

According to Jon Sass's Philosophies on: music, jazz, education, and life.



ON THE DEMANDS OF MUSIC AND WHAT IT FOSTERS

Music can provide a great basis for a give and take relationship. If composer and performer of a piece are sincere with their message and the music touches the listeners, it then generally affects what one receives, not only from the audience but from peers as well. For Jon Sass, music has no demands: it exists as a creation and reflects the experience of the performers and composer.

It reflects what people feel and/or want to say, show, give... or perhaps none of these. Over the years it has become crystal clear that Sass's life on and off the stage has been a profound part of the insight into his

never-ending self-discovery. He can hear it in the way his sound is today. His life in Austria has given him many things through its musical avenues. Equally so, Sass takes pride in the fact that Austria and other parts of the world have been positively receptive to his playing and creativity.

Jon Sass spent the first 5 years of his youth on a farm in Virginia with his grandparents, and lived afterwards in Harlem, New York City. Both being African-American environments, they gave him a deep-rooted connection to the spirituality of music and allowed him to celebrate and feel music physically and emotionally. This definitely set the stage for Sass's understanding of mind, body and soul as one, which seemed to him to be the logical and healthy basis for approaching African-American as well as other musical avenues.

Listening to music started when His grandfather would tell me stories, often true and impromptu. He would sing and talk while playing the guitar and say whatever he needed to say. That experience relates to the oral tradition which has remained in African cultures till today. It is how information is passed on orally from one geographical point to another. It was a system which had a profound effect on how people communicated verbally and musically.

Having lived in Vienna for 23 years now, Sass's grandfather's stories still leave a firm imprint on his creativity, especially in communication. Austria presented a new world of understanding in how music is celebrated and played.

Fortunately for him Sass has always appreciated a learn-by-feeling-and-understanding approach when confronting new musical worlds. Living in Vienna for Jon meant learning German and communicating musically. That all went rather smoothly. Social attitudes and communication methods were definitely a challenge. Of course, coming from Harlem and college in Boston to Vienna was no small step.

After having successfully integrated these new attitudes, Sass came to understand that creative communication exists from his rearrangement of essential skills acquired from past experiences, in order to learn how to effectively communicate and share ideas verbally and musically. Enjoying being in the only body he has now is also an essential basis. He is also fortunate to have played with great musicians who were either based in the USA, Vienna, or in middle Europe. It was at the age of 18 that he came in contact with 3 musicians from Vienna who were searching for a tuba player. It was in 1980, after a recommendation from Jazz

tubist Howard Johnson, that Jon met Wolfgang Puschnig in New York, together with Christian Radovan and Uli Scherer. Sass was invited to Vienna and have been close friends with all 3 till today.

The Vienna Art Orchestra was actually Sass's first touring gig ever. Musically speaking, it offered him space to explore a new kind of expression with his instrument, and to explore his creative voice, experiencing Jazz from a European perspective.

Prior to the Art Orchestra, Jon Sass often did substitute work for Bob Stewart or Sam Pilafian in New York and played a few times with Howard Johnson's band Gravity. He was a founding member of a jazz-based brass quintet called Sassafrass Brass which played on the streets of New York. Sassafrass did kick ass! It was a collaboration with some high school friends who are not at all unknown in the New York scene today: Chris Rogers, Alex Brofsky, David Zalud, Jack Shatz, and on occasion Ray Vega.

One important point Sass picked up is that real great value lies in the skills learned from the communicative challenges when working among different people, attitudes, backgrounds and musical worlds. The skills he learned did not only helped his communicative skills but his listening and hearing skills as well.

The experience of being in Vienna – rather than having stayed in Boston – has been very positive in this respect. Put in a nutshell, music has been Jon's means to shed light in the areas where light was needed. One question which is often asked in my new *CORPORATE GROOVE* seminar is: "If everyone were to follow you, where would you lead them?" Music grows as we grow and understand who we are. It's the best therapy! Through the responses from his musical creativity seminars, Sass has often experienced that many participants voiced that they have received a new understanding of life for themselves. He felt that it would be a blessing to be able to help people outside of the music world.

ON THE INCREDIBLE GIFT

It was around the second year of playing the tuba that Jon Sass remembers, while practicing in his bedroom, that he feared the neighbors were irritated because his tuba sound traveled through an open backyard. Lucky for him and to his surprise, the neighbors were supportive of his practice. As Jon would walk down the streets with his tuba, he would hear parents proudly say: "The- he goes Jonathan with his tuba!" Having the

support of his neighbors meant a lot. It represented Sass's hope that a dream can be realized, no matter how unusual or what type of environment it comes from. This gift reveals itself on a road together with the experience of having always been able to make his living with his passion. For Jon Sass the gift is the living self-discovery. It has been recognized by others as his unique way of playing the tuba.

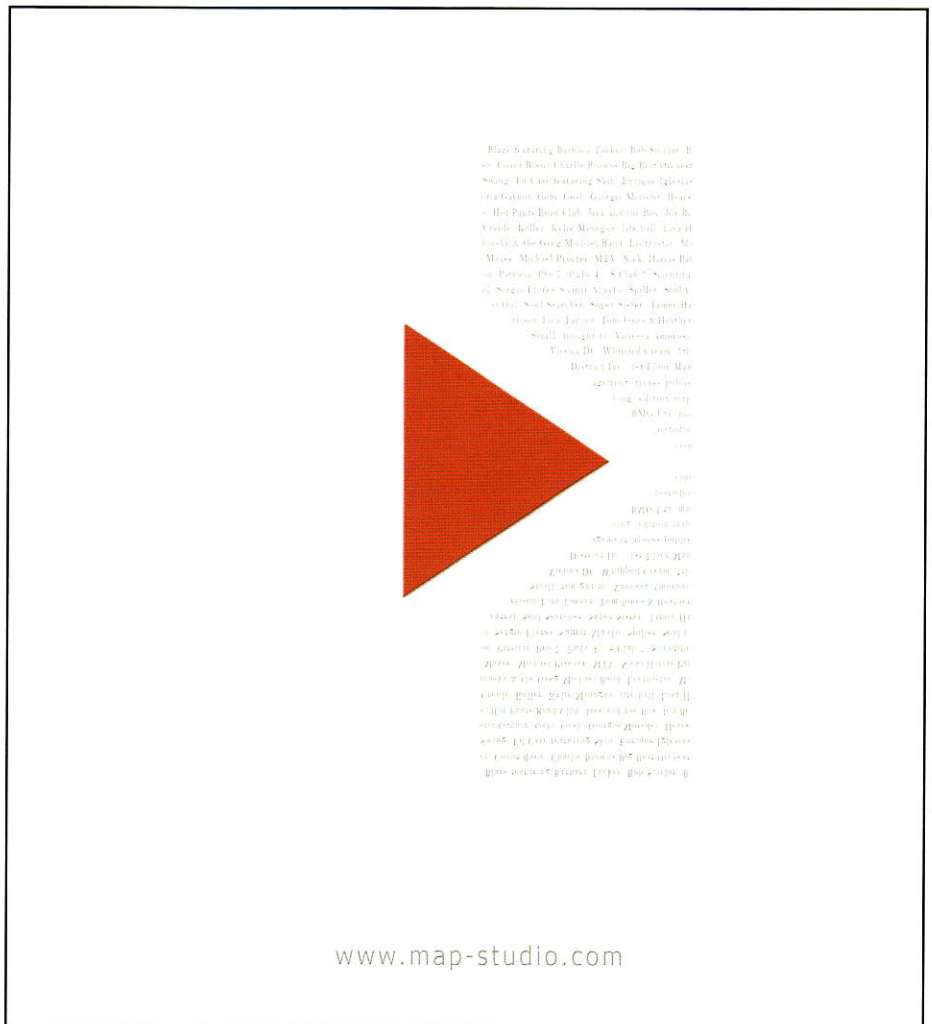
That creative voice has opened many doors and ways to grow as well. Jazz tubist Bob Stewart, who lived one block away, told him something very important. Stewart said that Jon should gradually introduce his unique playing skills in his other groups. It seemed to be more joy than just courage when he let it out, and it made an impact which was totally unexpected. Playing for others turned him on, along with the fact that they are equally turned on.

As one thing lead to the next, Sass realized that his playing style had made a great

impact on the Jazz scene in Austria, Germany, and middle Europe, as well as in the international brass world. Over the years, it has become evident that his strengths lie strongly in his ability to communicate and maintain successful performances within various high-profile ensembles from different musical styles. Whether workshops, seminars, ensembles, solo projects, books or composing, this diversity has been a structure which Sass created in order to go to where he is now. He is thankful that most projects and ensembles have reached a successful plateau.

Many formations are international and yet each musician – just as himself, can have slower months than others. People ask him at times: "Isn't it scary living life on a thin string?" John can honestly respond that he is truly "living" life on a thick fat string.

This is because he has trust in his talent. This has been helpful to him for unlocking a door to himself, traveling the world for several times over, and sharing his playing in different cultures and musical contexts.



Jon Sass



ON PERFORMING

During Sass's early stages of tubadom, he recalls daydreams or visions of how he needed to see himself as a performer. That picture is getting much clearer as he grows. Jon knows and feels that there have always been other familiar energies which have influenced his life as a musician. His father was a lead bass gospel singer with a prominent group which toured in the southern and northern states within African-American halls and churches. Sass has only one record with his father's singing on it but it was after his first time hearing it that he then knew and felt why he always preferred playing bass and having a vocal approach to playing tuba.

Unfortunately, Sass didn't have the pleasure of ever experiencing his father in person; however, he knows that his father is still part of his life. He has truly felt his father's presence for many years. Through that presence he has gotten to know himself better as well. Jon also knows why he loves to be on stage. It is the moment of the day when he feels truly in his element.

Jon Sass is currently playing in two classical chamber ensembles – Art of Brass Vienna (for 17 years) and the Austrian Brass Connection (for 4 years). Both groups have solo players either from the Vienna Philharmonic or Symphonic Orchestras as well as, players from the Berlin and Munich Philharmonic Orchestras.

Hans Gansch, solo trumpet of the Vienna Philharmonic, and Sass were invited to Art of Brass in the same year. Jon says that it has always been fun and inspiring to play with Hans, as well as, with all the members of the Art of Brass. Austrian Brass Connection provides the best context of working in a serious and focused way because there is usually a lot of music to realize and notes to play. It is also an outlet for his classical experience. He gives many solo

concerts within different contexts, either with symphonic wind ensembles, jazz bands, and original formations, as well as, with his own combos such as "Tuba and Tap" where he features himself along with the tap dancer Sabine Hascika.

Next year Tuba and Tap will have 2 dancers! There is also a great duo with the Cuban singer Millagros Pinera. For this reason, Jon maintains different arrangements of his music. In September 2008 Jon Sass was invited to Australia as the featured tubist in the International Melbourne Brass festival, a week-long event with a solo performance as well as seminars.

He represents Austria in most of his international workshops. Years ago, Sass gave presentations to tuba teachers in Austria; these days, he shares his creative journeys and insights with music teachers in general, such as the Vorarlberger Musikschulwerk. Workshop concepts for this fall and next year include "BASSis for the bassblowaz" and Corporate Groove.

His newest ensemble is a quartet with New York legends Dave Taylor, John Clark, and Dietmar Küblböck, solo trombonist of the Vienna Philharmonic. They have had a successful performance at Franz Hackl's *OUTREACH FESTIVAL* and will start workshop and performance presentations next year.

There are several new productions in the works, such as *Blauklang*, which features the music of Vince Mendoza, planned for this fall. Players such as Peter Erskine, Arkady Shilkloper, Lars Danielson and many others will be on board. A new creation is also the *STORYBAND*, which is where Puschnig and Sass create the music. The

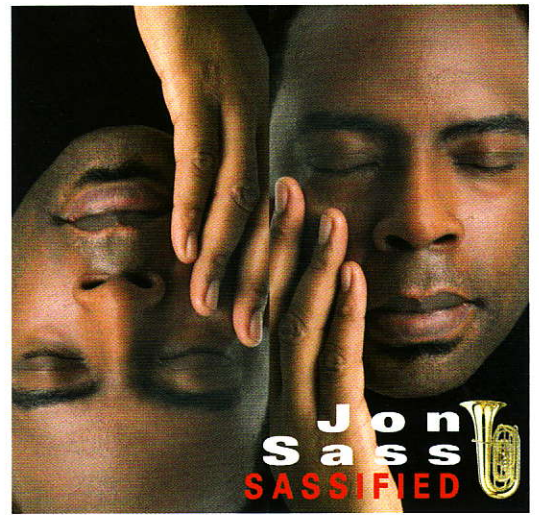
Storyband is a collaboration with three storytellers from the US.

One is the Grammy-nominated Diane Ferlatte as well as *ETH-NOH-TEC*, a popular duo team of Asian-American storytellers Nancy Wang and Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo, weaving storytelling with movement and music to create a unique kinesthetic theater experience.

Working with Erika Stucky has made a big impact on Jon Sass's world. She is a true friend and performer who lives in "the now" both on and off stage. In other words, she "keeps it real" when performing. He loves going into the unexpected with her.

Jon Sass shares a wonderful apartment together with two great performers: Wolfgang Puschnig and Wolfram Berger. They have known each other for years. Puschnig and Jon go back to the time when Sass started in the Vienna Art Orchestra. Puschnig has two formations where Jon shares the bass function with string bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma. Wolfram and Sass met when they started a new Ernst Jandl program about six years ago. Since then they have enjoyed performing as an ensemble. The three artists have lived together for three years now and all still happily share a beautiful 270-square-meter apartment in the center of Vienna. Living together with 2 other performers is a blast because it is huge fun as well as sharing their talents and experiences. The vibes at home are great because their chemistry is a great mix.

Sass is thankful to have graced the stage with performers of all kinds who have given him insight into the many possibilities an artist may have. Tuba playing in the past Sixty years has become more respectable to



audiences and musicians alike because of the work of players such as Ray Draper, Howard Johnson, Dave Bargeron, and of course Bob Stewart.

But he believes we have to look as well outside of the tuba world at our peers and into ourselves. With that in mind, Sass feels and sees that we are in an age for change.

ON SHARING MUSIC WITH OTHERS

Sass's main approach is that he "shares" information and insights learned from his experiences. He has always taught privately in his home in Vienna and feels that it is important to provide a basis for students to become aware of their own potential as well as the accomplishments of others.

He believes that students need to be challenged more creatively by empowering them to inspire visions for themselves. If a student chooses to create a soup of opportunities, one needs a good base, and for that Sass encourages networking. He will not at all rule out their having a foot firmly planted in the basics as well as learning music theory. Providing a diverse set of examples including jazz, classical, contemporary, and popular styles and his own material is part of his approach.

Sass then allows them to wisely choose the areas to focus on, including repertoire and techniques. If one plays the tuba, he suggests that they learn classical tuba as well. Realistically speaking, it is not easy to live by playing tuba outside of an orchestra unless flexibility is in the program. Jon plays classical because he can and it's fun to play with great classical musicians such as Hans Gansch, from whom he receives fire and energy while playing. This point is one Sass shares with students, so that they may receive a personal perspective on playing classical music.

Hearing personal perspectives in addition to traditional ideas can help empower students to take their own initiative. By networking, he means making forward steps to get familiar with other writers and ensembles who are making progressive use of the tuba or with working tubists who may require a substitute one day. To make such efforts more effective, confronting creative challenges and diversity in academia helps in providing an energetic basis. If it is difficult to find folks using the tuba in your area, then Sass suggests resorting to creating what you would like to experience. The same holds true for the young musicians who play instruments which are seldom used in different contexts.

Diving into unknown territory can bring one of two results: either you like it, or you don't. If you like it then you can profit by learning a new existing vocabulary or take part by creating your own lines: that adds up to one skill gained which may even be applied in other areas.

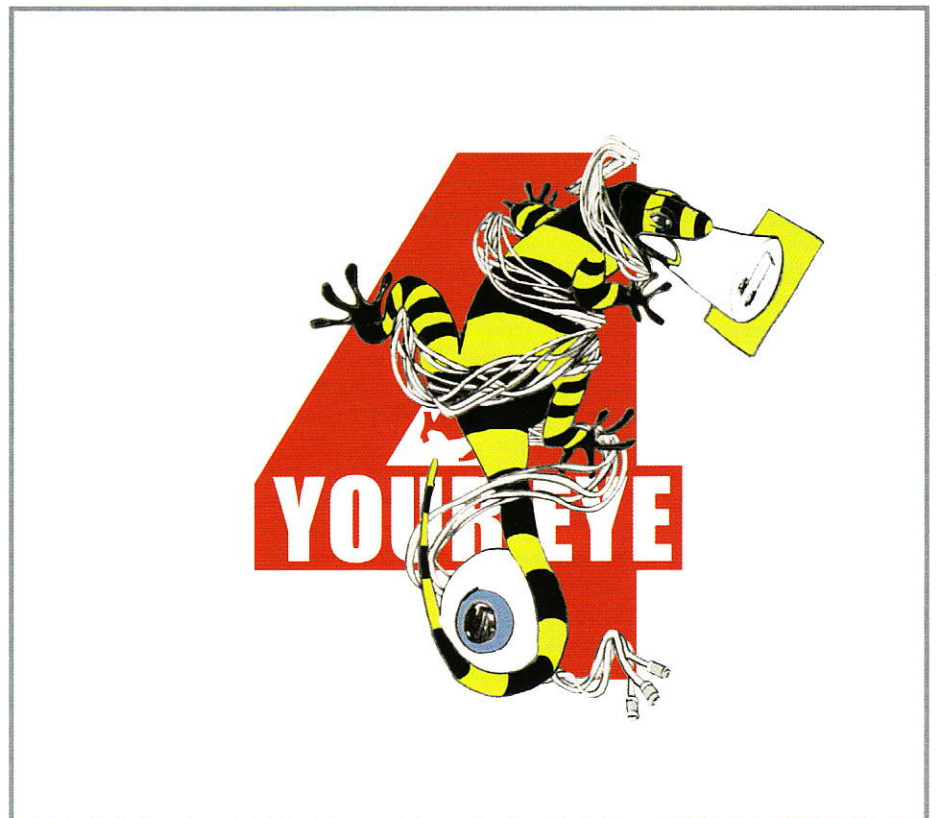
Jon Sass encourages the development of ideas for new formations with artists who share a similar vision. These artists must not necessarily be musicians. He feels that the key is to inspire the desire to share thoughts which are needed for saying and giving, not only for the audiences but for themselves as well. Jon believes that the key is to start working this way with younger musicians. It is important to keep an eye on for their own passion. If such exists, he would then encourage them to spend more time in this issue, they are simply accomplished in the other study areas. Sass encourages students to compose for themselves by taking a learn-by-doing approach, and share their insights on discovering their own creative voice.

Jon Sass also suggests that they give insight to the realities of the business and show them how they can create their own opportunities. Jon thinks this would be much more helpful, especially in today's music world. Sharing this would be important.

By "being aware of their own potential," he refers not only to improvisation but having more diverse experiences and thinking "outside of the box."

For years, Jon Sass has given workshops throughout Austria and around the world in connection with tuba playing and beyond. He has one theme which is very often requested and that is about playing basslines. This project will probably be one of the first specialized Bassline Books for Low Brass Instruments with play-along CD. A lot of interest has already been seen on the BIM site. www.editions-bim.com. Sass also has a Creative Workshop for Low Brass with DVD and play-along CD coming out in a new format from TMV-records

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CORPORATE GROOVE is a dynamic two-day seminar Jon developed to provide corporate organizations and institutions with the possibility of experiencing how disciplines used in ensemble playing provide a clear metaphor, showing how creativity can be applied when working with personal and team limitations. To put it bluntly, he wants to share the benefits he has received from years of human social creativity. With *Corporate Groove*, they provide a sound basis for developing communicative and inventive skills by means of interactive playing with specific musical instruments, and a unique approach to overcoming fear and empowering a new understanding for oneself. This experience ultimately applies not only to company team members but to clients as well. It is beneficial as well for companies after mergers and from different cultures. A healthy understanding of self combined with acceptance leads the way to a new universe of creativity.

ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jon Sass has mainly had a classical education, institutionally speaking, but he himself has always been self-taught regarding Jazz and other African-American music styles. He heard Jazz, Soul R&B, and Gospel at home in the north, country and gospel music in the southern parts of the USA. Growing up in New York City meant having music literally in the streets such as Soul, Rap, and Hispanic music, which was played daily till two or three in the morning through stereo speakers in apartment windows facing the street!

There sat the diversity; sleep was the real challenge. Sass's tuba and classical education started with Joe Daley, who lived in New Jersey; he next went to one of the top tuba teachers in the country, Sam Pilafian.

At the popular Music and Art High School located in Harlem, New York City

and the Harlem School for the Arts, there were classes offering classical, jazz, vocal, and gospel programs. Currently playing musicians such as Marcus Miller, Ray Vega, Omar Hakim and many others attended Music and Art at that time. Jon did some substitute work for Bob Stewart and Joe Daley, which is how he learned a lot.

His home neighborhood was buzzing musically in many places. Sass later studied classical music in Boston University, which was a great time. During the semester term, Boston University was supportive by allowing him to participate in the Vienna Art Orchestra tours.

During the summers he worked in New York, Boston, and at times Vienna. When Jon studied at Boston University, they offered several musical opportunities in its program, but some of the most unforgettable were efforts initiated by the students.

He recalls a free improvisation party set up by Paul Brody, an accomplished jazz musician now living in Berlin, for those who chose to participate. They used part of the first floor of the school to let a larger environment inspire the fire. That was great fun and inspired others as well as himself. The entire experience both in and out of college and high school were paramount as a basis for who Jon Sass is today. As stated earlier, Sass feels that there needs to be more concern with students using their creative skills: knowing what is inside and thinking outside of the box.

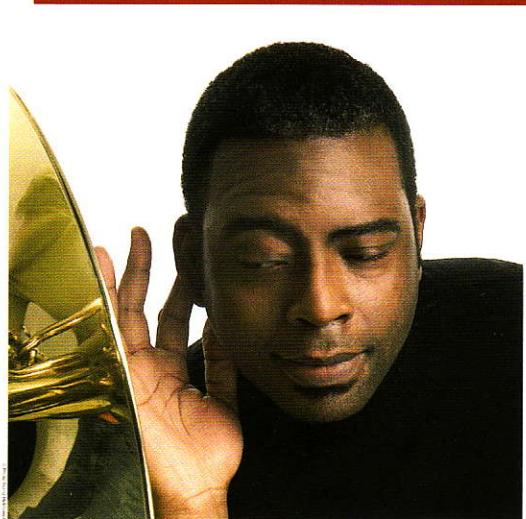
His younger brother is a celebrated MIT professor of architecture whose students are highly challenged creatively. The theme of creativity was inspired by several experiences, one of which is from Creative Impulse in an article Sass wrote years ago to be published on line for musicians.

The response by readers was astounding. Here is an excerpt from his Creative Impulse concept: It was creativity that has made it possible for me to live from "playing" the tuba, and to be able to choose from different opportunities. Today, looking back at all these years of experience, it is unfortunate to see that there is far too little true original creativity but more copying. Copying is very human but there is something we all can do. CI is designed for classical musicians who desire more from themselves creatively.

This is an intense, fun-filled session for musicians who seek to expand their own musicianship and opportunities by adding diversity and balance to their own musical universe. Creative Impulse is not only useful for musicians but for professionals in other fields as well. The motivation involves seeking out one's own truth in the creative process. This particular version of CI is specifically designed for all musicians.

A common unhealthy stigmatism amongst classical musicians is the fear of improvisation and playing freely without notes.

Knowing that we are truly in command of our own belief patterns is the first step in showing fear the front door!



The Jon Sass Bass Line Book

for tuba
or other low brass instruments
with CD accompaniment

Editions **aim**
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Creative Impulse Topics

- Awareness of the Creative Voice.
- Having a creative outlet.
- Awareness of Other Paths.
- Fundamental Contemporary Harmony.
- Introduction to Improvisation - Overcoming the fear.
- Improvisation in different Genres.
- Thinking outside of the box.
- New Concepts in Concert programming, performance and stage concepts.
- Arranging original compositions for new ensemble instrumentations.
- Creating a direction or your thing.
- Observing and Using Your Resources.
- Composing for yourself-Learn by doing approach.
- Rhythmic Impulse.
- Dealing with Creative Block.
- Self Discovery.
- Using Recording facilities - Recording your own material as an individual or as a group.
- Simulation of Live amplified situations in the Studio.
- Microphone, Monitoring and Equalization.
- For the future Sass remain true with his horn on and off the stage and see where tubadom travels

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