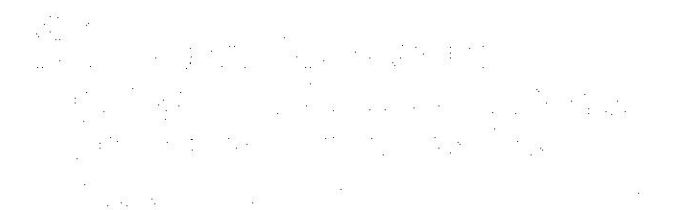


ARNOLD JACOBS DECONSTRUCTED — PART I

BY JAMES M HARVEY

This essay explores potential performance philosophy implications in the wind brass pedagogy of Arnold Jacobs. It investigates specific techniques Mr. Jacobs employed with students to encourage artistic and musical performance ideals. An appreciation of Arnold Jacobs' oral teaching praxis will be offered and developed as a musical performance philosophy. The well-known, extensive information that Arnold Jacobs imparted regarding breathing, anatomy, and physiology of respiration will not be a concern in this article. Neither will be the technique of embouchure "buzzing" that Mr. Jacobs and other members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra brass section demonstrated and taught. Nor are the respiratory quantifying devices Arnold Jacobs employed in measuring vital lung capacity and demonstrating principles of airflow/air-pressure to wind players.

The significant interest of this article is with a prevailing musical concern of Mr. Jacobs that players aspire to artistry by probing the essential meaning of words such as *artist*, *artistry*, and other performance enigmas such as *bass*, *sound*, and *musical agency*.



Western philosophers such as Kant, Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche may be counted upon for abstract musical concepts. These elegant philosophical contemplations of aesthetics, art, and culture are too structured, complex, and objectified for an accurate accounting of the common-sense wisdom of Arnold Jacobs. These are not the sources that have emerged as essential to this study and research. It is ancient classical Greece and the mythopoetic pre-Socratic philosophers in which this hypothesis positions the wisdom of Arnold Jacobs. To do so, we begin with a basic pedagogical praxis of music - teaching lineage - with the path the author, a former student, took to study with Arnold Jacobs.

Embedded in our lived culture of classical musical performance thrums a wellspring of motivation located within our unique pedagogical lineages of private study. A heritage — valued, varied, and genre-crossing — can project meaningful stylistic prospects for a player while having no actual value, currency, or consequence beyond one's latest performance. There is a tradition of professed lineages: *W is a student of X who studied with Y who studied...* referentially into redundancy. Pedigrees represent a progression of significant historical and artistic performance information arising from generationally shared techniques and musical experiences. Experiential information, knowledge, and wisdom often conveyed

in anecdotes and stories represent an evolving respect and acknowledgment of "the teacher" being vitally recognised as the vocation of a musical role model and leader. This is a psychological archetype in the Jungian sense — Socrates being an ideal type in Plato's philosophy — with the "music teacher" representing a recognised character trope in visual art, film, and literature.

The private music lesson, that individualized, attentive, inter-personal relationship we experience as music students — to later turn around and practice with our own students — is a unique, special, and rare space within our culture and society. Ironically, classical musicians take it for granted as a given, traditional, and longstanding convention in the process of gaining competence in music performance. At certain times in our musical lives, we focus intense energies upon its practice and the approval of "private teachers." The private music studio is ideally an esoteric space set aside for focused musical attention within a master-student relationship; a novel, singular space devoted to developing and nurturing inter-personal musical-cultural relationships. Some see it as "musical training," while for many students, it is part of an intensive initiation into the musical arts. Rapport is vital for this particular aesthetic-pedagogical relationship to flourish, and it originates as described in Hermann Hesse's utopian novel *Magister Ludi*, *The Glass Bead Game*:

"Come, let's make a little music together... making music together is the best way for two people to become friends. There is none easier. That is a fine thing."²

Music teacher-student relationships are legendary and often a decisive factor in a musical life and career. In the tuba world — fifty years ago as still true now — there would be a handful of elite teachers and a supporting cadre of great ones. A student seeking to become an accomplished musician who plays tuba would want to study with an artist-performer. In my student days, Harvey Phillips (1929–2010) and Roger Bobo (1938–) were the ground-breaking, music commissioning, solo tuba recording artists of renown. Then there was Arnold Jacobs. The "go-to" man for help with specific playing problems and for the opportunity to turbocharge one's symphonic sound and professional orchestra prospects.

In my case — despite playing in multiple community symphony orchestras, performing Vaughan Williams' tuba concerto, organizing numerous brass concerts, miscellaneous church gigs, producing-performing several public solo recitals, as well as teaching private music students and music classes — the ascent of my tuba performance practice felt stalled with no clear destination. My musical career, like the preceding run-on sentence, was going nowhere recognisable. I was striving to maintain direction and motivation with only vague prospects of progressing in the obvious ways.

Eventually, these artistic ambiguities were addressed by attending Arnold Jacobs' weeklong tuba summer masterclass at Northwestern University. An expansive musical world was opened by being in a room full of accomplished, aspiring brass players with Arnold Jacobs. Hearing my peers play and appreciating the common-sense wisdom offered with Jacobs' ironic good humour was enlightening. Over that week, attentively listening, playing before a true music master, I began comprehending what "*sounding*" a tuba could become; tuba as a physical-musical extension of self, not an obstacle to be overcome.

Essentially, I needed to release a lot of debilitating psychological strain and resulting physical tensions in order to begin genuinely claiming my own sound. I had been trying too hard, pressurizing the air, blocking wind flow by creating isometric tensions in my body. Having obviously seen such striving, egoistic strategies many times before I came along, Mr. Jacobs stopped my performance after the first phrase of *Blazhevich 70 Studies*, Etude No. 1.

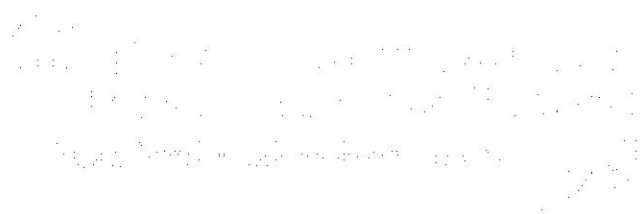
"Well, another farm boy too strong for his own good. Strength is your enemy; weakness is your friend. Be an old man like me when you play (big laugh)... Order what you want. You don't go into a restaurant and say - I'm hungry - you order exactly what you want, a hamburger with all the trimmings. That's what you expect to get. It's the same with playing tuba. Imagine the most beautiful sound possible..."

This counter-intuitive psychosomatic aesthetic process was encapsulated in Jacobs' famous motto: *Song and Wind*. A beautifully natural, personally authentic, bass-brass sound could be manifested as an expression of *resonance* through an imaginal process engaging *Breath - Wind - Sound*. Jacobs presented a phenomenological conception of generating wind flow to motivate and empower imaginative *Song*. In doing so, Mr. Jacobs continually articulated an expressive, conceptual, metaphorical continuum of *Song and Wind* that became an inspirational refrain motivating generations of accomplished instrumental wind musicians.

Arnold Jacobs' poetic concepts unquestionably impressed me as being authentic and indelibly transformed my own elusive musical perceptions of bass sound and its artistic production:

"Be willing to make a mistake."

"Imitate great musicians and create your own greatness."



In this sense, Arnold Jacobs could be considered my most important and significant teacher while also recognising that he was a culminating artistic influence within a personally evolving progression of musical experiences and teachers.

"When the student is ready the teacher will appear..." – Lao Tzu³

The simple fact remains that I was not ready for Arnold Jacobs until experientially feeling worthy of it. Arnold Jacobs, to me, was a far distant famously recorded tubist of the Chicago Symphony

Orchestra's gold standard symphonic brass section. I was introduced to the CSO through the Fritz Reiner recordings while studying trumpet in high school. In my university days, I drove halfway across the country with friends to hear the mighty Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall. Eventually, I applied for Arnold Jacobs' masterclass on expert advice to simply get to Chicago, play for the man, listen to him; just get over it.

The pilgrimage to Chicago and playing for Jacobs accomplished two important things. I quickly realized it would never be realistic for me to conceive of living in a major city (a challenging career obstacle for an aspiring symphony musician). Second, in seeking out Mr. Jacobs, I had met a truly outstanding man, musician, gentleman-scholar, mentor, and a genius.

"A genius is the one most like himself..." – Thelonious Monk

An affable and grounded presence, Mr. Jacobs presented this musically informed, shared, and perceptual conception of "*sounding*" a brass instrument as being an imaginative natural process.

"I consider brass playing to be a natural act, an almost instinctual one." – Philip Farkas⁴

The secret, hidden in plain sight, to the prodigious playing of Jacobs and the extraordinary brass section of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was "*that the challenge is the music, not the instrument.*"⁵

Arnold Jacobs conveyed this successful practice concept directly into his teaching by employing great charm as a storyteller. A master of allusion and metaphor, he delivered instruction directly, with ironic humour, informing each student of just the relevant details required in order to comprehend the issues at hand. He was a wellspring of conceptional ideas and images concerning acoustical, physical-somatic, and mental processes involved in playing a wind instrument. Often this was done away from the instrument with measurements of vital lung capacity and airflow, suggesting physical adjustments to posture with strategies to help the respiratory system work naturally as a bellows. Jacobs taught wind players how to breathe freely with a "*tuba player's yawn*" that allows unrestricted airflow into the lungs. Breath as wind-airflow was Jacobs' first priority, right next to musicality.

An intellectually persistent and curious man, Arnold Jacobs had respiratory issues of his own with professional concerns for manifesting a highly efficient approach to wind performance. Beginning in the 1940s and decades following, Mr. Jacobs conducted extensive study and research, becoming an expert in medical-anatomical information concerning breathing technique, respiration, anatomy, neurophysiology, and human psychology. He eventually consulted with doctors at Reese Hospital in Chicago to offer his effective breathing techniques for children with asthma.⁶

Mr. Jacobs employed his bass-baritone speaking voice to great effect. As with his tuba sound, one could experience the physical resonance of Jacobs' voice within the body as well as hearing it. The scope of his knowledge in so many areas relating to successfully playing a wind instrument, coupled with his individual attention to each student, resulted in his recognition as an esteemed musical mentor and educator.

Such esoteric philosophical concepts originate in early Greek sources of civilization and society. Ancient Greek thought evolved its philosophy by employing poetic devices and distinctive words conveying sophisticated concepts and informative processes. Teaching stories and metaphoric thinking — riddles, paradoxes, puzzles — are dialectically employed in pointing towards an essential self-knowledge as a vital element to the achievement of human agency and the accomplishment of excellence. The orally transmitted, discursive investigation of experience is found in the classical, mythopoetic, and philosophical roots of western culture and society.

Part II of Arnold Jacobs Deconstructed explores potential applications of Arnold Jacobs' *oral pedagogy* with pragmatic Pre-Socratic thought processes in offering a musical performance philosophy perspective to *Song and Wind*.

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✍ Editor's Note:

Part II of Arnold Jacobs Deconstructed will be featured in the Fall 2022 issue of the ITEA Journal.

Endnotes:

1. All quotations, unless otherwise cited, are transcribed statements of Arnold Jacobs as referenced in the primary sources.
2. Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game*. p. 33.
3. Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*
4. Farkas, *The Art of Brass Playing*
5. Furlong, *A Season with Solti; A Year in the Life of the Chicago Symphony*, p. 299.
6. Frederiksen, *Arnold Jacobs: Song and Wind*, p. 97.
7. Jacobs, *The Special Studies for the Tuba*
8. Stewart, *Arnold Jacobs, The Legacy of a Master*, p. 1.
9. Ibid, p. 2.
10. Lucas, *Star Wars: A New Hope (Episode IV)*, E.g., Master Yoda to padawan Skywalker
11. Curd, *Presocratic Philosophy*

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The advertisement features a collage of musical instruments including a tuba, a euphonium, and a trombone, along with sheet music and a large bass clef. The text 'www.justforbrass.com' is at the top left, 'JUST for BRASS' is in a stylized font at the top right, and 'IT'S ALL IN OUR NAME' is in large bold letters in the center right. At the bottom left, it lists 'SHEET MUSIC • INSTRUMENTS • CASES • ACCESSORIES'.