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## THE EVOLUTION OF ARNOLD JACOBS'S PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH BY LUIS LOUBRIEL

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# THE EVOLUTION OF ARNOLD JACOBS'S PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

BY LUIS LOUBRIEL

Most people know of Arnold Jacobs as a master teacher whose efficient, effective, and simple pedagogical approach helped players of all sorts. Those players came to his studio from all over the world seeking help in solving performance maladies related to stress factors found in their performing or teaching jobs and/or the negative effects of the aging process. Others were in need of further training

method, not in the ideas he was teaching. What changed was the method of delivering the ideas and I totally agree with him going towards that direction. Few students know those medical words anyway.

Ron Hasselman described his lessons with Arnold Jacobs during the 1950s in a similar manner when he was asked to compare those lessons with the lessons he took from Jacobs

during the 1990s. He said:

What I found was that he did not go into the physical parts as much as he did in the beginning. Back then Jacobs would go into lengthy explanations of the physical aspects of brass playing. He had a name for everything... the intercostals muscles, the Valsava maneuver, etc. I had to go home and look that one up.

Vincent Cichowicz expressed similar thoughts:

When I studied with him there was a much larger concentration on wind than on song. Later he started to move with more emphasis towards the song. And yet, without that wind part it can't evolve into the song. It just can't evolve without that. In the years I taught I could not dismiss that either. The two had to be working together in order to achieve the results. You could not say, "Here is a good sound. Imitate."

Because if your breathing is corrupted there is no way you can achieve your goal.

An example of Jacobs's emphasis on using medical terms used to explain technical aspects of brass playing happened during a 1957 private lesson taken by John Cvejanovich who shared the following recollection:

So here is what he told me. I am playing through the Bach *Cantata* #51 in a musical way and he says to me, "Well, I see you have been a shallow breather for a long time and what happens is that in order for you to have any chance at all in getting these notes out I must tell you that, first of all, you are violating Boyle's Law. Because of the elevated tongue that you are using, I can hear it in your sound, you are interfering with the Bernoulli Principle. Furthermore, you are playing at the lower quadrant of the pulmonary function curve. As a result, that is making you go into isometric contractions and as you are trying to continue to play the phrase you are triggering the Valsalva reflex." I thought, "My God what's all this." However, he was right on the money.



Caption: Arnold Jacobs performing with the Chicago Symphony in 1963

for achieving higher levels of brass performance. However, few people know that his pedagogical approach evolved towards that efficiency, effectiveness, and simplicity to the point of becoming recognized by the motto "Song and Wind." In the next few pages we will see that the importance Jacobs placed on the psychology of "Song"<sup>1</sup> (the artistic aspects of music making) and on teaching with simplicity evolved over time.

The evolution in Jacobs's teaching was described by William Scarlett as follows:

I saw his teaching change over the years. His teaching was medically oriented in 1956. He would throw those long medical phrases like popcorn popping. I don't think that most of us knew the meaning of the words but we got the idea of what he was saying and we tried to put them into practice the best way we could.

Over the years his teaching became much simpler. He still knew the medical words, he just did not use them very much. In the end it came down to "song and wind." It was a real revolution in his teaching

Jacobs explained his position on the evolution his students perceived in his pedagogical approach in the following manner<sup>2</sup>:

I would say the individual is involved in this very much. In other words, you go by what the individual wants to know. There are people who think along different lines in relation to what I do and you have to steer the person into a heavy dominance of the musical thought... I frequently have to be technical in the sense that I am responding to some of the needs of the student. There are many teachers who come to see me. There are many inquiring minds that will not stay with me unless I can first answer some of the technical questions. In other words, I gauge the student who comes to see me based on our first words together and then I try to go by establishing some way of "two-way" communication. Many times I have to, what I consider, over-teach because whomever I am teaching at the moment seems to feel that that is what he needs. At that moment I can pull rank and say, "No, you do it this way," or I can cooperate, especially if it is somebody I am going to see for an extended period of time. In that case I say, "All right we can start with the subject of anatomy and physiology." Then I also tell them, "You are not going to use this in your playing."

If you want to help a person you will find simple answers to complex situations. The complex answers do not fit the picture. If you talk about machine systems when you find the anatomy of a machine you have to also find a fine mechanic to operate on that machine when something goes wrong. For the human body we have physicians who can do wonderful things for us when something goes wrong. To know your own structure is not necessary unless you are planning to repair yourself. The human body is like a car that has a simple control panel. I have studied people in various situations like athletics, like the Australian aborigines, and like the untutored people in parts of South America and I observe how they do tremendous physical feats. They dance, they play flutes, they play drums, they use their bodies for tremendously complex things, and there are no "PhDs"<sup>3</sup>.

I have studied and I have put many factors together. I have used myself as an example of a fairly trouble-free player, I had people with problems, I have people in other fields that I consult with, I have studied the structures, I have studied a great deal about the brain, I have followed the research that is going on in various disciplines so as a culmination of many years of investigation I want to stress that the answers are all in simplicity, not complexity.

The study of what we are has become very complex. I would have to live various lifetimes to finish the study. I came to realize that whoever designed this machine of ours has put in us magnificent brains. I do not think any of us begins to use our brain with real efficiency. What I am trying to indicate is that the answers really are in the study of motivation, the study of what people are like, the study of how to use

our brains efficiently, and not in the study of mind control over the body. Why spend hours studying how to lower your blood pressure, like in the study of Yoga, by conscious thought when you have built in ways to lower you blood pressure; like when you are happy and you have wonderful calming thoughts. To use your brain efficiently, do not waste time trying to control something you cannot control like an embouchure. When you control the music you control the embouchure. You do not control meat to control sound. Instead you control the music to control the meat.

Jacobs also called the simplifying of the complex activities involved in music making a "childlike approach:"

The psychology of what you do is very important. You have proven already that you have the tissue development. You have the reflexes and now you have to provide the stimulus. To do that, can you begin to simplify your activities so that there is more of a childlike approach? I need the adult mind for interpretation and for the qualities of musical styles but I want the child for trumpet applications. I do not want your knowledge of muscles and feel phenomena; a little of it is all right, but do not put a magnifying glass on your breath or your lip anymore. Strive to create sheer music. Keep it as simple as you can get it.

#### Teaching With Simplicity:

Jacobs often found ways to help players overcome problems in their playing by finding simple mental cues they could use while performing. Manny Laureano commented on Jacobs's ability to help brass players by saying the following:

He (Jacobs) would take time to tell you about the complex things but the point he would make was to make very simple mental cues to deal with the complexities involved in playing. Only then we would be able to make the complexities happen. Not the other way around.

In other words, by using the simple mental cues the player found the easiest way to play a brass instrument. Jacobs said:

If we play by ordering products (trumpet sounds) we will find that our playing becomes effortless. The main reason for this phenomenon lies in the great set of controls that we have in our brain (if we simply order a product, the necessary actions will be executed by the lower levels of the brain—cerebellum). This is why it is important to go by the study of the product (trumpet sounds) and not by the study of the mechanics involved.

However, for the "chain of commands" to work effortlessly, we have to get out of the way. In other words, think of how you want to sound on the trumpet and avoid thinking on how you are going to do it (this would be like an actor trying to act while simultaneously writing the script). You have to have a great deal of thought on what you are trying to accomplish musically and not on how you are going to accomplish it mechanically. The "thinking" part of your brain is simply not competent enough to order the actual "machine systems" in your body directly. The thinking part of your brain is indeed competent in

ordering what it wants and letting the lower parts of the brain do the handling of specific “machine systems” for it.

Jacobs added the following:

We must keep simple things simple. The human body is, perhaps, the most complex “machine system” on earth. However, complex machines have simple controls (like a car). In the human body the simple controls are in our brain so we can be free to cope with life outside us and not inside us.

I cooperate with nature in the sense that I study long and hard how our bodies work in many ways, in sickness, in health, and in music. However, you will soon find that you do not have senses in the muscles but you have divisions in the brain where the muscle sense exists at subconscious levels. People think that the muscle sense starts in the lip but it is not there. Muscle sense works at various levels in your brain. If you learn to use your head by honest, simple thoughts you will learn to communicate with your body. You have to communicate in a language your body will understand. In other words, if you want to touch your nose you simply touch your nose. Your body understands that. If you start rationalizations and peripheral thinking you will lose the body-mind communication right away.

Jacobs said that it was during the last ten or fifteen years of his teaching career he was able to teach the concepts of “song and wind” with simplicity:

One of the things I have realized throughout the years of teaching, and that I have only been able to use in my teaching for the last ten years or so, is the simplifying process. Twenty or thirty years ago I did teach using simplicity but people did not come to see me because I was not teaching how to use muscles and they thought that I was not teaching right. That was until it was proven that playing with simplicity is the way to play.

It is hard to convince a person until they have had success playing with simplicity. Your habits do not include some of the things I am teaching. At this point you have to recognize that. Do not undo anything you have done before. You are a fine trumpet player with what you got. However, you are not a great artist. You have to add more tools to your arsenal and do not try to fix the old tools.

Trumpet players usually do not think this way. Adolph Herseth does. He is a storyteller of sound. I mentioned that to him years ago and he liked that. You have to bring in developmental challenges even if those challenges are not included in the trumpet repertoire. In other words, take some of the violin music and interpret it. Take charge of your music and not of your trumpet.

#### **Adolph Herseth and the Simple Approach:**

Adolph Herseth<sup>4</sup> served as an example of the “simple approach” to Arnold Jacobs. John Cvejanovich said the following:

What originally got Jacobs so curious and inspired to research brass playing was what Bud Herseth was

doing which resulted in a tremendous success in a brass instrument. Basically, it was Herseth’s thought process that was not encumbered by all the mental junk (such as the stuff that goes through your head while you are sitting on the stage thinking, “What am I doing here?”) In other words, the bigger the challenge, the better Bud Herseth would play. The psychology of it was such.

William Scarlett commented on that subject by saying the following:

One of the last times I saw him in the studio, Jake said to me, “Bud never knew it but he was one of my best teachers.” All Jacobs had to do was to sit in the orchestra and watch him. He saw how Herseth did what he did and then he (Jacobs) would go to the studio and try it out for himself. Then he would teach it to the students. He said, “Then I knew the way it should be.” Bud was so efficient. Unbelievably efficient. He was simply our model to try to copy.

#### **Song and the Vocal Approach in Brass Playing**

It is of interest to note that Adolph Herseth’s earliest musical influences were his high school band director as well as opera singers. William Scarlett said:

Herseth told me the story of taking a lesson with his band director and Bud was struggling with something so the band teacher picked up his trumpet and said, “Just play it like this” and he played it nice and free and simply gave Herseth a lesson in good thinking. That was started in high school but Bud carried that approach throughout his career.

Herseth also gives credit to his mother who had opera recordings playing in the house all the time. I feel that I was very fortunate to have played a number of seasons at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, listening to these great singers from all over the world. The emotion and the little nuances they did with their voices were so subtle that we can’t even describe them in words. They add up to some very emotional music making. Bud said that he was very fortunate to have had those opera recordings in the house, especially singers like Jussi Bjorling.

Manny Laureano made the following connection between brass playing and singing when asked if he thought there was a specific conception of brass playing that Jacobs was after:

For Arnold the concept for brass playing was really singing. He would use the expression that what came out of the horn was a mirror of what was inside your head and he wanted you to constantly sing. Therefore the horn was a vehicle, it was a tool, to make your internal voice external. So I would say that his concept was almost operatic, storytelling, which is what he told us all the time. He wanted us to be storytellers. Also, he encouraged us to put words to the music we were playing. So if you think of trumpet playing as an operatic sort of an event, all of that starts to make sense. In terms of quality of sound I think that he was always looking for great clarity and lots of fundamental in the sound.

I say the latter because of the way he used to play and the way I heard those characteristics in his play-

ing. I would also say that, as he held Herseith as an example, this is also what I heard in Bud's playing that I enjoyed so much. Like in those Reiner recordings... great fundamentals with the singing quality on top.

I do not think I can describe his concept of sound in any other way than as an operatic voice with great clarity and with lots of body coming from the fundamentals of the instrument.

Jacobs found the playing of another trumpet player, Timofei Dokshizer<sup>5</sup>, to exemplify what he was teaching:

I listened to Dokshizer, when I did this thing with the Summit Brass this last summer, and he was a very musical trumpet player... an extremely musical trumpet player. I was hearing very much what I am teaching in his playing... a buoyant and a singing quality all over the horn.

The closeness between the approach a singer uses and the approach a brass player should use was noted by Jacobs:

I am more and more impressed all the time by the closeness between singing and trumpet playing. The quality of teaching of voice is terrible. The average vocal teacher does not know what way is up so I cannot send a brass student to a singer because they might acquire many bad habits from bad teaching. However, the training aspects for the brain, in terms of interpretations of music and styles, are marvelous. Mentally, a brass player is much closer to a singer than to any other instrument. The more you can play as if this was a human voice, the better you will play.

Jacobs explained the importance of mentally "singing while playing" a brass instrument as follows:

Always motivate song and wind. Song is always vocal chords and buzz... singing into the mouthpiece. That is what you motivate. The fuel is the wind. You should motivate the musical message like a singer. If you order the wind you do not know what is going to come out. It is "pot luck." Maybe it will be good maybe it will be bad but you are not in charge. You have to order "song."

Do not order wind. Order the sound directly as your product. There is no buzzing without blowing. It does not exist. You cannot buzz without blowing. You do not have to worry about blowing. You have to put your money where it pays off. Vibration pays off. There is no sound without lip vibration. Just because you blow air it does not mean that you are going to have lip vibration. Blowing by itself is silence. If you want sound you have to order the song.

Make sure the singing is the most important thing you do, not the lips, and not the blowing. There are habits that you have to form in which you take charge of your music like a singer. In other words, you have to treat yourself like a vocalist. By that I do not mean in terms of breath applications or specifics of vocal

techniques but in terms of using your mental voice. The lips become the vocal chords. Sing with them. Put the notes in the cup of the mouthpiece. By the time it reaches the throat of the mouthpiece it is success or failure because everything on the other side of the mouthpiece is acoustics. Put perfect notes into the mouthpiece.

Jacobs helped his students maintain their focus on the mental internalization of music by telling them not to be concerned with the physical applications involved in making music but instead to focus on singing each note in their head. He said:

One of the most stabilizing influences in playing is singing in the head out loud and in pitch. That sends a signal down from, you might say, the motor cortex. It has to be a voice up here in your head as if you were going to sing with your vocal chords but instead you sing with your lips. Those are the vocal chords of the trumpet. This has to be one of the things you must rely on.



The Chicago Symphony Brass Quintet in 1957.  
Trumpets: Schilke and Herseith

Jacobs also stressed the importance of controlling the music to be performed based on the "read out" of conceptual thought provided by the player. That "read out" was the mental internalization of music that appeared in the form of "singing syllables." Those "singing syllables" activated conditioned reflexes developed in advanced players by years of practice. Those were the "controls" Jacobs wanted his students to use while playing music. In the following excerpt, Jacobs called that process a "reflex response:"

Can you hear a voice coming out of the trumpet? The voice of a wonderful singer singing "Ohhhhh?" The changes from note to note should not be done by changing your lip but instead you sing each pitch in your head. If you try to play from the lips you are very apt to miss. If you play from the controls in the brain

you are almost guaranteed a positive result. I have been working on this in recent years because I'd like to put some papers out on this subject and it looks very much to me like playing is really a reflex response. We are so used to handling our embouchures, but in this case, if instead you concentrate on handling the music in the brain you will get better and easier results. You have to start each tune with great quality.

Prepare the qualities of tone in your head before you play and you will be much better off. Prepare the sound and not the mechanics. Your body will respond as a result. Then we go back to what my thesis is, "This is a reflex response." If I am right you will see that a lot of things in your playing will change for the better. All of this has to do with your ability to mentally hear your music before you play. I have taught mental internalization my entire adult life but I have never really looked for the text and the ways to prove it. However, I am doing that now. The more I do it the more I am convinced that I am right.

Jacobs began to use the "singing while playing" approach as a tool for improving his own performance early in his music career. This happened when he was a student at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Jacobs said:

The habit of singing while playing has been an interest of mine from before I started teaching. I used to sing when I was a vocal student as a kid. I intuitively used my voice and I was lucky because when Fritz Reiner, at the Curtis Institute, would ask for parts a certain way, he would usually sing them. I could not hear what he was saying but I would pay close attention to his vocal interpretation. That was what I really copied. It was much more successful than trying to use words. When I used words I usually screwed it up. I noticed that when I copied his voice it was only once through and he was satisfied.

#### Song and Wind:

Arnold Jacobs taught for over 60 years and in 1995, towards the end of his life, he described in a succinct manner the basis of his pedagogical approach "Song and Wind:"

You are a musician and things have to be always worked out based on music. The final arbiter in everything is sound, phrase, and style. Now, the words "Song and Wind" are very important. Song has to do with the bio-computer and wind is your motor force. Just like the bow is the motor force for the string family, the bow is just a bow without a string. Our string is our lip. You cannot associate your lip with the reed family because it is a different principle. Theirs is a piece of wood. Your lip is part of you and it is tied into your nervous system. The woodwind reed is not. As a result you have to associate your lip with your vocal chords. Then you get the picture. You sing with your lips.

As we have seen, Jacobs's pedagogical approach evolved during the last five decades of the twentieth century due to the perceived need to "cut through the clutter" of peripheral thoughts that impeded brass players from performing with efficiency and ease. The concentration on "Song" rather than

"Wind" was necessary for achieving this goal. In "cooperating with nature," Arnold Jacobs found a way for brass players to communicate with our bodies in the most efficient, effective, and simple way by ordering a "product" in the form of "Song."

It is my hope that the information discussed in this article will serve as a guide to future trumpeters, who strive to teach and perform with efficiency, effectiveness, and simplicity, achieve their goal to, in the words of Arnold Jacobs, "breathe like a baby and play like an angel for many years to come."<sup>6</sup>

*About the author:* Luis Loubriel was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico where he studied at the "Escuela Libre de Musica" of the same city. He joined the American Federation of Musicians at age 16 to play with the Puerto Rico Philharmonic, Orquesta de Zarzuelas, and the Puerto Rico Symphony. He studied at Northwestern University with Vincent Cichowicz and Luther Didrickson concurrent with private studies with William Scarlett and Arnold Jacobs; at University of Minnesota with David Baldwin, Manny Laureano, and Gary Bordner; and at the University of Illinois with Ray Sasaki, Michael Ewald, and Ronald Romm. Loubriel has performed with the Minnesota Orchestra, the Canadian Brass, the Artie Shaw Orchestra, and the Orquesta Arabú among others. He has served as faculty member at Western Illinois University, North Central College, St. Xavier University, and at Benedictine University in Lisle, IL. He recently published *Lasting Change for Trumpeters*, a book that goes into much more detail on many of the ideas expressed in this article. This book can be ordered online at Loubriel's web site (<http://www.luisloubriel.com>).

#### Endnotes:

- 1 The psychology of "Song" referred to the "singing approach."
- 2 Jacobs was responding to the question asked by Stephen Chenette at the Second Brass Congress held at Indiana University at Bloomington in 1984. The question was the following: "I had my first lesson with you 22 years ago and I think there has not been a year since in which I have not had a lesson or two. In the early years you were extremely informative about the physical aspects of playing. In more recent years it is almost entirely musical. Is this a general change in your teaching or is it specific to me?"
- 3 Doctor of Philosophy degrees.
- 4 Former principal trumpet with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.
- 5 Timofei Dokshizer (1921 – 2005) student of Mihail Tabakov (1877 – 1956) and soloist with the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra since 1945. Dokshizer also served as successor of Tabakov at the Gnesin Music Academy.
- 6 William Scarlet used this phrase to title his article "Arnold Jacobs, Breathe like a baby, play like an angel" found in the *ITG Journal*. May, 1999.

