

Arnold Jacobs - The End of an Era by John Taylor*

"Now he belongs to the ages," were the words uttered by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton when Abraham Lincoln died. They are no less appropriate to Arnold M. Jacobs, who died in his sleep Wednesday, October 7, 1998, at age 83.

I was privileged to know Arnold Jacobs for nearly 37 years. I first met and began studying with him when he was at the very height of his powers. It was near the end of the Reiner era of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO), when he had already recorded *Pictures At An Exhibition* with Rafael Kubelik, playing the solo in "Bydlo" on a BB flat-F double tuba, the high C-sharps played on the BB-flat side, and the powerful Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky Cantata with Fritz Reiner. Yet to come was the Nielsen 4th Symphony, "The Inextinguishable," and many years of great recordings with the late Sir Georg Solti. When Jacobs decided to retire due to the deterioration of his eyesight, Solti told him he couldn't because, "My dear Mr. Jacobs, you are the Chicago Symphony." Although auditions were held, an immediate replacement was not available. Therefore Jacobs continued to perform. When retirement was eminent, Solti awarded him the Theodore Thomas Medal that accompanies retirement from the CSO. Walking together on the way back to Jacobs's chair, Solti said, "Now that you have your medal, you should be able to play the remaining half of the season."

In the early 1960s, it was my privilege to sit high up in the Gallery at Orchestra Hall and listen to his great artistry. It is often the misconception that Arnold Jacobs only played loudly. To the contrary, his pianissimo playing was like silk. It was not sheer volume, but rather his impeccable rhythm and buoyant sound that made it possible for him to literally lift the entire Chicago Symphony and drive it like no other player, save perhaps its principal trumpet, Adolph Herseth. The late Philip Farkas said that playing in the brass section with Herseth and Jacobs was like driving a road with a white line on either side; you only had to stay in the middle. I recall hearing a performance of the Bruckner 4th Symphony from the Gallery that literally shook Orchestra Hall to its foundations. Yet it wasn't a vulgar performance, just so rhythmically and inronarionally perfect that the entire brass section played as one, and this synergy became a performance that echos in my head to this day. So too does another "Bydlo" that acid-penned music critic Claudia Cassidy referred to in her review as, "A golden coach pulled by magnificent white chargers." The late Ms. Cassidy was seldom 100-percent right in her column, but in this instance her prose was exact and as beautiful as the playing she portrayed. And he replicated that scene in each of three performances.

At one time students of Arnold Jacobs and the late William "Bill" Bell carried on a cheap-shot rivalry. In truth, Bell and Jacobs were the very best of friends, and enjoyed each other's company to the fullest. One of the last times I spoke with Arnold Jacobs he mentioned this supposed rivalry and said, "I was on tour and a man came up and without introducing himself said, 'I study with Bill Bell and you play too loud.'" While students took sides, these two giants of tuba performance remained friends to the end of their lives.

In life, Arnold Jacobs was bigger than life itself. A self caricature, he was forever the performer on a stage. Wherever he went, he sang, often scatting jazz licks. Henry Ford said he liked a man who was fast to reach for his wallet; Ford would have loved Arnold Jacobs. It took great plotting to ever beat him to the tab in a restaurant. Many was the CSO ticket he bought for me so that I could soak up more of his

and the orchestra's sound, and many, many the dinner. Arnold Jacobs loved people and seldom made a disparaging remark about any individual. To be sure, he carried a great disdain for conductors, especially the arrogant and incompetent, and for those who sought his counsel solely for a resume entry, or who were not as totally dedicated to improving their own musical being as he was. Still, it was rare that he called someone something other than a "Schlub."

Arnold Jacobs's teaching legacy will live on, but we need to be ever mindful that no one person has all the answers he did. His friend and student Dr. Richard Nelson, M.D., once said, "Arnold Jacobs is the world's greatest diagnostician." It is in this area that the truth of Jacobs's teaching has its roots. He worked with each student as a separate entity, never using a stock approach. A single person taking a single lesson or even 10 or 100 lessons has only the perspective of how Jacobs worked with him. To be sure, many things were common to every student, but as each student was an individual with individual problems, so too was Jacobs' approach to him or her alone: there was also no universal approach.

Each time I think of Arnold Jacobs's death, I have a sense of emptiness, a sense of an unfillable void. It is difficult to come to the reality that I'll never again hear that wonderful, deep, almost sung "Hello" at the other end of the phone. That I'll never have that dear man sitting next to me, demolishing my playing, only to reconstruct it by lesson's end into something far better than it was. That he is no longer there when disaster strikes my playing or that of a colleague; no one to make right the mistakes of self-inflicted folly and misdirection. No longer the one who could pinpoint a problem within the first eight bars of an etude, and then really fix it. No longer the one whose every fiber exuded music, and who tried desperately to impart that feeling to every student and acquaintance. It is truly the end of an era in American brass playing. But as the flesh dies, the memories are many. Hopefully those memories will sustain us until we too go to join Jacobs, Bell, Helleberg, Geib and the rest in the Celestial Band.

Arnold Jacobs has been rightfully called the father of modern orchestral tuba playing. He left an overflowing cup of knowledge, musicianship, humor and joy to countless listeners, students and colleagues. The world of music is far, far poorer today than before October 7, but his legacy will live on in the hearts and minds of music lovers everywhere, because Arnold Jacobs now truly belongs to the ages.

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