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Richard Schneider interviews the famous tubist of the Chicago Symphony.

Since joining the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1945 as Principal Tubist, Arnold Jacobs has become an almost legendary figure within the music profession, as well as with those of the musical public who listen deeply. They have come to recognize Mr. Jacobs as a key component of the "signature sound" of the Chicago Symphony.

RS: It is true that your association with Fritz Reiner goes back further than any of your colleagues in the Chicago Symphony?

AJ: Almost. Vladimir Kalina, plays bass with us, and he worked with Reiner in Cincinnati, as well as those years here in Chicago. But I probably know him for more years than anyone here. I first met Reiner back in the early thirties at Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

RS: Did you have to audition for him to get into Curtis?

AJ: I had to pass an audition to get into the school, but he didn't attend. Later, when the time came, I was put in the school orchestra and he was the boss.

RS: How old were you at the time?

AJ: Oh, I guess I was about fifteen or so.

RS: How did he strike you at that age?

AJ: It's strange, he seemed like an old man. In all the years I knew him, later in Pittsburgh and then here in Chicago, he never seemed to change. He was just always The Old Man. Until one day in Chicago, I went home and got out an old Curtis brochure from about 1930-31, and he looked like a kid! And I think he got a kick out of Bela Lugosi. He had that Mephistophelean look about him.

RS: How old in fact was he then?

AJ: Middle forties. But you know there's a relative aspect in the sense that I was fifteen and he was in his forties. The relationship remained that of a very young person to a much older person.

RS: What sort of a reputation did Reiner have among young students when you started at Curtis.

AJ: When I entered Curtis I was warned to watch out for two individuals: Reiner and Marcel Tabuteau; and the greater bugaboo, by far, was Tabuteau, not Reiner.

RS: Wasn't he the first oboist of the Philadelphia Orchestra? What was your contact with him?

AJ: That's right. And he taught a phrasing class that was required of all wind players, woodwind and brass. We would all be in one class as a group, and we would study his concepts of phrasing exercises to develop control of the instrument so that we could phrase. I found it one of the most rewarding classes I had at the school.

RS: Did you find that what he gave you in those classes prepared you for what Reiner would ask for in the orchestra.

AJ: It was beyond what Reiner would ask for from the tuba. Tuba parts don't usually call for the type of phrasing that Tabuteau wanted. But I also used to sing a great deal; and as a singer, I found it very valuable to think in terms of works that I was preparing vocally. Then I used to play on tuba practically all the music I used to sing and the music that the woodwind players were playing, as well as the other brass players. I rarely played the tuba parts in Tabuteau's class, because in order to get the greatest benefit from the class I had to be exposed to a wide variety of music that would require all types of phrasing.

RS: Was Reiner's approach to the student orchestra at Curtis different in any way from his approach to professional orchestra?

AJ: Very, very slightly. He didn't particularly like to teach. In other words, he was a very severe taskmaster with a young group. But he had proficient musicians and very high standards. And actually, there was a philosophy on his part that you were already musicians. Of course, he allowed us time to develop our parts. We didn't have

to sight read perfectly. We were allowed to take our parts home and develop them. But at rehearsal he demanded fine performance, and he received excellent performances.

RS: I've noticed in speaking with you and other Reiner veterans over the past years an increasing nostalgia for him. I can recall from my student days in the late fifties that references to Reiner often weren't so warm.

AJ: Ha, ha, ha. Depends whom you talk to, in the sense that the nostalgia would go toward the excellence of performance, the excellence he would show as a conductor. He had an ability to get an orchestra to sound very well; and, in my opinion, Fritz Reiner was one of the truly great conductors of our age. And I don't think he received quite the recognition he deserved.

RB: Why not?

AJ: Oh, personality problems, perhaps or lack of P.R.; but put him in front of an orchestra and that orchestra would always sound he had actually very marvelous insights into how to communicate with his musicians. He did not use words nearly as much as many conductors. He was able to communicate through body language, facial expression. The stick technique was always very good. Even as a young conductor his stick technique was impeccable. He was a little stingy with it, but his philosophy was that a small use of the stick would force your attention to it.

RS: Wouldn't that approach require an extremely astute and mature group of musicians to be able to respond to anything as subtle and sophisticated as you've

described? How would he go about developing a younger orchestra to respond to this approach

AJ: This is where the frustration used to come for him. He didn't like working with younger orchestras because they weren't able to respond to this type of conducting. He would have to revert to his days of choral and opera conducting and put everything in their laps. With orchestras like ours in Chicago, or Philadelphia, the

various major orchestras, after the first few rehearsals there was already a two way form of communication established between conductor and men. I think dominantly TO the conductor, but in response, from the men, and most of it was non-verbal.

RS: It's been said that beyond ones ability to play, one had to be able to "handle" him psychologically or one might not last long in his organization. What was that extra ingredient needed in order to survive a Reiner regime?

AJ: You had to keep your cool. You had to have competence in playing; and beyond that, the big worry was not to become upset under nerve wracking conditions. In fact, I think that its one of the reasons he used to test individuals from time to time. In fact, I felt that ever since I'd known Reiner, which was many, many years, that every few years he'd test you to find out how you'd react under stress. And if you reacted -- well, way as I did about every three years -- then everything was fine. But he was always worried about a person who would get nervous and tend to get flustered, and felt individuals like that would become flustered under stress on the stage and be very apt to ruin a performance. And he didn't want people like that in his orchestra.

RS: What was it like to go before the microphones with Dr. Reiner?

AJ: It wasn't bad. Recording sessions were fairly comfortable as far as I can recall, a great deal like performances. The real strain with Reiner was at rehearsal. The recording sessions would go fairly well, though I must say fatigue on the part of the player never seemed to bother him. We could be taping long sessions, repetitions, etc., and the fact that your lip would get tired never bothered him in any way. He'd just continue recording and ask for excellence. There was very little concession he'd make to fatigue. Other than that the recording sessions were fine.

RS: Of the many recordings you did with him, can you cite a particular favorite?

AJ: My favorite would be Prokofieff's Alexander Nevsky for personal reasons. The one chance I had to get close to a microphone.

RS: Did you often feel cheated on the miking?

AJ: Quite often in a recording, you'd have to force, you couldn't play comfortably. When they would want the tuba to be picked up, Reiner would say, "play louder." And many times this wasn't practical. I was already playing quite loud, and either it wouldn't be picked up, or I'd have to change position, somehow try to get the bell pointing toward a microphone. But in this one instance, they had a chorus mike maybe ten feet from the bell of the instrument, and it was picking up the tuba, and I realized it was, and I could play fairly comfortably. It was one of the few recording sessions where I was quite comfortable as far as the tone production, balance, etc., were concerned.

RS: You come through well on a number of recordings, the Wagner, for example.

AJ: Of course, you know those were done at Orchestra Hall; and they were miking us quite well toward the end.

RS: Lieutenant Kije . . .

AJ: Kije, yes, but the orchestration is not so thick. It is a bit harder to come through in thick orchestrations where they would want the type of presence that you'd have in a concert relative to the rest of the orchestra; and I think it requires different type of miking.

RS: It seems to me that the Pines of Rome, with that frightening and devastating finale, is something absolutely unique in recording annals. Period. Can you recall anything special about that series or performances or the recording itself that gave it this character?

AJ: You know I really can't. I do know that this was a period when we were playing Pines quite a lot, and we were very comfortable with it. As far as I can recall, we just came in that day and recorded it. I agree with you; it turned out quite well. Reiner's tension used to rise on Wagner and Strauss. Other than Wagner and Strauss, things used to go very smoothly.

RS: That incredible Pines was just a routine day's work then.

AJ: That's all, but I'd like to emphasize for your readers this further aspect: this orchestra played well when I first joined. I had missed Stock by a few years, then Defauw was here when I arrived. Then a couple of years of guest conductors, Rodzinski in '48 - 49, Kubelik for three years, and then Reiner. But this orchestra was very, very good back in 1945. The standards had been quite high. In the brass, it really started to improve dramatically with the hiring of Herseth; and of course, our trumpets really moved into a top flight relationship with other sections. It's a very fine orchestra, and a very fine brass section within the group. And I feel this was very much the case when Reiner came here in 1953. He had a first class outfit with which to work.

RS: Can you cite an example in which an idea of Fritz Reiner had a direct bearing on your playing?

AJ: There were any number of things over the years, but I suppose his insisting that I learn to play the F tuba made my life at the time miserable, but in the long run it's worked out quite well. Back in '56, in the summer I believe, he went over to guest conduct the Vienna Philharmonic, and he decided he would like some of the

Vienna characteristics transferred back to Chicago. He wrote to Herseth about using the rotary valve trumpet, and he wrote to our principal bass about using gut strings and the five string basses, rather than what our boys were using. He wrote to me about using the little Viennese tuba. Everybody turned him down except me. I wrote to him and said sure I'd be glad to play the little horn. What the hell, I figured he'd always given me good advice. In other words, my relationship with Reiner was in a musical sense, quite close. I grew up playing under his guidance, and always his advice to me was right. And even in this instance, it was good . . . in retrospect. At the time, I didn't particularly enjoy it; but in retrospect, I'd have to say there has been great benefit.

Perhaps by way of background, I should explain to your readers that the type of tuba used by most orchestral players in this country is the large contrabass tuba in B-flat or C; and it was a quite large contrabass C that I had played almost exclusively since I'd been in the business. Now in Europe generally, and in Vienna in particular, they tend to use the smaller lighter bass tuba in F. This was what Reiner had in mind for me to play.

They sent one of the unorthodox types, a Daimel, with six valves, three in the right hand and three in the left. In addition to having to transpose fingerings from one key to another, which by itself is no great

problem, you add the transference of right hand technique to the left hand. This makes it a little hairy, especially when the instrument arrives in the middle of the season, and you have to start playing it immediately in some very difficult works. There was no learning to swim gradually with Reiner, you got thrown in the pool, and you'd sink or swim.

But I did develop on it and become fairly proficient on F tuba. Then I purchased one of my own, a larger and more resonant instrument with conventional fingerings made by Alexander; and on that basis, it wasn't too bad. But, actually when we'd got to the really big works -- Wagner, Russian works, etc. -- the Old man didn't care too much for it. Finally, one day when I switched back to the big tuba on Francesca da Rimini, he thanked me.

RS: During the height of that F tuba period, then, he wouldn't have wanted you to play Prokofiev's 5th or Nevsky on the F.

AJ: It was understood that certain pieces like that obviously required the larger tuba; but generally, what he didn't take into consideration was that we play in a large auditorium. The Vienna Philharmonic plays in a much smaller one. We have a heavy brass section; they have a much lighter one. The dynamic level of output and the amount of fundamental in the tone that would be satisfactory in Vienna was completely unsatisfactory in Chicago. It just took the character of the bottom of the section away. If our boys used the same type of instrument, and the same decibel in a small hall, I can see where the small tuba would be very practical; and I do use it on certain works today by choice.

But you know, there's a further touch of irony to this. Reiner had picked out my big York C tuba when I was at Curtis Institute. I had bought that tuba from my teacher, Phillip Donatelli, the tuba player of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and I brought it to rehearsal. We were doing the Bach Toccata and Fugue in d, which is perfect for a big tuba. Reiner liked the horn so much he asked for it at all rehearsals. So I used to carry it back and forth from the house to rehearsals until one day a little lady fell on the bell of the horn and pushed it down a bit. So I told him that I would not be able to bring it any more. So he sent a chauffeur and car. Every rehearsal day; they would pick me up with the horn bring me to Casimir Hall; and at the end of my day, they would drive me home. This went on for a number of years!

RS: Looking back over it all, what would you cite as your greatest musical experience with Fritz Reiner?

AJ: There were many, but I would say that the one in recall that stands out the most would be the concert we played in Boston on tour in the late fifties. There was a good deal of Strauss on this tour, and Wagner, Bartok, etc.; but in Boston we did Ein Heldenleben. That performance was probably the high point of all the concerts we had done with Reiner. Reiner said that it was the concert he'd waited all his life to have.