

Meckno, Michael, TWENTIETH CENTURY BRASS SOLOISTS, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1984

JACOBS, ARNOLD (b. Philadelphia, PA, 11 June 1915). Tuba. Although he reached countless ears during forty-five years of concerts, broadcasts, and recordings with the Chicago Symphony, Arnold Jacobs is best known among brass musicians as a teacher. Even among prominent instructors like trumpeter David Hickman, hornist Milan Yancich, trombonist M. Dee Stewart, and fellow tubist Daniel Perantoni, Jacobs is considered the ultimate teacher. Philip Farkas, to whom this epithet might also be applied, has stated: "I . . . stand by my assertion that Jake is The World's Greatest Brass Teacher," and I am not in the least bit worried about ever finding someone who will contradict me" (Stewart, 1987, p. 28).

Jacobs' achievement is remarkable for someone whose early instruction was so haphazard. He credits his mother, a vaudeville pianist who later provided background music in the silent film days with nurturing his interest in music. As a ten-year-old Boy Scout he took up the bugle, and he learned the calls by following his mother's cues from the piano. Subsequently in a competition he won a silverplated bugle. Then he asked for a trumpet, which he also learned by mimicking his mother's piano playing. He finally settled on the trombone, but it disappeared during a family vacation. "I had hopes of returning home and playing trombone in the high school band," he recalls. "but when we returned . . . all that was available was a tuba" (Haugan, p. 2).

Jacobs's disappointment quickly disappeared when he made rapid progress and received many compliments. Fritz Reiner discovered him in Long Beach, California, and saw to it that he had a full scholarship to attend the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, where his teachers were Philip Donatelli for tuba, Marcel Tabuteau for musicianship, and Mme. Longy for solfège; Reiner directed the orchestra. Jacobs earned extra money by playing trumpet, trombone, string bass, and even singing in a variety of popular, extracurricular ensembles. So impressive was his voice that upon graduation he received two offers: to be an announcer at WBEN and to return to Curtis as a vocal major. He turned both down, though, and joined the Indianapolis Symphony where he spent two seasons. Reiner, now in Pittsburgh, successfully negotiated to get him for the next five seasons, after which he joined the Chicago Symphony, where he remained from 1944 to 1989. Other career highlights include a 1941 tour of the United States with the All American Youth Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, and a 1949 tour of England and Scotland with the Philadelphia Orchestra. While in Chicago he taught for many years at Northwestern University and in 1986 he received an honorary doctorate from VanderCook College.

Jacobs's performances of passages in orchestral works as well as solos like the Vaughan Williams Concerto have long been models for tuba players. No one can fail to be moved by his solo in the Intermezzo interrotto section of the fourth movement of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. Jacobs brings just the right touch of raucous vulgarity to this passage in which Bartók burlesques Shostakovich. In the Choral section of the same work Jacobs is a model of sober precision.

Musorgsky, Prokofiev, and Strauss are three more tuba friends, and again Jacobs serves them well. To Also Sprach Zarathustra he brings both the kind of power and subtlety which Nietzsche would have admired. Ronald Bishop of the Cleveland Orchestra has written eloquently of just two notes from this work, the D-flat/C-sharp which one hears fifteen measures before rehearsal number eighteen. "The character of this sixteenth followed by a held half note is perfect . . . the string section is being put on notice, forewarned about what they are going to be required to play" (Bishop, p. 29). Jacobs provides another model in the robust accompaniment which he contributes to the wedding movement of Prokofiev's Lt. Kije, and his poignant legato style is unsurpassed when Kije is buried. Finally, in

Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition Jacobs plays what many consider to be the definitive Bydlo solo. Certainly his performance in Catacombs is unsurpassed for breath control. and he is the firm foundation upon which the entire orchestra rests in Baba Yaga and The Great Gate of Kiev.

As a teacher. Jacobs has been spectacularly successful. Although his approach is subjective and his goals are always musical, he is one of the very few teachers who apply scientific knowledge of the structure and function of the pulmonary system to brass playing. He introduces his students - who are singers, oboists, and trumpeters as well as tubists - to what he calls the "phenomenon of wind," by which he means "the idea of air blowing out through the instrument to prevent pressures from building up inside the lungs (Kelly. p. 10). To achieve results he uses a respirometer as often as an etude or orchestral excerpt. He also uses a variety of nonmusical exercises. such as blowing on the back of the hand, to get students to blow air freely.

In a 1987 book entitled Arnold Jacobs, The Legacy of a Master. M. Dee Stewart has compiled and edited the personal and pedagogical recollections of Jacobs's students. Among the recurring themes in these testimonials are how quickly he identifies problems and how clearly he explains them. Another theme is the efficacy of his teaching. Trumpeter George Rhodes is not unusual in asserting that Jacobs added at least ten years to his career. The book also contains reprints of articles about Jacobs and transcripts of two of his lectures.

To anyone who wants to make tuba performance his profession, Jacobs says "first of all, he has to love to play" (Haugan, p. 8). Such a person should be ready and willing to perform in any style of music. "I say that if a person has an overwhelming desire to be a performer . . . they should go with their feelings, but those who aren't sure should maybe study something along with music," he once told a student (Meyer. p. 32). This sound, logical advice is undoubtedly born of Jacobs's long and illustrious performing career.