

Bishop, Ron, "Arnold Jacobs on Record: Its Influence on me", T.U.B.A. JOURNAL, May, 1988 p 27-29

The first time I heard the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on record was in 1955. I was a senior at the Eastman School of Music and a classmate, who was an audiophile, had the record of the Moussorgsky - Ravel Pictures at an Exhibition with Rafael Kubelik conducting. This is very early HiFi, readers (1951), but it sure hooked me! I bought that record and a few others and, after building a do-it-yourself sound system, listened regularly at home and later in the barracks at Ft. Meade, Maryland (U.S. Army Field Band, 1956-1959).

The CSO sounded fantastic, the tuba playing, remarkable. The man responsible was, and is, Arnold Jacobs. As I listened to recordings of Bartok, Moussorgsky, Prokofiev, R. Strauss and Wagner, I thought, "What a thrill it must be to play in such a marvelous ensemble." I had trained in music education at Eastman, graduating in 1956 with a B.M. and a Performer's Certificate in tuba, but the prospect of being a professional tubist dawned with the inspiration drawn from these recordings.

After my discharge from the Army I entered the University of Illinois, Champaign - Urbana, so that I would be close enough to have lessons with this legendary Mr. Jacobs. I had met him in Washington, D.C. in my Army days when the CSO / Reiner gave a concert in Constitution Hall (pre-Kennedy Center). I had gone backstage to meet and visit with him during the first half of the concert (Beethoven, as I recall). I was absolutely thrilled to be talking with my hero - the epitome of the student sitting in awe at the master's feet. After intermission I floated out into the audience and tingled through Stravinsky's The Fairy's Kiss - what bliss! A star-struck fan? You bet! This was a whole galaxy!

While I worked with Bob Gray at the University of Illinois on a weekly basis, I drove up to Chicago for a monthly lesson with Jake, taking in a live CSO concert whenever possible. This was an extremely intense learning period for me, and I was like a busy sponge trying to soak it all up.

Listening to these recordings now (some have been reissued on CD's) brings back those important, informative years. What an inspiring orchestra! From the free-flowing power and richness of Mr. Herseth on top, to the wonderful resonance of Mr. Jacobs on the bottom, it's no wonder that this brass section has had such a strong impact on all brass players. We all know that the brass is but one part of the whole, so let us not forget that the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is a world class aggregation of outstanding musicians in all sections and Fritz Reiner was one of the "special" ones.

The CSO was a very busy recording orchestra in the Reiner days. Space does not allow a detailed review of Jake's legacy on record, but let me mention a few specific examples: Jake's solo from the "Interrupted Intermezzo" from Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra has a wonderful impertinence about it, a thumb-to-the-nose character which seems very appropriate; in the "Chorale" one is aware of how punctual, precise and present the tuba can be in the hands of a master. These three p's are strong identifying traits of Jake's playing and if we etch them in our minds, people may be writing about us someday.

The 1951 recording of the Moussorgsky-Ravel Pictures at an Exhibition I mentioned earlier holds a very interesting story. I was always under the impression that Jake played the Bydlo solo on his big CC York. This seemed a Herculean feat back in 1951 (not a piece of cake even in 1988 to those of us who still can't walk on water), but the truth of the matter is even more eye-widening. On very short notice (two or three days) Kubelik told Jake that he'd better get the Bydlo ready on tuba because the tenor tuba player, who usually played it, was having some difficulty and it was doubtful that he would be able to

"make it" for the recording. Jake got a beat-up wreck of a double tuba (BB-flat and F "Penzel") from T.M. Koeder who got it to work and he began trying to find a way to "cover the part" if need be. He did have to do it at the session and to his surprise the high g-sharp was more reliable on the BB-flat-outrageous!!! It was the first time he ever this particular tuba with the orchestra! Jake's playing in the Catacombs is outstanding for breath control and he sure "got on" (was picked up by the microphone) in the Baba Yaga and the Great Gate of Kiev.

Speaking of "getting on" in a recording, one must hear the CSO's Alexander Nevsky by Prokofiev, especially the "Battle on the Ice" section. Jake said he had his own "mike" for this one, but it wasn't his idea. The recording engineers and record producers have their own ideas of how the finished product should sound and it doesn't always fit with yours.

I remember, after becoming a member of The Cleveland Orchestra, discussing a record of ours with Jake at a lesson. I was complaining that the tuba sound on the record was not what I thought I was creating. He commiserated and said that you have to go with the "live product" because that's the only one you can control. In a live concert nobody can "ride gain," "assist," "filter," or "equalize" your sound - it's just you. Unfortunately, some people only know your work via broadcasts, or recordings, but there are worse fates!

Another record I listened to a lot during my early "growth period" was Lt. Kije of Prokofiev - too bad some tubist didn't get a Concerto from that man. The resonant, meaty, robust sound that Jake made in the bass line accompaniment in Kije's Wedding still makes my ears smile. The lovely, legato playing of the solo in Kije's Burial is gorgeous.

In R. Strauss, we tubists had a friend and the CSO's discography of this composer is vast. Two little notes in Also Sprach Zarathustra still remain in my Jake NOTEbook. These are the D-flat C-sharp about fifteen bars before number 18. The character of this sixteenth followed by a held half note is perfect (another p, which is a Jacobs' trademark). It's as if the string section is being put on notice, forewarned about what they are going to be required to play: Uh,o.

I've played and recorded much of the music I first heard around 1955-1959 and Jake's influence is still there. He is still an inspiration and because he has recorded so many works, his inspiration will live on.

About the Author: Ronald Bishop is principal tubist with the Cleveland Orchestra and serves on the music faculties of several colleges and universities in the Cleveland area.