich deep sound of that many tubas and euphoniums.” Matt’s wife, who has attended 20 TubaChristmases with him, spoke highly of a particular piece from the 2022 event, when a featured soloist performed “Elegy for the Whale” by Alec Wilder with piano accompaniment.

69
Responses also showed that audience members appreciated the musical selections performed, which were almost entirely well known and popular Christmas carols. The audience survey showed “Christmas Music” was the second most common motivation for the audience to attend the concert, with 14/47 participants selecting it as one of their choices. One survey comment wrote, “It’s awesome. Short songs are perfect. Good mix of secular and Christian.” From musician interviews, Matt explained that he “tries to mix the big, fun, popular carols that everyone knows while fitting in a few less well known ones,” showing a very intentional programming process. Randy noted that “The people that come all really love it. It’s a great show, they like all the tunes.”

**Family**

The most prominent theme that emerged relating to the audience experience of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas was family. Twelve responses related to the overall theme, with an additional six focused on the related sub-theme of community building.

Many audience members reported that “Friends/Family” was their motivation to attend, with 35/47 selecting that option on the audience survey. More comments related to family than any other theme or subtheme under audience experience, with most describing either their children or grandchildren performing in the event, showing an intergenerational link between musicians and audience as well as between the musicians themselves. Comments included: “Our middle school daughter participated. Awesome;” “My son is playing today;” “This is my daughter’s first time performing;” “2 Grandchildren playing;” “My son loves this event;” “Grandson played in 1st, Grandpa joined in the second year. We have had 2-3 generations for the past 5 years;” and “My husband, Matt, conducted a TubaChristmas in 2008 and held out then 2-month-old daughter while he conducted Jingle Bells. She has attended every year since!” Audience members clearly showed excitement and pride for their family members to perform and be included in the ensemble.

**Community Building**
Several audience survey comments mentioned an appreciation for the event bringing people together from within the greater community. Responses included “It’s a great community event!” and “It’s so wonderful to see so many tubas together! We’ll be back!!” A few responses also made references to the intergenerational aspect of the event from the audience perspective, including, “I love the variety of ages and performance.” “This year my grandson is excited to play with his director outside of the classroom,” and “This year’s TubaChristmas my son will be playing with his band director.” In his musician interview, Matt noted that a benefit of hosting the event at the museum was that, being a public space, there were likely people in the audience who had not been expecting TubaChristmas who stayed to listen, increasing the reach of the audience.

**Tradition**

Another theme that emerged from audience survey data was that some audience members experience TubaChristmas as a tradition. According to the survey data, 27/47 audience participants had attended two or more TubaChristmases, with 12 having attended five or more. When asked if they would consider attending in the future, 43/47 selected “yes” and four selected “maybe,” with none saying they would not attend again. Several comments from the audience surveys showed the event as something they look forward to, both in Grand Rapids and in other locations where TubaChristmas is present. Comments included: “Always look forward to it.” “I moved to Grand Rapids 6.5 years ago and found TubaChristmas on Facebook. I missed last year, dumb Covid! But I’m so glad to be back.” and “We saw a performance of 400+ tuba players in Kansas City, MO.” These comments point not only to the Grand Rapids event as creating its own tradition, but that it is also part of a larger connected tradition of TubaChristmases throughout the country that audience members can look forward to.

**Challenges**
The final theme explored in this section is that audience members experienced challenges in the event. While the audience experience was overall positive, a couple of challenges were present and acknowledged by participants.

One challenge for the audience brought up by the audience members and musician participants was that there wasn’t adequate seating for the audience in the new venue. At the 2022 event, the musicians were seated in long rows that took up most of the main concourse of the museum, with the audience lined up along the walls or balconies looking down. No chairs were available, although some audience sat on the floor. Karen acknowledged this in her interview and said, “I’ve heard from maybe four audience members that they didn’t have a place to sit. They couldn’t see musicians. The museum made them stand up.” Comments from the audience surveys mentioned similar sentiments, and included “Could use some seating,” and “I was at Fountain Street Church before, which was a better venue for the audience, with seating.” Being the first year at a new venue with a unique layout and not in an auditorium, these were some logistical concerns that, having gone through it once and with feedback, could now be addressed.

Another challenge for the audience is the length of the concert, especially when they did not have seating. For some audience members, the concert was a bit too long. Comments from the audience survey included: “Fewer quartets and no solo singers” and “Not so many quartets, etc. I’d rather hear the whole group.” Understandably, some audience members might only want to listen to pieces performed by the whole group, when everyone is included in playing, rather than people they might not know being featured. However, for the musicians, having quartets and soloists perform in between whole group pieces gives their embouchures a needed break after hours of playing, which many in the ensemble would not be used to, as well as giving skilled performers an extra challenge to make their experience more satisfying. Balancing these needs of the musicians and the challenge it presents for the audience is certainly something to consider, as both Matt and Brian mentioned in their interviews.
Summary

In Chapter Five I presented findings from the first and second research questions. Musician participants described the event as fun, community building, a musical experience, and inclusive. Audience participants described the event as fun, a musical experience, family, a tradition, and with challenges. Common themes emerged between the musician and audience experiences of the event. Much of TubaChristmas is a shared and cooperative experience between the two groups of participants. In particular, the event as fun and a musical experience are similar. This likely was facilitated during the concert portion of the event when the two groups give feedback to each other through the musical performance and applause for each piece played.

Some distinctions are made between the musician and audience experiences, however. One distinction between the experiences of the two participating groups is the types of challenges the audience faced. At times the challenges for the audience were at odds with the needs of the musicians, such as the length of the concert. Another distinction can be made when looking at the musicians’ emphasis on community building compared to the audience’s emphasis on family in attending TubaChristmas. The findings suggest that for the audience, ties to family members who were performing were their strongest motivation for attending. For musicians, although several participants mentioned attending with family, the focus was more drawn to the connections made with other tuba players in the community. After all, one of the unique aspects of TubaChristmas is that it is an event for a wide variety of people who have one thing in common: playing the tuba.
Chapter Six

Meaning Making and Participation in TubaChristmas

In this chapter I discuss findings from the third research question: What meanings do musician participants draw from their experiences in TubaChristmas? Themes that emerged from participant data include tradition, intergenerational connections, community building, uplifting tuba culture, and uplifting others.

Tradition

TubaChristmas is an annual event that takes place throughout the United States as well as internationally. It has taken place every year since its founding in 1974, and for over a decade in Grand Rapids, specifically. For many participants, TubaChristmas has become an event that holds a place in their seasonal activities. It is an event to look forward to and know that it will deliver what it promises: a lot of tubas, and a Christmassy celebration. For many, TubaChristmas has become a tradition.

The predictability and consistency of the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas is a part of what makes it an excellent tradition for musicians and audiences alike. Karen has organized the event since 2006 when she brought TubaChristmas to Grand Rapids and Matt has been the director/conductor since 2014. While they have certainly made some changes to the event since its beginning including venue and specific programming selections, the consistency in personnel, along with items such as guidelines, souvenir badges, and carol books provided by the Harvey Phillips Foundation as overseer of TubaChristmas, has certainly aided in the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas’s consistent presence and growth.

In her interview, Karen mentioned the value of “keeping it going” so it can be something people can keep coming back to. For Randy, the Grand Rapids event is a tradition that he can start anticipating around October, when Christmassy costumes and “tacky suits” go on sale, so he and his daughter can have something fun to wear and stand out at the event. Randy also mentioned the consistency of how the event is run, and how that helps make the event a
positive annual experience. He said, “You know exactly what Matt’s going to pick, and you practice a few weeks before the thing, and you kind of got ‘em down, and away you go!” and “I think Karen does a phenomenal job, to me it’s well run, you know what you’re in for every time.”

Having the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas as an event consistent with other TubaChristmas’s under the larger organization of the Harvey Phillips Foundation provides the consistency needed to maintain the tradition as well. Amy, who had attended herself for the first time at the 2022 event, articulated:

I think that it’s cool that it’s something you can do anywhere in the country … that there’s TubaChristmases happening everywhere, and so it’s a national, you know, traditional event that happens all the time. So it’s something people can plan on and connect with again, even if you move somewhere else.

She continued, sharing an anecdote from a colleague who knew a teacher from out of state who was going to miss his hometown’s TubaChristmas, and who came to the Grand Rapids event instead and was perhaps able to continue his tradition in that way. She said “That’s a neat thing that it can just bring people together from lots of places, and it’s not just in our community.” For Randy, now that his daughter, who originally attended TubaChristmas as a middle schooler with him, is attending college in Indiana, his family can expand their tradition by performing in the Indianapolis TubaChristmas next year while visiting her in her new location.

The celebration of holidays is ritualistic and full of tradition on its own. However, the way people enact these celebrations can change throughout their lives as situations change in their families and communities around them. These changes can make holidays difficult or even painful for various reasons as holidays are loaded with memories and society’s projections as to how we are expected or meant to act and feel at these times. In the United States, and in the West Michigan region, the Christmas season is performed for weeks, and maybe months if starting after Halloween, in public spaces with decorations, music, events, and marketing centered around the holiday. TubaChristmas can fill a role in the holiday season of celebration
by being a place in the community to participate in seasonal activity. One participant, Bill, who had suffered the loss of his wife the previous spring, said “I was looking to fill my time with as many good things, especially during the holiday season, as I possibly could.” Karen, who coordinates the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, shared, “I don’t celebrate Christmas. So having this musical concert that’s essentially my thing, means that I have a focal point for the holiday season.” She further described:

Coordinating a TubaChristmas doesn’t take up a lot of my time, but it is a pleasant distraction from the holiday hustle and bustle that is not present in my life. It's a way for me to take a role as a bringer of joy, and assemble pals I see once a year and newcomers to the event.

The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas additionally holds meaning as a tradition by being a means of passing on elements of tuba culture and community knowledge to younger generations. Matt has attended TubaChristmas events since he was in the eighth grade, when he first attended the Kalamazoo Tuba New Year (TubaChristmas on New Year’s Eve) directed by Robert Whaley, who was the tuba-euphonium professor at Western Michigan University and who had been a student of Bill Bell, Harvey Phillips’s inspiration for founding TubaChristmas. Attending that event was extremely impactful on him as a young tuba student. Matt said:

And so I remember going in as an eighth grader, and you know, being disoriented by the score, and having a hard time reading it, but just being amazed by the sounds of this low brass choir, which I had never heard before. And that was one of the events in my young musical life that really got me hooked on playing the tuba and making music, and Mr. Whaley wasn’t, is not just a fantastic tuba-euphonium player, but he’s a really, really good conductor. He conducted the orchestra at Western for a while, as well as the bands. And to get to watch him conduct is always a joy, and so I would always go as a middle school and high school student for the experience of playing in the ensemble, but also just to watch him conduct.
Matt’s early experiences with TubaChristmas were profoundly impacted by the tuba role models that were leading the event, in particular Robert Whaley. TubaChristmas itself was founded as a way to honor an influential tuba teacher, Harvey’s mentor William (or Bill) Bell. As director of the Grand Rapids event, Matt continues to find ways to honor this line of tuba teachers each year, including the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas. One way that he does this is by programming what might be seen as the least likely tune in the TubaChristmas carol book, “Komm Süsser Tod,” a Bach chorale known to be Bill Bell’s favorite. Matt said about the programming choice:

Come Sweet Death is, you know, nobody who’s not a TubaChristmas person is gonna know that. But I like doing that one because, I did it growing up, you know, and that … And so to me it’s a part of TubaChristmas. Mr. Whaley would always do that one and he was part of the generation with Harvey Phillips that in the seventies created what at that time was TUBA, the Tubists Universal Brotherhood Association, which eventually became the ITEA, and he was actually part of the series of concerts that Harvey Phillips organized of tuba soloists in Carnegie Hall. Harvey Phillips was the first tuba player to play a tuba solo concert in Carnegie Hall, but he didn’t just have himself do that. He got a series of concerts for … eight tuba players.

The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas holds a place not only for participants to look forward to and anticipate a joyful and festive celebration of the Christmas season but also for tuba players to pay homage to their roots. It is an ongoing opportunity to acknowledge musicians before us who helped elevate the instrument through sharing their knowledge, musicianship, and efforts to secure national respectability for the tuba.

As with any tradition, there can be a sense of loss when it is unable to occur, as well. When the Covid-19 pandemic forced TubaChristmas, along with many public events, to be canceled in 2020, it was missed. Karen said, “not being able to do it in 2020, that hurt. That was really horrible.” When the Grand Rapids event returned in 2021, it ended up being one of the only Michigan TubaChristmases that was able to occur that year, with events in cities such as
Detroit, Lansing, and Kalamazoo still on hold. The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas had its highest turnout up to that point with 70 participants as musicians traveled from across the state where their local events had been canceled. Because the Grand Rapids event was able to return, it was able to maintain its role as an annual tradition for people both inside and outside the Grand Rapids community.

**Intergenerational Connections**

The theme of intergenerational connections emerged as meaningful for participants of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas. While the event was intergenerational through the musician and audience participants present, the connections that that togetherness allowed emerged as one of the most valuable and important meanings for participants.

Interview participants expressed how valuable the TubaChristmas was in facilitating community and social interaction between different age groups. For most adults, unless these types of interactions are part of their profession, this intergenerational socialization would be uncommon outside of and maybe even within families. Tim said, “There was somebody there, they said, was 9 or 10, and the oldest person there was in their 80s. So just that whole level of different experiences and things where you can get together and just have fun. And in that type of setting. That’s what I like about the TubaChristmas.” Andy also mentioned an appreciation for interacting within a wide age range, and noted: “One of the real benefits is for younger and older players to play together on fairly equal footing, and we’re all playing from the same books, and it’s just nice to have that wide an age spread.” Bill, who generally attends multiple TubaChristmases each year, said:

At the end of the day, it’s about the joys of making music with lots of different people, meeting them, talking with them, helping the young and helping the old. I mean, like I said in that post, I sat next to the oldest performer in the performance at Kalamazoo, who was 99 years of age, and then the youngest and oldest at Lansing, and I was able to be helpful to all of them, and that was wonderful to me.
Participants who are current or retired teachers appreciated the opportunity to interact with younger people outside of school and in a different setting as well. Amy, who is a band director in the local area, said this about interacting with a college student:

I sat next to somebody who was a Grand Valley student, and I don’t know if he wanted to talk to me as much as I was interested to talk to him, because I asked, that, as a teacher, I was asking him a bunch of questions. It’s just fascinating to hear where people are from, and I knew his high school band director, of course, you know, and so to get to know new people, too, and that was cool to see.

Bob, a retired band director, reflected on the intergenerational connections he made during the event, and said “I had a high school student on each side of me at rehearsal. And so that was fun to interact with the kids, and it probably was fun for them, too. It made me miss teaching a little bit, to be honest with you. It really did. To interact with the kids around me.”

Besides interacting with younger people socially, participants felt that inspiring younger generations through older role models was a valuable take away from the experience. When asked about the most valuable aspect of TubaChristmas, James, a 90 year old participant, responded: “Well I think it’s great to encourage musicians, like … we had 9 year olds playing. You know? 9 year olds from middle school. Playing tuba. This is going to, they’ll remember this, all their life, that they played in a big tuba concert like that.” Tim agreed, “I think it’s good for younger students to see older people playing, that you can still play your instrument after you get out of school.” Bob spoke about the effect of performing in such a large group of like instruments, and said it was:

Just encouraging. You’re lucky if you get two or three [tuba players] in your band, and for those kids to see all those tuba-euphonium people and people like you and me, who are still playing after all these years. I think it’s a real confidence boost for young players to see so many and to hear them play as an example.
Bill shared a story from a previous TubaChristmas to illustrate the value of being able to serve as a role model and mentor for younger musicians:

During rehearsal I sat in between the youngest and the oldest performers. And the youngest was a 10 year old, and I just was very kind and supportive of him, just helped him out where I could. And his father reached out to me afterwards, found me on Facebook. We weren’t friends. Found me on Facebook, and said Henry would really like to thank you for your kindness and support for him.

Although Bill loves to perform, this feeling of being able to pass on a love of music to others is the most important reward from TubaChristmas for him. He explained:

But all that being said, my favorite is the photograph of me sitting next to that young man, laughing while I’m telling him something. And he’s just looking at me intently, and I’ve got this big laugh on my face. And then what his father shared with me, that makes me feel good, because, and then, his father’s recently shared “Yep, he’s going to be moving up to the tuba next year because he’s really excited about it.” So if I had just a small smidgen of helping that young man find a love of music, and in 40 years he’s doing the same thing I am. Then what I’ve done is perfect.

Participants also described ways that older generations are supported by TubaChristmas. In an all-call and low pressure environment, older players can participate and enjoy themselves without having to make a big commitment and a lot of prior preparation. Tim spoke about how TubaChristmas can be an opportunity to inspire older tubists to perform by peer modeling from older performers, “For older guys like … if there was another old guy there, who can continue to play.” When asked about the most valuable aspect of TubaChristmas, Brian responded: “I think the most valuable aspect of that concert is basically dragging people out that otherwise wouldn’t perform. And keeping the tuba in their lap, if you will.” Brian went on to speak about a senior tubist in the Grand Rapids community:
I don’t think he’s really playing much anymore. And the fact that he showed up and played I thought was awesome. So it was one of those things where it’s just like, you gotta go and you gotta say hi! And like that kind of camaraderie, and like keeping people plugged into music even when they’re I mean. He’s got to be pushing what, 85 now.

Bill talked about being able to be helpful to older musicians as well as younger musicians, and said, “I hope that when I’m an old man and slightly hard of hearing someone will take me under their wing, and they’ll help me out.” Caring and respect for the older generation of tubists as well as the younger was clearly evident among the participants.

**Community Building**

Community building also emerged as meaningful for TubaChristmas musician participants. For the musicians, the ability of TubaChristmas to gather communities together by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment is part of the nature of the event itself. Amy talked about how TubaChristmas “can bring people together from lots of places, and it's not just in our community.” She said that she “would love to participate with her students, get more people involved, experience the community aspect with other colleagues and meet new people" because “when communities can gather and make music together is neat.” Bill mentioned that “the most important thing about it is that TubaChristmas brings together people of varying backgrounds, musical talents, instruments, age, and allows us to all come together in a wonderful feeling of community.” Brian also talked about “the camaraderie of playing music together” and “seeing people at the event, showing up and enjoying and sharing that with people.” For Randy, TubaChristmas is a venue that helps connect people that might otherwise never meet. He said:

It’s pretty cool that you find just people that play the same instrument as you; because, when I went to do Rockford Community Band, guess who was the only tuba. We’re used to being one or two and that’s it. So being surrounded by all those people.
Karen spoke about the importance of having an annual event that brings people together, and said it is “valuable, having buddies walk in who I haven’t seen in a year.” TubaChristmas is a somewhat niche event that draws in people who have a particular interest in common: the tuba family of instruments. Some musicians who attend play in community bands or are in school ensembles together, but others may only play in TubaChristmas as their one musical event of the year. Whether musicians play year round or not, the event is like a reunion for people who keep coming back. Karen added, “It’s just so cool to see somebody that I know and care about. And is part of my band family.” Tim also mentioned that Grand Rapids TubaChristmas has served as an opportunity to continue relationships with friends who don’t often cross paths, and said: “The thing that motivates me to come back, it’s just to see people that I don’t see very often, and just to play in that big group.” Randy talked about the positive aspect of being able to see the same people each year as well, and appreciated “Just the getting together, you kind of see the same people every year.” Because the event creates a line of consistent connections by taking place long-term, year after year, real friendships have been sustained as a result. Bill said of Karen, “She’s a great coordinator, and general all-around supporter of music and TubaChristmas particularly,” and that he generally tries to attend the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas to support her efforts and partake in her event.

The all-call nature of TubaChristmas has been part of the event since its inception and is still seen as crucial to maintaining its spirit. Creating a virtuosic musical performance or seamless logistical flow is seen as less important than welcoming tuba and euphonium players of all experience levels into the ensemble. Tim described the 2022 Grand Rapids event, “you had people of all levels, the professor from GVSU playing, GVSU tuba ensembles, and instant quartets,” and said what’s “most valuable is it allows people from all different abilities and experience levels to get together and play.” Amy expressed similarly when asked what is valuable about the event, that “it is open to everyone. I think that’s really important. We don’t want to exclude people from music making opportunities when we don’t have to, right. So I think
that’s super valuable.” When talking about some of the logistical issues the new venue had presented for the 2022 event, Andy said:

> You could limit participation, but we really don’t want to do that. That’s a little against the nature of the way we’re accustomed to it being. So if 300 or more people show up, as in Chicago, a couple of years ago, I was there. And you like all those people to be able to play.

James, speaking about bringing together amateur and student musicians to perform, put it succinctly, “It’s not like music has to be perfect to be fun.”

**Uplifting Tuba Culture**

The 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas also provided meaning for participants by uplifting tuba culture. The event is specifically catered to the tuba family of instruments, as advertised in its name, and puts a focus and celebration on the instruments and the people that play them. At TubaChristmas, tubas and euphoniums are the stars of the show.

One way that TubaChristmas uplifts tuba culture is simply by gathering tuba players and enthusiasts together to one event, when a typical ensemble would have a few at most. Bob and Randy both mentioned that, as a section commonly composed of perhaps two or three people, having an event where everyone plays the tuba as well can be encouraging. It also puts the attention all on tubas who normally sit in the back of the ensemble playing accompaniment to the more commonly melodic instruments that sit in the front. Discussing the director’s focus on tubas during TubaChristmas, Karen said that it’s “important to have a director that understands tubas and low brass culture.” TubaChristmas is a chance for tubas to be in the spotlight. Karen continued: “You want to talk about tuba things. You want to talk about low brass things.” She told a story about a previous director who had brought a trumpet mug to TubaChristmas, not understanding how important it was to allow the focus to be on the tuba family for the day. The event is also a chance for the audience to show their appreciation for tubas. Bob said, “We just got a lot of positive feedback that we don’t usually get when we perform with large ensembles,
because we’re usually not the main player, we’re not the trumpets, the clarinets, the flutes.

Probably the most gratifying part.”

Another way that TubaChristmas uplifts tuba culture is by having tubas and euphoniums play melodies. The arrangements in the TubaChristmas carol book rotate the melodies of the carols through the parts, so that both the higher-ranging euphoniums and the lower-ranging tubas get a chance to play the melody at various points. Bill, who is primarily a trumpet player outside of TubaChristmas, said that the event is important in that it is “giving low brass players the experience that I have, being the lead.” Bob said:

The most valuable part, as a euphonium and probably tuba player, frequently playing backup to the melodies in most pieces of music, it just was really fun to see how excited and focused low brass people can be when they get to play melody, and they’re kind of the center of the show instead of playing backup.

Bob continued:

It shows young players especially, that the instrument can be pretty versatile, and we can do a lot more than just oompahs, and backups, and ensemble work is fun. It’s like a massive tuba quartet. It’s kind of a tuba ensemble on steroids. Hopefully … [for] the younger musicians that were there, it would light a fire under them to want to perform in small ensembles and maybe do Solo and Ensemble at their school, and that sort of thing.

Another meaningful aspect of the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event is that it helps connect musicians with a heritage of tubists. Heritage is one element that can help people feel connected to a broader history, feeling themselves connected between the past, present, and future of their community. As a participant, Andy recognized the significance of being able to connect with people who were integral to founding TubaChristmas, like when he attended Chicago’s TubaChristmas and met Harvey Phillips there and was stand partners with Norlan Bewley, who arranged additional carols for the TubaChristmas carol book after Alec Wilder.
Andy shared a photo of a signed copy of the TubaChristmas carol book (see Figure 4), with autographs from several prominent tubists including Harvey Phillips, Bob Whaley, and Jim Self. Andy spoke about his choice of dress for the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, relating to what he had known about Harvey.

I have not been one to get really dressed up for it, but Harvey Phillips always said that he liked people to dress up a little bit. He didn’t like blue jeans and T-shirts and that sort of thing. He wanted people to take pride in what they played, and how they looked.

For Matt, incorporating moments that educate the musicians and audience about the heritage of TubaChristmas is important, as well. Matt said:

It’s important to me to mention where the event started, and you know, I didn’t mention it at this one, but that line of tuba players and teachers. If we trace our teachers back to their teachers, back to their teachers, it really does almost always go back to Bill Bell.

Matt also talked about programming choices that honor important figures in TubaChristmas’s history, such as including “Komm Süsser Tod,” Bill Bell’s favorite Bach chorale, and, in 2022, “Elegy for the Whale,” a solo for tuba and piano by Alec Wilder, a close friend of Harvey Phillips who composed the first arrangements used in the original TubaChristmas.
The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas also helps uplift tuba culture by providing an event where historical and unique instruments are welcomed to perform publicly. Four of the musicians interviewed were able to perform on historical instruments and share both sight and sound with the ensemble and audience. Tim’s helicon, Andy’s Conn 46K Grand Jumbo Sousaphone, and both Bob and Bill’s double bell euphoniums are not only interesting to see and hear, but they help provide participants with a sense of the historical range and evolution of the tuba family as instruments were used in brass bands, military bands, orchestras, and wind ensembles.
Finally, the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas provides meaning for participants by its ability to uplift others. Participants felt that it was meaningful that the event brings joy to participating musicians, the audience, and the enveloping community.

Musicians who participated in the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas overwhelmingly responded that it was an enjoyable experience and that they had fun. As a no RSVP, all-call event, TubaChristmas is an opportunity for any musician to show up and perform with others for an audience, even if they don’t play their instrument any other time during the year or haven’t played in a long time. Additionally, unless someone is a member of a school or community ensemble, opportunities to play tubas or euphoniums with others may be hard to find. Bill shared a story from a previous TubaChristmas of an exchange student from Japan who was a euphonium player but hadn’t gotten to play in a long time. When the student was given access to a borrowed instrument and a space to play, Bill said “his playing was just beautiful, and he was filling this church with the most beautiful sound you could imagine.” For Bill, being able to organize the joy of music for someone who hadn’t been able to participate in it in a little while was immensely rewarding. Matt also talked about bringing joy to the musicians in the ensemble, and said that as director, his “main reward is making it a good experience for everyone and that means a lot to me,” and that he wants “everyone to get some musical satisfaction out of it.”

The musician participants also expressed that it was important to them to bring joy to the audience. The musicians certainly enjoyed playing the carols, but being able to spread holiday cheer to those who weren’t playing was part of what made the event meaningful to them. Having an audience present to appreciate the musicians’ efforts and enjoy the gift of music was essential to the spirit of TubaChristmas. Tim said, “It’s not about taking it seriously, it’s about doing your best and having fun and making, putting out something enjoyable for the audience.” Bob reflected that “even though there was a nice size audience, it would be nice to be able to
share that with more people, if there was a way.” If the concert could reach even more people, the impact of the event would be greater.

Participants also felt that Grand Rapids TubaChristmas was meaningful by bringing joy to the community as a whole. The concert was free with the price of admission to the Grand Rapids Public Museum, and provided an opportunity for both musicians and audience to participate in a Christmas celebration with others. Bill said, “It brings joy to people during the holiday season. If I can bring some joy to people, that’s really important to me as well.” James compared the TubaChristmas concert to other community concerts, and said, “The reason I like it is because we get together with a bunch of musicians and play. And the community gets blessed by it.”

Summary

In Chapter Six I discussed the research question: What meanings do musician participants draw from their experiences in TubaChristmas? The themes discussed in this section included tradition, intergenerational connections, community building, uplifting tuba culture, and uplifting others. Whether it was their first TubaChristmas or one of many, all of the interviewed participants described a sense of importance placed on the event and found value and meaning in participating both for themselves and in their relationship with others. In Chapter Seven, I will synthesize the results from Chapters Five and Six and share my conclusions and implications of the research.
Chapter Seven
Synthesis and Conclusion

In this chapter I will synthesize the findings and connect them with the related literature to discuss the final research question: What elements of the TubaChristmas event provide perceived benefits to musician participants, and what elements provide challenges? The meanings that participants perceived from the event point toward which benefits they gained. Their responses assist in determining which elements of the event provided those benefits. I will then discuss the implications for ongoing practice, make recommendations for future research, and provide a conclusion to this study.

Intergenerational music programs provide a setting within which the potential for positive outcomes is created. By bringing together generations in a musically purposeful environment, participants in such programs can benefit from intergenerational interactions in ways that both relate directly to intergenerational attitudes and in ways that have nothing to do with intergenerational relationships. In other words, intergenerational music programs are valuable not only for providing and improving social interaction between multiple age groups. Music education and performance opportunities within intergenerational contexts are useful as a means to improve outcomes in musical performance, education, and the community as well.

Benefits

The benefits reported by participants of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas fall into the categories of musical, communal, and social benefits. The musical benefits can be divided into two sub-themes: aesthetic experience and educational experience. This section will discuss the elements of the TubaChristmas event that provide benefits for participants in each of these categories.

Musical

As primarily a musical event, it should be expected that participants receive benefits related to music when attending TubaChristmas. Participants both reported benefits from
TubaChristmas as an aesthetic experience and as an educational opportunity that enhanced their musical selves.

**Aesthetic Experience**

Participants expressed an appreciation for TubaChristmas as an outlet for musical satisfaction and a chance to perform. Performance opportunities for tubas and euphoniums that are welcome to all and require very little commitment and preparation are hard to come by, so being able to participate in the ensemble and spend a few hours immersed in music was seen as a benefit to the musicians interviewed.

The sounds of the concert were aesthetically pleasing and provided musical satisfaction to participants. James described the “rich, deep sound” of the tubas and euphoniums as a memorable moment from the event, and how his children and grandchildren were amazed by the tone quality. Similarly to the combined intergenerational choirs in Conway & Hodgman (2008) and Sutherland (2017), the beautiful and unique group sound achieved by the mass ensemble gave the musicians a different aesthetic experience than they could have achieved on their own. Tim also described one of the musical performances as a memorable moment, specifically Bill’s solo singing of “Santa Wants A Tuba” while wearing a colorful Christmas suit and moving throughout the ensemble and audience.

For a few of the interview participants, TubaChristmas is an opportunity for music making that is available even when other opportunities are closed or require more commitment than they are able to give. Bob appreciated any chance to play euphonium in a community setting. He said, “I’ve got more time on my hands being retired, and I’m always looking for reasons to play my horn because I don’t get very many opportunities.” He continued, echoing the findings of Cottrell (2004) that discuss the limited use of euphonium in ensembles outside of military, brass, and wind bands, saying, “It’s hard to find opportunities to perform euphonium. It’s not like we can play in jazz bands and orchestras and those kinds of things, there’s just not a lot for euphonium players. So it’s fun to find something different.” Brian recognized that although he
now plays year round semi-professionally there will come a time when he will no longer be able to do that, and TubaChristmas could remain an opportunity for him to still experience musical performance as a senior. Brian said:

I hope to do this much longer than I can functionally perform at the level that I’m at now, because again, I feel like the whole goal of TubaChristmas is wildly different than sitting on stage and playing every concert D in tune, right? If I’m a little off, that’s okay. I got to play, you know, ‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas’ with like, a hundred other people. That’s pretty awesome.

It can also be an enticement back into music for participants who haven’t played in a while. When asked why he decided to participate in the 2022 TubaChristmas event, Andy said, “Just sort of getting back into playing the tuba after being away from it for a few years.”

The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas also provides particular performance opportunities for musicians with higher skill levels or special musical talents that can function within the bounds of a tuba-euphonium concert. Bill, who is highly motivated by performance, was featured in “Santa Wants a Tuba” as the solo singer. He had performed the piece several times previously at other TubaChristmases, but said that this year’s rendition, being “the first time I got to perform at that venue, and having the crowd so close, made it absolutely amazing.” Brian had also been invited to perform as a soloist, playing “Elegy for the Whale” by Alec Wilder on tuba. Although he usually tries to attend the event anyway, this addition of a performance opportunity that met his ability created more incentive and enjoyment for participating. Brian said:

Not that TubaChristmas isn’t interesting and exciting. But that, here’s another level of, let’s make it challenging. Usually I just show up and, you know, have a good time. This time I felt like I had to actually show up and play.

**Educational Experience**

Participants also recognized the value of being able to learn from the event and increase their own knowledge, skills, and musicality. The intergenerational nature of the event
contributed to the educational value of participation, as found in Kennedy (2003) and Varvarigou et al (2011). Musicians of varying ability levels and experiences were able to find some way to grow, whether by looking up to or being a role model for others, performing in a different role than usual, or practicing pedagogical techniques as an educator. Several participants referred to experiencing or witnessing musical growth during the event. Amy talked about the growth opportunity TubaChristmas provided for students. She said:

Anytime you can have an opportunity to get your students to either attend or participate in something musical outside of class and outside our own requirements is an awesome chance to help them grow as people and musicians…. I think it’s really important. So, and this one’s a little bit more fun and a little more attainable, I think, for some people, especially.

Amy also described how the event impacted her thinking as an educator, saying:

It was good for me musically to be on a lower instrument than I typically would play and to think about all those things, as a teacher, how my students, oh, yeah, they can’t breathe. They can’t hold a note as long as [smaller instruments]. It’s way bigger, you know. As an educator, it was important.

Bill also spoke about the event as an educational experience, one that increases his own musicality. He explained:

It’s what Matt brings as director. He brings his own educational style and overall I love that. That’s another thing I love about TubaChristmas is seeing all these different conductors and the different ways they do things, and bringing from that stuff, stuff that I can bring to my own music.

Karen also mentioned that “Matt makes it into a bit of a sectional,” and as director brings out the educational aspect of TubaChristmas.

Matt’s interview emphasized the importance given to making the event a learning opportunity for participants. He said, “For me, because I’m an educator, and I see it not just as a
Christmas event, but as a musical event. But I also see it as an educational event, because it was for me, you know, and I want to make it a good experience for everybody.” Matt hopes to be able to provide each person with something, a “little nugget” of information that they can hopefully take home and incorporate into their playing, not just for a single day, but long term. He has the same approach when adjudicating school ensembles at festivals in order to try to make those events more impactful, as well. At TubaChristmas, there are some techniques that he makes sure to talk about every year, such as guiding newer musicians in how to read a score (which is how most of the TubaChristmas arrangements are presented) and the “finger-air-tongue” technique, which preserves embouchure from fatigue while clarifying articulations, valve-timing, and rhythmic accuracy. Already thinking toward the next year’s event, Matt additionally proposed incorporating coaching opportunities for collegiate musicians who attend as an idea for increasing the educational outcomes of TubaChristmas for more advanced musicians and aspiring educators. He explained:

I’ll have some of the GVSU students go coach the volunteer quartets, and then that way we can have kind of an educational experience on multiple levels. So we’re giving his college students the chance to do a little bit of coaching as well.

With thoughtful planning and consideration of the needs and development of a wide range of participants, Matt is able to turn TubaChristmas into an educational experience as well as a festive celebration.

*Communal*

Participants described benefits to the community. The way the event impacted the Grand Rapids community positively was described in several ways. TubaChristmas involved a large and diverse group of people from all walks of life who were able to participate. Amy talked about how communities gathering together to make music is special and a valuable aspect of the event, as well as how the inclusive nature of TubaChristmas means that no one needs to be excluded. Amy’s description mirrors the sense of family and communal culture of musicality that
was elevated by the presence of intergenerational choirs in Sutherland (2018). Karen also explained that “keeping it going” for people in the community is really valuable. Having a space where people can come together and be welcome to socialize, make music, and perform a celebration of the season is important for communities, and TubaChristmas was able to be one example of that.

It also provided a low-cost public performance that was available not only to friends and family members of the performers but to anyone visiting the museum. Although audience members had to pay the normal entrance fee to get into the museum, the concert itself did not require tickets and was free of charge. Communities are seen to thrive when they can provide arts and entertainment in addition to the practical necessities, and so TubaChristmas can be seen as a fairly accessible and welcome cultural event for the city.

Finally, the event also brought a sizable audience to the Grand Rapids Public Museum, a non-profit organization that works to be a positive resource for people living in and surrounding the city. Both Karen and Matt mentioned that it seemed to be positive for the Museum with the number of people the event brought in. Many audience members as well as musicians took time to view the exhibits and displays throughout the day as the event went on, as well as visit the cafe and gift shop. Having the event be mutually beneficial to the venue and community it resides within is certainly one of the positive elements that will hopefully ensure its longevity. TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids serves multiple purposes as an intergenerational music program as defined by Ayala et al, including bringing together different age groups to “[collaborate] to support their community” (Ayala et al, 2007, p.47).

Social

All of the participants felt that they benefited from the sociability of TubaChristmas, paralleling findings from other studies of intergenerational music programs (De Vries, 2012; Kennedy, 2003). This is an element of TubaChristmas that is purposefully scaffolded by Karen, who created the schedule for the day to include a lengthy registration period and pizza lunch
during which musicians can mingle, as well as open seating arrangements during the rehearsal and performance so people can sit where they are comfortable. In Sutherland (2018), purposeful planning for opportunities to socially interact was mentioned as a necessary element to fostering positive social outcomes in intergenerational music programs. James felt that playing in the ensemble was “a great social experience to have,” and that “the camaraderie that you have with the group of musicians is always fun.” In fact, every participant mentioned that knowing they would see people at the event, either who they already knew and could reconnect with or to meet new people, was a positive motivator and a perceived benefit from attending.

Intergenerational social interactions were in particular mentioned as a benefit of TubaChristmas, as well. The mutual nature of the event doesn’t put one generation in particular in a position of power or superiority over another. Amy, Bill, Brian, and Bob all specifically talked about appreciating social exchanges with musicians in the ensemble from either younger or older generations than themselves, and all of the participants expressed appreciation for the presence of other generations that allowed intergenerational music making.

Challenges

The challenges reported by participants of the 2022 Grand Rapids TubaChristmas are related to venue, audience needs, tuba/euphonium needs, unpredictability, and potential intergenerational friction.

Venue

The challenges that a venue can present affect the organizer, director, musicians, and audience. Both securing a venue and managing the logistics of the venue’s space can be difficult. This resonates with findings from previous studies including Beynon et al (2013) in which access to appropriate facilities was noted as a potential barrier to intergenerational music programs. Karen, the organizer of the Grand Rapids event, and Bill, who organizes Kalamazoo’s TubaChristmas, mentioned that finding a space to host the event can be difficult. For Karen, managing roadblocks such as cost, insurance, venue size, availability, and location
was important when the previous venue, Fountain Street Church, communicated to her that they wouldn’t be able to host TubaChristmas in December 2022. Bill discussed the additional challenge of finding locations and connections within the community when he doesn’t live in the city himself. Once the venue was secured, however, planning the logistics of the event for the new venue’s space presented some difficulty as well, as could be expected for any event being held somewhere new for the first time.

Eight of the participants mentioned that the flow of the event within the new space was a bit awkward, while recognizing that it was the first time in the Museum and that there were a record number of attendees. Karen discussed that considering where people will put their cases, recalling that tuba and euphonium cases are quite large, can help reduce congestion in high-traffic areas like event registration. She also emphasized that perfecting the flow of traffic from registration to hanging out, to rehearsal and performance, is an important detail toward making the event run smoothly. Karen already has plans for improving these aspects of the event for the next year.

**Audience Needs**

As noted in Chapter Five, audience participants have their own needs when attending events like TubaChristmas. Issues such as inadequate seating, viewer sightlines, length of the concert, and paid entry into the Museum were all potential problems for those who came to the performance. With the ensemble set up throughout the main concourse, there was no formal seating area for audience members who lined the walls and railings of multiple floors to view the musicians. Some audience members struggled with not having a bench or chair to sit on or with not having a clear view of the ensemble. This, combined with the length of the concert, which was an hour and 15 minutes, provided a challenge. Additionally, although no audience respondents mentioned the museum fees as a challenge to their participation, several musician participants related that holding the event, although free itself, in a venue that charges admission could potentially turn people away.
**Tuba-Euphonium Needs**

The nature of TubaChristmas as a pop-up, inclusive, multi-hour rehearsal and performance presents some challenges when considering the specific needs of musicians playing tuba and euphonium. Embouchure fatigue is one issue since the nature of the event requires musicians to play for several hours in a row through the same-day rehearsal and performance. Additionally, the type of playing may be more taxing than a typical ensemble rehearsal or concert, since the tubas and euphoniums have almost no rests. The size of the instruments can be challenging when moving through indoor spaces as well, for example, having storage for all of the large cases or fitting a sousaphone through a door without denting the bell. Finally, although tubas can play fast, too, the nature of an amateur mass tuba-euphonium ensemble is such that the comfortable tempo for some carols will be slower than general performance practice. Matt talked about the potential challenge of having a conductor who doesn’t “know tubas” leading the ensemble, and how having someone who understands these needs is so important. He said:

I wanted to make sure that there was someone who knew tubas, at least, choosing the tempos, and not telling us to go eight bars in one breath…I need to teach my tuba players to hide the breath and to create the illusion of a long phrase.

**Unpredictability**

Because TubaChristmas is an all-call event without pre-registration, there is no way to know the exact number or experience level of people attending ahead of time. Although Karen uses methods to estimate the turnout such as creating a Facebook event that allows people to RSVP, the final size of the ensemble is only clear when registration has ended. The Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event essentially doubled in size over the past three years, going from about 50 participants to 98 in 2023. This unpredictability is a challenge for knowing how many materials to provide, such as commemorative buttons from the Harvey Phillips Foundation and how much pizza and pop for the complementary lunch.
Matt, the director of the event, mentioned it is challenging to make it a good experience for players of all diversities of experience who may attend. Providing enough support for less experienced musicians, while at the same time offering enough challenge and opportunity for those who are more skilled, is something Matt considers and prepares for.

**Potential Intergenerational Friction**

Although the overwhelming majority of intergenerational interactions were viewed as extremely positive and meaningful for participants, there was still a potential for intergenerational friction, as experienced by Andy. Similar findings were presented in Conway & Hodgman (2008) regarding placement of singers within the ensemble. While Andy expressed appreciation for the wide age range of participants in TubaChristmas, he also was challenged when his seat in rehearsal was close to a middle school student who wasn’t being careful about where his bell was, knocking it into others’ instruments and potentially denting the brass. Andy had brought his historic Conn 46k Grand Jumbo Sousaphone, which he maintains with great care, and said, “So with 97-year-old instruments, it’s a little … irksome,” and that next year, he would probably choose somewhere else to sit. In this case, the young student didn’t have the experience or mindfulness yet to understand the care needed in handling the size of the instrument in a crowded space which was in conflict with Andy’s need for a safe environment for his instrument.

**Mitigating Challenges**

Throughout the data collection process, even as potential challenges from the event were noted, ideas for ways to improve the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas for the following year were discussed. One reason I believe the event continues to grow and is seen as overwhelmingly positive and meaningful to participants is due to the thoughtfulness of the organizer, Karen, and director, Matt, in considering ways to improve year after year. Certainly, a benefit of an annual event is the ability to make adjustments to the experience following feedback and consideration of the effectiveness of an event’s implementation.
Karen, along with the museum coordinators, was already planning ways to mitigate the logistical challenges incurred by the 2022 event. For a better flow through the event space, she discussed that having a separate space for cases would reduce the congestion around registration and the complimentary lunch. To address the lack of seating and poor sight lines for the audience, the ensemble could be set up along the stairs, with chairs set up for the audience in what was previously the ensemble space. Karen also suggested working with other TubaChristmas coordinators to facilitate sharing leftover badges, carol books, and ideas, which helps handle the unpredictability of how many musicians will show up. Karen’s thoughtfulness in organizing the event didn’t go unnoticed by participants who really appreciated her efforts in planning.

Matt mentioned several ways in which he plans for handling the musical and educational challenges that can arise within TubaChristmas. To assist with embouchure fatigue, he helps musicians have moments of rest within the rehearsal and performance by using rehearsal techniques such as the “finger-air-tongue” technique, where musicians perform the wind, articulation, and fingerings for the music without buzzing, by sharing interesting tidbits with the audience between pieces, and by having quartets perform at intervals throughout the concert. He also mentioned a technique that can help with ensembles tending to slow, using a circular motion while conducting, though he also is intentional in responding to where the group seems to want to be, tempo-wise, while playing. In catering to the variety of experience levels that attend TubaChristmas, one way Matt helps collegiate or professional musicians have a good experience is by offering solo or chamber ensemble opportunities, and in 2023 plans to offer coaching opportunities for music education students, as well. Matt mentioned that continually reevaluating the event may be important to its success, saying “I think we’ve gotten more successful at it, the more that we do it. I’ve gotten more sophisticated [at planning].” Appendix E includes Matt’s notes for both the rehearsal and the performance in 2022, showing thoughtful planning for the event.
A final idea to consider for mitigating challenges in TubaChristmas relates to the finding that some audience members were challenged by the length of the concert being too long, particularly when paired with inadequate seating. Perhaps an element of audience participation could help audience members stay engaged for a longer time. For example, Grand Rapids, along with other TubaChristmas locations, has sometimes in the past included lyric sheets for the audience to sing along or sleigh bells for children to play during some tunes.

**Implications for Ongoing Practice**

TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids could be impactful for music education, the community, and intergenerational bonds and attitudes. Participants had clear ideas on how they benefited from the event, as well as ways in which TubaChristmas has the potential to benefit others in their community.

An event that provides an accessible music education experience connecting the youngest learners to the oldest hobbyists could be an effective way to bring the idea of lifelong musicianship to students, something music educators strive to promote and instill in students. It increases the connection between “school music” and music in “real life,” by bringing together people from all walks of life in a culturally relevant event, a performance of Christmas carols during the holiday season. For adults, TubaChristmas is a valued opportunity to continue learning that likely began in school, and even a chance to pass on their musical knowledge to others, even if they are not professional music educators. In this way, TubaChristmas can serve as a bridge between music education in schools and community, and from childhood to adulthood.

Intergenerational bonds and attitudes were described by participants as being positively impacted by the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas, making it likely that this was an overall beneficial outcome of the event. Audience members were excited to attend with several generations of family, watching students participate alongside band directors, and listen to the beautiful sound of the combined ensemble. Musician participants enjoyed getting to socialize
with those from both younger and older generations, learn about and from each other, and perform on equal footing with people both less and more experienced than themselves in order to form a sense of togetherness. Participants could see themselves in past, present, and future through the event, allowing them to situate themselves within their own timeline and show caring and understanding for others making their own journeys through life. While the event itself spans only several hours, TubaChristmas may have increased or at least reinforced a respect and appreciation for generations outside of one’s own.

Music educators and community organizers should be aware of TubaChristmas events as an intergenerational opportunity within their own communities. If there is an existing event, I encourage music educators to get involved by attending the event themselves, inviting their students to attend, and potentially using ideas from this research to assist in mitigating challenges presented by the event or to increase the benefits for participants. If there is no existing TubaChristmas event in their community, I encourage music educators and community organizers to consider starting one as a unique intergenerational opportunity for tuba and euphonium players.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study provided insight into a specific annual intergenerational community music event. However, even within TubaChristmas events in Michigan and the Midwest United States, there are many unique characteristics and elements of each event to consider. Further research could investigate TubaChristmas events in other cities or the history and impact of TubaChristmas as a whole throughout the United States and/or internationally to determine the potential impact and considerations necessary for TubaChristmas events in other communities. Additionally, this study investigated the experiences and perceptions of adult participants in the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas; future studies could delve into adolescent experiences and meaning-making from the event. With more research surrounding the benefits and challenges of intergenerational music making, the music education community could have more resources
and information available to successfully implement these opportunities for students and community members.

**Conclusion**

TubaChristmas in Grand Rapids is an annual intergenerational community music event that may last for only several hours at a time, but as a tradition weaves a thread of continuance year after year. This continuance takes place not only over the years in Grand Rapids, MI, but throughout the country as a part of a larger network of events that people can look forward to, increasing its cultural significance. The apparent silliness of its concept, taking a solo accompanying instrument and putting it in a mass ensemble to play Christmas carols, combined with the depth of meaning behind its founding and heartfelt inclusivity to all in the community, has perhaps created an ideal foundation for an educational event that is also uplifting and builds togetherness across generations. As in Hebert and colleagues (2012) and Petrone (2014), experiencing musical traditions together with family and within communities is powerful.

The findings from this study showed that musician participants described the event as fun, community building, a musical experience, and inclusive, and audience participants described it as fun, community building, a musical experience, and a tradition. Musicians drew meaning from TubaChristmas through tradition, community building, intergenerational connections, uplifting tuba culture, and uplifting others. Finally, musician participants perceived musical, communal, and social benefits from the event, while experiencing challenges related to venue, audience needs, tuba/euphonium needs, unpredictability, and potential intergenerational friction.

TubaChristmas is an event that from the outside, may look frivolous, simple, or, due to the inevitable imperfect sounds created by nature of the ensemble, a “less-than” performance opportunity. But the experiences, histories, and stories of the people who bring life to TubaChristmas show that it carries more weight and complexity than seen at first glance. The Grand Rapids community has almost certainly been positively impacted by this intergenerational
event that connects student musicians to adult amateurs and professionals and gives seniors a stage on which to play alongside children.

Communities continue to strain from the generational gap (Camareno, 2019), and providing an annual event like TubaChristmas may serve to benefit all generations from the social interactions present when they get together for music making. It is my hope that this study will help shed light on the unique intergenerational experiences TubaChristmas events provide to guide future participants, audience members, and community organizers.
References


Appendix A

Survey Protocol

Survey (All Musicians)

1. Age range: Under 18  18-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  61-70  71-80  Over 80
2. How far did you travel to be here today?  0-20 miles  21-50 miles  51-100 miles  100+ miles
3. What motivated you to come to TubaChristmas today? Check all that apply.
   Friends/Family   Social media   Website   Teacher/School   Play
   Tuba/Euphonium   Christmas Music   Tradition   Other:____
4. How many Grand Rapids TubaChristmas’s have you attended?
5. How many other TubaChristmas locations have you attended (TubaChristmas in Kalamazoo, Detroit, etc)?
6. How many years have you played tuba/euphonium?
7. Is tuba/euphonium your primary instrument?  Yes/No
8. Do you play tuba/euphonium outside of TubaChristmas? Yes/No
9. Do you play another instrument outside of TubaChristmas? Yes/No
10. Do you think you will attend a TubaChristmas again in the future? Yes/No/Not Sure

Survey (Audience)

1. How many TubaChristmas's have you attended?
2. Have you attended TubaChristmas at any locations besides this one? Yes/No
3. What motivated you to come to TubaChristmas today? Check all that apply.
   Friends/Family   Social media   Website   Teacher/School   Listen to
   Tuba/Euphonium   Christmas Music   Tradition   Other:____
4. Do you think you will attend a TubaChristmas again in the future? Yes/No/Not Sure
Appendix B

Participant Interview Protocol

**Individual Interview (TubaChristmas Participants)**

- Demographics (Age, location, # of TubaChristmas’s)
- How long have you played the tuba/euphonium? What is your musical life like during the rest of the year, outside of TubaChristmas?
- How did you first hear about TubaChristmas?
- Why did you decide to participate in this year’s Grand Rapids TubaChristmas?
- How often do you attend TubaChristmas? What motivates you to come back?
- How do you prepare for TubaChristmas?
- Describe a memorable moment from this year’s event.
- What do you consider the most valuable aspects of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas?
- Are there any aspects of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas that are challenging or difficult?
- How does Grand Rapids TubaChristmas compare to other experiences where you are performing music?
- Would you consider attending future TubaChristmas events, and why?

**Individual Interview (Organizer)**

- What is the story of your involvement in TubaChristmas? In general, and in Grand Rapids?
- Why do you continue to be involved in TubaChristmas?
- What are your goals for participants of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas? For the audience?
- What do you get, personally and or musically, out of TubaChristmas?
- What are the challenges in organizing TubaChristmas?
Individual Interview (Director)

- What is the story of your involvement in TubaChristmas? In general, and in Grand Rapids?
- Why do you continue to be involved in TubaChristmas?
- What are your goals for participants of Grand Rapids TubaChristmas? For the audience?
- What do you get, personally and/or musically, out of TubaChristmas?
- What are the challenges in being the conductor for TubaChristmas?
Sarah Powell would like a word:  
"Hello to all fellow Grand Rapids Tuba Christmas goers! I wanted to introduce myself before this fantastic event. 
I am a Masters in Music Education student at U M, and am excited to be studying Grand Rapids’ Tuba Christmas event for my capstone project! My project involves writing up the history of Tuba Christmas in Grand Rapids, as well as people’s experiences with the event in order to examine its impact. 
You will see me at registration distributing surveys and hoping to find a few folks interested in sharing their experiences with me via Zoom interview. Completing the survey and interview sign-up are entirely voluntary, and I thank you for considering sharing your stories with me!  
Hope to see you there, and a Merry Tuba Christmas to all!"
Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

TUBA CHRISTMAS IN GRAND RAPIDS: AN INTERGENERATIONAL EVENT

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experience of participating in the Grand Rapids TubaChristmas event.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in one individual interview with the researcher, recorded over Zoom, for the duration of approximately 30 minutes.

Benefits of the research

Although there are no direct, concrete benefits of this research to you, during the course of this study, you may find an increased awareness of the impact this event has on you, personally. In addition, this study may help other communities in determining whether to organize Tuba Christmas in their locations.

Risks and discomforts

There are no significant risks or discomforts associated with this study. Any reference to you in the research will use a pseudonym, unless you indicate permission to use your name.

- I would like my name to be used in the study, instead of a pseudonym.

Compensation

There is no compensation for this study.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You may choose not to continue with an interview for any reason.

If you have questions about this research study, you may contact Sarah Powell at sfpowell@umich.edu or Marie McCarthy at mfmcc@umich.edu.

I agree to participate in the study.

____________________________________  ________________________
Signature                                  Date
Appendix E

Director Rehearsal and Performance Notes

Warm-Up
H - 8-12-16
Remington
Scale Round
Slurs
Articulation
Tune
Pencils - 1 per stand
Tone
Watch
Balance

Danger Notes
Define 1st & 2nd parts Top Bottom
Not too loud
Find line of sight

Order of rehearsal & performance
Will go over order & announce @ perf
Save Lips for perf - Finger/Air Tongue & vb
Bell Front in back

Elevator / Stair
2 trips / elevator
Bell Front in back

Leave time to mm
Set up quiet area

Find line of sight
Leave room for museum gown

12/18/22 Rehearsal
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Key Change</th>
<th>Sheet Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>GRTC 12/18/2022</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adeste Fidelis</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Welcome to TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Beside Thy Cradle</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Explain origin of TC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Go Tell it on the Mountain</td>
<td>With repeat</td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce volunteer 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>O Little Town of Bethlehem</td>
<td>1X</td>
<td></td>
<td>quartet(s) practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Fum, Fum, Fum</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>TC around the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>O Christmas Tree</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Invite being along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deck the Halls</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>First day of Chanukah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The First Noel</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chanukah Suite 1&amp;2 volunteers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Wassail</td>
<td>1 of 2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Various instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Angels We Have Heard On High</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Explain Kommm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Kommm Susser Tod</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Line of Tuba Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Joy to the World</td>
<td>2x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Duet with volunteers! #19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Hark the Herald Angels Sing</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Bring a Torch</td>
<td>1x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Invite to sing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Jingle Bells</td>
<td>Skip 50/51, play National Emblem</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuba salute at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>We Wish You a Merry Christmas</td>
<td>1x, sing last phrase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Encore Jingle Bells @ 52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>