

Maldonado, Luis, "A Conversation with Abe Torchinsky", T.U.B.A. Journal, Summer 1989,p 17-21

L.M.: What did your brother play?

A.T.: Saxophone and clarinet; he was a doubler. Saxophone, clarinet, flute. I think at that time he contacted Arnold Jacobs because he used to work with Arnold. Arnold played string bass and my brother worked many jobs with him. He contacted Arnold and told him he had a kid brother. Arnold is five years older than I am, so Arnold was 18 or 19 and I was 13 or 14 at the time.

L.M.: Now, Arnold was in...

A.T.: Curtis Institute at the time. He was a student at the Curtis Institute studying with

Donatelli, Philip Donatelli Since I was a raw, rank beginner, Arnold recommended that I study with a student of his, an interior decorator named Bob McCandles. I have no idea if Bob is even alive today. I studied with him for a very short time and, either he

recognized that I had some talent, or (I don't remember how it happened) he suggested that I study with Arnold. Therefore, I consider Arnold to be my first serious teacher. I studied with Arnold, I would guess, from the time I was 14 or 15 years old while he was in Philadelphia at the Curtis Institute of Music. After he went to the Indianapolis Symphony, he would return to Philadelphia during the summer months, and I continued to study with him. Arnold and my brother were very strong in suggesting that I double on the string bass, for which I am grateful to both of them. The string bass supported me while striving to be a tuba player. I then started to study with Fred Geib.

L.M.: Were you living in New York then?

A.T.: No, I used to take the train up to New York every week or two to take a lesson from Mr. Bell. For those people who are interested in the cost of lessons as compared to today, Arnold used to charge me a dollar a lesson in the beginning, and Mr. Bell charged me two dollars a lesson.

L.M.: But that was still a lot of money back then.

A.T.: I would say it was a lot of money back then. Both Arnold Jacobs and Bill Bell greatly influenced my career. After Arnold got the Indianapolis job, he was asked by a conductor named Hans Schweiger if he would be interested in going to an orchestra in Columbia, South Carolina called the Southern Symphony Orchestra. Of course, Arnold refused the job and recommended me. This was my first symphony job. It paid a grand salary of \$27.50 a week, which was \$2.50 over scale.

L.M.: How long were you with the Southern Symphony?

A.T.: One year. At \$27.50 a week I couldn't afford more than that. It was a ten-week season. Then, when I came back to Philadelphia in 1939, I went into the Curtis Institute.

L.M.: Curtis at that time and still is...

A.T.: They consider themselves a school for virtuoso players. They took one tuba player. They take enough people to make up one orchestra. There I studied with Donatelli, who was also Arnold Jacobs' teacher. I had a great deal of respect for him. He was a wonderful man. At the beginning of the Second World War, the school closed the entire wind department. At that point, I was hired to play in the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington under Hans Kindler. This was the 1942-1943 season. I stayed there one season because of the low salary, short season, and high rentals. People are going to wonder why I left after one season and why I wasn't in the service. I had a mastoid operation on my left ear when I was a kid and it left me with multiple perforations. That kept me out of the service. At the end of the season in Washington (which was a twenty week season and with a principal player's salary of \$68 a week - impossible to live on) I said to my wife, 'Look, I would like to go to New York and study with Bill Bell and take my chances there.' I did receive offers to return with an increase in salary up to \$95, but I decided to stay in New York.

A.T.: In 1949 I was asked (I did not audition) to join the Philadelphia Orchestra.

L.M.: How? Who made the contacts?

A.T.: I was called by the personnel manager and the manager. The tuba player, Mr. Donatelli, had retired.

L.M.: Do you remember the brass players who were there that time?

A.T.: Sure. The first trombone player was Charles Gusikoff, second was Howard Cole, assistant first was Robert Lambert (who later became principal at Chicago), and bass trombone was Bob Harper. The trumpets were Sam Crouse on first, Seymour Rosenfeld on second, Harold Rebig was third, and Sigmund Herring fourth.