

Taylor, John, "Reminiscences of the Man and His Horn", John M. Taylor, T.U.B.A. JOURNAL, Fall 1981

John Taylor, The United States Army Band

Concurrent with his enrollment at the Curtis Institute of Music, Arnold Jacobs acquired the tuba he has used for almost five decades.

Manufactured in 1933 by the York Band Instrument Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., this particular CC tuba is one of only two made. The bore is .750 inch at the valves but unlike many tubas, grows rapidly, especially the bottom bow and bell. The four piston valves are augmented by a fifth rotary valve. The fifth valve is located in such a way that it is operated by the right thumb and adds a flat whole step (alternate first valve).

I first met Jacobs in 1961. At that time he also owned the brother to this tuba.

During the 1960's the Chicago Symphony performed a weekly television concert which was recorded in the ballroom of a local hotel. All the large instruments were hoisted to the fifth floor by an outside freight elevator. One memorable evening following the taping, the elevator cable snapped sending York no. 1, Warren Benfield's bass, the harp and several other large instruments plunging five floors and into an excavation next to the hotel, seven floors in all. Recent rains had filled the hole with water and the ensuing rescue effort was epic.

"Sand got into the valves and several solder joints were knocked open, and that was all," Jacobs said. It was a tribute to the construction of the tuba and its trunk, also still in use, which was made for him by Fred Boose and Johnny Klima, both deceased orchestra members.

Jacobs was discovered by Fritz Reiner as a 14-year-old virtuoso living in Long Beach, California. At that tender age he was given a full seven-year scholarship to the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, Pa.

"Reiner loved the sound of my horn in the student orchestra. Even in those depression days he would send his chauffeur to pick me up for school and take me home, just so I would bring my tuba," Jacobs said.

With the heavy schedule of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, time for repairs became nearly impossible. I recall seeing the tuba in the late 60's with an army web belt securing the bell to the top branch. Finally, Jacobs' old colleague, Reynold Schilke, engaged the famous "Jerry" as a repairman. Jerry was a Russian with an almost unpronounceable last name and everyone called him by his anglicized first name. Time was scheduled and finally the grand old trooper was given a complete overhaul.

Its twin, through several misunderstandings, has not fared as well. The fifth valve was removed, having been judged unrepairable. The leadpipe was changed as well.

"I was playing the Powerama and between shows took my horn to Lyon-Healy. I asked them to patch the leadpipe as it was leaking," said Jacobs. "When I returned, they had replaced the leadpipe," Jacobs continued. "They looked for the old one but it had gone out with the trash."

Nearly all the recordings done by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra have been done with one or the other of these Yorks. One exception is the Reiner recording of the Tchaikovsky Sym. no. 6, the Pathétique.

"Reiner went back to Vienna and heard some guy playing a Schertzer six valve F tuba like the Vienna Philharmonic used. So, he bought me one of them. I took it over to (Carl) Geyer who just shook his head. The thing wasn't even soldered-up right, " Jacobs said. "The valves weren't set up like ours so when I had to play fast I had to cross my hands, " Jacobs said. Jim Palacek, a bass player in the orchestra dubbed it "Jake's brass accordion." "Finally, I figured Reiner's eyesight wasn't getting any better and I began bringing my old York into rehearsals. One day Reiner said he liked the sound of the horn I was using...my York," Jacobs said. "I found a good hiding place for the Viennese F and made sure no other conductor ever saw it again, " concluded Jacobs.

The fall of 1981 will see Jacobs begin his 38th season as the magnificent tuba sound of the Chicago Symphony. Jacobs and his York tuba have both stood the test of time and continue to delight concertgoers around the world. If ever two entities were made for each other, they are.