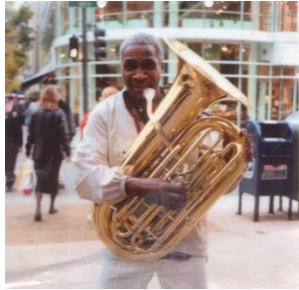


Aaron Dodd (1948-2010)

By Gene Pokorny and Brian Frederiksen

With Linda Dorsey, Paul Robertz, Richard Armandi, Roger Rocco, John Taylor



It is an often said fact that there were two tubists at Chicago's Symphony Center: The one who played inside Orchestra Hall and the one who played outside Orchestra Hall. For nearly three decades, Aaron Dodd played outside the hall on perhaps the toughest block anywhere for a street musician - the home-base of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He played where members of the Chicago Symphony, conductors, soloists and visiting groups from all over the world entered and exited that

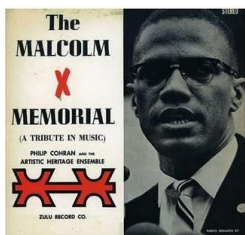
esteemed locale.

While at Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School, Aaron's twin sister, Linda Dorsey started playing the cornet. She was more interested in the boys in the band than the cornet, although she brought it home but never practiced: Aaron picked it up with instant success. He soon joined the high school band where he began playing many instruments. Linda said, "He could play anything." Eventually, he decided that his instrument would be the tuba.

Roger Rocco, a Chicago-area tuba player and music educator, commented, "I first noticed Aaron's smile in 1964 when we performed in the ten-member tuba section of the Chicago Public Schools All-City High School Band. Aaron's grin was as wide as the bell of his tuba. Later, he asked me to share the knowledge that I was fortunate enough to receive from the tubist of the Chicago Symphony, Arnold Jacobs. Very few young musicians had the opportunity to study with 'Jake' so he was thankful to receive [the knowledge] second-hand from me."



Eventually, Aaron met the legendary tuba player of the Chicago Symphony, Arnold Jacobs, who, typical of Jacobs, gave him lessons, *gratis*, and they became instant and fast friends. Eventually, Jacobs obtained a music scholarship for Aaron to attend Chicago's Roosevelt University.



Aaron's love was jazz, and he began his professional career in 1968 with "Philip Cohran & the Artistic Heritage Ensemble." They recorded *Malcolm X Memorial (A Tribute In Music)* with Pete Cosey (guitar), Charles Handy (trumpet), Don Myrick (baritone saxophone), Willie Woods (trombone), with Aaron Dodd, tuba.

He played for soul singer Donny Hathaway's debut album, *Everything Is Everything* recorded in 1969-70. Richard Armandi, a Chicago-area tuba player and jazz artist/clinician said, "I met Aaron just after he recorded with Donny Hathaway and we became friends. I always looked up to him in that he was creating a voice for our instrument in genres of music where the tuba wasn't usually found. He helped pave the way to make it a sought after and essential color within the ensemble."



He then joined "The Pharaohs," an R&B band. They recorded two albums, *The Awakening* in 1971, and in 1972 *In the Basement*. The group included Charles Handy (trumpet), Louis Satterfield (trombone), Don Myrick (alto saxophone), Big Willie Woods (trombone), Oye Bisi and Shango Njoko Adefumi (African drums), Yehudah Ben Israel (guitar and vocals), Maurice White (trap drums), Alious Watkins on (trap drums), Derf Reklaw-Raheem (percussion

and flute), along with Aaron Dodd on the tuba. The group disbanded in 1973.

In 1975 Aaron recorded with R&B singer Leroy Hutson. He was a respected jazz musician in Chicago and travelled the world. Chicago reed-player and bandleader Mwata Bowden remembers, "He was a respected musician . . . Aaron was really rewriting the book on the capacity of the tuba."



Later, he went through some difficult personal times and he decided to become a street musician. Throughout all the tumult in his life, his one constant was his love of performing. He remained a street musician even after he was finding peace in his personal life. That love of performing never stopped.

In 1985, Aaron joined Edward Wilkerson Jr. (woodwinds), Mwata Bowden (woodwinds), Robert Griffin (trumpet), Isaiah Jackson (trombone), Naomi Millender (cello), Harrison Bankhead (bass), and Dushun Mosley (drums). They became known as "8 Bold Souls" and released four albums: *8 Bold Souls* (1987), *Sideshow* (1992), *Ant Farm* (1994) and *Last Option* (1999). In 1995, "8 Bold Souls" and in particular Aaron Dodd were named in *DownBeat Magazine's* critic's poll for "Talent Deserving Wider Recognition."



The day after his mentor, Arnold Jacobs, passed away in 1998, Aaron was playing in front of Symphony Center. It was apparent that he was upset. He was told him that Mr. Jacobs' son would be two blocks away at the Fine Arts Building later that afternoon. He



then energetically started playing Wagner's Overture to the opera, "Die Meistersinger." He moved to the Fine Arts Building and played for hours until Dallas Jacobs appeared. They talked for a half hour. Dallas Jacobs remembers Aaron saying, "Arnold Jacobs taught me to love all people."

Over the years, Aaron gained the respect of other members of the Chicago Symphony. In 1999, his tuba was damaged so the CSO's low brass section with brass instrument master craftsman Wayne Tanabe bought him a new horn. Both Chicago newspapers carried the story. The event was front-page news in the June 8, 1999, issue of the Chicago Sun-Times!

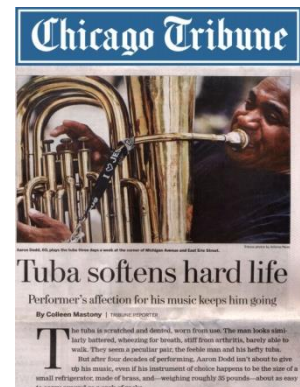


John Taylor, tuba player and photo-journalist, wrote "I'll never forget the night, following a concert by the Chicago Symphony, when the entire trombone and tuba section went outside in their tails and encouraged the departing crowd to help reward Aaron's playing with some spare change, especially principle trombonists Jay Friedman who turned pitch man."



The CSO's current tubist, Gene Pokorny said "Aaron was a warm, generous person who, in spite of being challenged with a lot of adversity, found a way to be thankful for what he was given in this life. He seemed to find joy in a lot of things, but above all, he loved to play and see how positively his passion for it affected those around him."

Eventually Aaron was confined to a wheelchair, but despite the weather, come rain or shine, Aaron would strap his tuba to the back of his wheelchair, board a city bus downtown and roll himself to Symphony Center. In 2008, he told the Chicago Tribune, "The music is the way I exist . . . I get pleasure from playing, especially at night. People will walk and hold hands. They seem happy. Some people dance, some people sing along. Some people like it enough to give me something. Most people give change. Once in a while they'll give me a dollar or a \$5 bill."



Aaron's life is something made for Hollywood. He suffered hardships but enjoyed his favorite thing - playing music. He was diagnosed with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, but he continued to play as long as he could. He passed away June 17, 2010 at the age of 62.

"He loved being a musician. He just breathed music," said his sister, Linda Dorsey. She recalled her brother playing outside, no matter how frigid or stifling the weather. As his health deteriorated she remembers that every procedure the doctors

ordered was OK with him. "He never gave up," she remembered. During the final years his girlfriend and caregiver, Maja Rios, never gave up and stayed by his side.

At the CSO brass concerts occurring in December, 2010, audience members will have an opportunity to remember Aaron by helping out his extended family with some of the horrific costs associated with his final medical and funeral needs that are still unpaid. Should you wish to help out now and would like more information, contact info@windsongpress.com.



Aaron Dodd was a fine musician and a great entertainer who could have made Scrooge smile. The world, and in particular Chicago, lost a piece of its heart and soul with the passing of Aaron.

