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Thomas G. Everett – *An Interview with Dr. Donald S. Reinhardt.*
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An Interview with Dr. Donald S. Reinhardt

BY THOMAS EVERETT

When I received a review copy of the new augmented version of *Encyclopedia of the Pivot System* by Dr. Donald Reinhardt, I immediately thought of the confusion and misconceptions associated with this man and his teaching concepts. I, too, had much misinformation and was skeptical about his so-called "pivot system" until 1972, when I decided to take a lesson with him to learn more about his teaching concepts. I don't believe the new text is as valuable as personal contact with Reinhardt, but it does present his teaching beliefs, and discusses the function of the body in brass playing.

The first lesson is called an Orientation and Analysis session and lasts between three and four hours. It consists of discussions with Reinhardt, listening and taking notes from prepared tapes, and a personalized session consisting of analysis of playing faults and the proper methods for correcting these faults. A discussion of the individual's jaw type pivot is included, along with exercise material adapted for the individual's particular needs. The tongue, breathing, and coordination are left for later lessons. Reinhardt is no miracle worker, but he did make me aware of several faults I had, and he showed me ways of making better use of my natural facilities and physical attributes. Not only did my sound open up and my playing improve, but also I became a bit more open-minded and a better brass teacher.

Donald S. Reinhardt, an alumnus of the Curtis Institute of Music and holder of a Doctorate from Combs College of Music, has made a teaching career of brass specialization through his rare gift of pedagogy, analytic talent, and ability of expression through the written and spoken word. He has several study books published including the *Concone Studies* and *Pivot System Manual* and is one of the most sought after and respected brass authorities in the country.



Donald S. Reinhardt

The following interview consists of frequently asked questions about Reinhardt's teachings. The interview took place April 4, 1972, at Reinhardt's studio at 1720 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

T.E.: Why did you write the *Encyclopedia of the Pivot System*?

D.R.: In June of 1939, after ten years of playing at the Fox Theatre, the musicians were released due to a change in policy. As they paid us off in a lump sum, my wife and I decided to take a vacation to the West Coast. (Gas was 13¢ a gallon then and we could get a good chicken dinner for 35¢.)

While stopping for lunch one day in Kansas, I heard some trombone sounds coming from the apartment above the road restaurant where we were dining. It turned out to be a poor thirteen-year-old boy, playing a \$39.95 Sears and Roebuck Marceau trombone. He sounded terrible and was doing everything wrong. In a few minutes, I showed him how to hold the horn, buzz his lips, and read from the left side of stand, and how to slur B-flat to D (which he couldn't do). He was amazed at the progress he made in the short 20-25 minute period. He asked how he could learn more of these things, as he couldn't afford lessons, so I wrote out some instructions for him.

I still remember the last question the boy asked as he enthusiastically thanked me: "Isn't there a book I can buy somewhere with information in it that would allow a fellow like me to teach myself to some extent?"

As we continued traveling west, I thought of the boy, and kept writing down material for him in a three-ring notebook I kept on the driver's seat. When I returned home, I retyped it and elaborated on the points I had made while writing in the car.

I had been frustrated with eighteen teachers who did not know how to teach. Not a single one of them

ever explained how to approach playing problems in a physical sense. When I asked questions regarding my many problems, one so-called authority said, “speak when spoken to!” The experiences I had with previous teachers, and that boy in Kansas, were my reasons for putting years of dealing with brass problems and players on paper.

T.E.: Why do you call your *Augmented Encyclopedia of the Pivot System* a “scientific text?”

D.R.: Because the word “scientific” means to be systematic and exact. My Pivot System is a scientific, practical, proven method of producing the utmost in range, power, endurance, and flexibility on the trumpet, trombone, and all other cupped-mouthpiece brass instruments. I originated, organized, and perfected it in over fifty years of research and experimentation with many thousands of professional performers, supervisors, teachers, and students from all parts of the world.

The Pivot System, working on tried and tested principles, first analyzes and diagnoses the physical equipment of the performer. It then presents a specific, concrete set of rules and procedures which enable the individual to utilize, with the greatest possible efficiency, the lips, teeth, jaw, and general anatomy with which he is naturally endowed.

The Pivot System, in its entirety, shows the player how effectively to transfer the purely mechanical command of his instrument into musical expression based upon the most exacting modern conception and standards. It represents a thoroughly organized plan for the development of the brass performer as a complete musician. It coordinates tone production and technique with music theory, reading, phrasing, transposition, etc., in order to achieve as quickly as possible for each individual his desired goal, whether it is in the classical or jazz idioms. My division of physical types into nine separate categories, and having them visually proven with a transparent, plastic mouthpiece into downstream and upstream classifications; my explanation and proof of the airstream spiral as it passes through the cup, shoulder, throat, and backbore of the mouthpiece and into the leadpipe of the instrument; my detailed categorization of eight different physical tongue types and the proper way of manipulating each type; my lengthy and detailed discussion of correct and incorrect breathing methods, etc., are all positively “scientific” because the *Augmented Encyclopedia of the Pivot System* is a systematic and exact presentation.

T.E.: How did your teaching philosophies become associated with the Pivot System?

D.R.: When I was in my early teens, I wanted to become a professional golfer. I was a caddy and had won many caddy tournaments. I often played in the



Reinhardt with his trombone at age 18

low seventies, however, I soon learned that this was to become my avocation, rather than my vocation. I respected golf because, whenever a correct, scientific approach was used, I could relate it in the same way to my brass instrument studies and experiments. The term “Pivot System” came from the golf links, rather than from any of my brass inclinations. Initially, I was going to use my own name for my professional playing, teaching and writing, and use the term Pivot System on the mouthpieces and accessories for brass instruments which I had intended to manufacture. At that time all of this seemed very logical; however, I soon found that my name and the term Pivot System had become strongly entwined, at least as far as the public was concerned. In short, I went right along with the idea, not realizing how many colleges and conservatories object to the word “system.” In my Pivot System, every person is analyzed and treated as a separate mental and physical entity; therefore, under my Pivot System banner there are as many systems as there are people. In short,

the size-ten foot is not given a size-nine or -eleven shoe. Oddly enough, these edifices of higher learning do not object to the term Boehm system in relation to flute and clarinet terminology, or military or conservatory systems for oboe, etc. Now, even if I did so desire, it is a little too late in life to segregate my name from the well-known colloquialism, Pivot System. I wish I could make colleges, conservatories, and the brass profession comprehend this fact.

My Pivot System is based upon logic and common sense, not a bunch of illogical tradition. Particularly in the early days, this logical approach to playing a cupped-mouthpiece brass instrument brought storms of protest from many, simply because I refused to join hands with illogical, traditional teaching approaches. The “informed” consider talent the one attribute which covers all. They fail to realize that progress is the beginning of finding answers. Eventually, they must forsake their crusade against logic and accept my Pivot System. In the meantime, we must “forgive them for they know not what they do.” They must realize that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. It must be remembered that I do not possess the luxury of picking my own students: they must pick me. I might add that the older I get, the more I see I do not know – too bad they have not arrived at this realization.

T.E.: Do you feel that the Pivot System trains and prepares a student for a particular style of music, maybe more for the dance band than the symphonic idiom?

D.R.: In addition to the theoretical musical work I did during my eight years of conservatory and college training, I studied harmony, counterpoint, composition, and arranging with six other “teaching names” in the theoretical category. Then I became exposed to the logic of the “mathematical approach” to writing. My friends all warned me that this form of study would “stifle and stereotype” any writing accomplishments I had made up to that point. Believe me, I received no encouragement from anyone. However, this study did not dwarf talent, but rather served as an intelligent and logical augmentation to what I had already accomplished. In fact, it served to expand my thinking so that I could accept this new, fresh and never-ending source of musical ideas and concepts. Why will some in our musical field nearly always condemn what they themselves are unable to comprehend?

The man teaching this mathematical approach to writing was nothing short of a genius, both as a mental giant and as a superb instructor, and I was fortunate enough to study with him for several years before his death. Certainly, what I learned from him could be directed toward the symphonic or dance



Donald S. Reinhardt, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1933

fields of writing, for it was applicable to any style or musical situation. I am positive that his teachings were not intended to lean one way or the other. Many of today’s fine Hollywood studio writers were students of this master teacher.

This may serve as an analogy for my Pivot System approach, for it is intended to free the student of both mental and physical playing obstacles that preclude success. After the student has mastered my Pivot System, it may be applied to the field of music of his choice. It, too, does not lean one way or the other. I have, and have had, students from all parts of the world studying my Pivot System. Some are in the commercial performance field, others are symphonic players, and still others use it in their own teaching.

T.E.: Do you feel that your teaching techniques in the Pivot System are in conflict with, or support other generally accepted brass authorities?

D.R.: Regardless of whose names are mentioned as “accepted brass authorities,” if the following logical and proven brass facts, which I have demonstrated to the “brass community” for over fifty years, are not accepted or utilized simply because the instructor’s sense of logic has been impaired or completely stymied by nonsensical, illogical, traditional approaches and techniques for overall brass instruction, then my Pivot System definitely collides with



“Doc” Reinhardt enjoying a cigar amid the controlled clutter of his Chestnut Street studio

their mode of thinking in this regard. My Pivot System is based upon logic and common sense, and it never bows to tradition when tradition becomes illogical. A few of the basic facts expressed by my Pivot System are as follows:

1. We are all different both mentally and physically; therefore, every brass student must be treated and taught as a separate entity.
2. “Smiling to ascend” (pulling the mouth corners in a backward manner so that the lips are stretched across the teeth) was wrong, is wrong, and always will be wrong. This old-time brass playing fallacy is the most destructive of all teaching and playing concepts.
3. “Spitting seeds, threads or confetti” from the tip of the tongue so that the tip of the tongue may penetrate between the teeth and lips in order to produce a clean, crisp attack is another destructive playing mannerism. Both the “smiling to ascend” and the “spitting of seeds, threads, or confetti to attack” concepts have produced more brass playing failures than all other incorrect teaching points combined. They should have died at “Custer’s Last Stand.”
4. Delaying the attack by “bottling up” the air column, rather than snapping the mouth corners forward toward the rim of the mouthpiece (not into the cup of the mouthpiece), is one of the chief causes of the unwanted neck puff (the pregnant neck).
5. Over-breathing for the upper register causes dizziness, lightheadedness, spots before the eyes, pain in the back of the head and neck, etc.
6. It is impossible to develop and maintain correct breathing if the playing posture is faulty.
7. Excessive “dropping of the jaw” to produce a fine, responsive lower register only adds to upper register difficulties and creates many unwanted endurance and flexibility problems.
9. A chin or lip vibrato can often become an unwanted

playing fixture, so much, that the performer can no longer produce a so-called “straight tone.” These two methods of producing vibrato have often caused facial nerve damage; I have seen and heard hundreds of such cases.

10. When a performer’s oral cavity is extremely small and the roof of the mouth very low, very often an air pocket will form in one cheek or the other, or both, or under the upper lip. This type of player should avoid any air pocket under the lower lip, particularly if he uses a high mouthpiece placement (two-thirds upper lip, one-third lower).

The air pocket will become particularly pronounced when playing loudly in the upper register. If this mannerism is not corrected, when the physical structure is as described, then the unwanted neck puff will take over. I consider an air pocket in the cheek or cheeks, or under the upper lip (never under the lower lip) to be the lesser of two evils, if you choose to consider an air pocket an evil under the physical conditions already mentioned.

11. While using a plastic, transparent mouthpiece, I have demonstrated and proven that those whose mouthpiece placement utilizes more upper lip than lower direct their airstream in a downward direction into the cup of the mouthpiece, where (north of the equator) it spirals its way in a counterclockwise manner through the cup, shoulder, throat, and backbore of the mouthpiece, and into the leadpipe of the instrument. The downstream is created because more upper lip than lower is projected into the cup of the mouthpiece during the blowing. The higher the note being played, the closer the downstream will strike toward the rim of the mouthpiece; the lower the note, the closer to the throat of the mouthpiece, but not directly into the throat of the mouthpiece.

Conversely, the performers whose mouthpiece placement utilizes more lower lip than upper direct their air streams in an upward direction into the cup of the mouthpiece, where it commences its spiral through the cup, shoulder, throat, and backbore of the mouthpiece, and into the leadpipe of the instrument. The upstream is created because more lower



Reinhardt with a transparent trombone mouthpiece of his own design

lip than upper is projected into the cup of the mouthpiece during the blowing. The higher the note being played, the closer the upstream will strike toward the rim of the mouthpiece; the lower the note, the closer it will strike toward the throat of the mouthpiece, but not directly into the throat of the mouthpiece. Both downstream and upstream performers can be observed visually in a transparent plastic mouthpiece. Metal rims without cups do not present a true picture of the performer’s lips while playing, because the actual blowing resistance which is created by the use of both the mouthpiece and instrument positively cannot be duplicated with a metal rim alone. Early in 1932, I “lathed-out” a transparent plastic mouthpiece and proved this point conclusively. Since that time, I have used this plastic visual source as a basis for all my embouchure analyses and check-ups.

Limited time and space prevent me from discussing over a hundred basic playing points. However, I trust that the eleven points just discussed will provide you with some of the logic used in my Pivot System instruction.

T.E.: What percentage of your students return for regular lessons after your initial three-hour Orientation and Analysis period?

D.R.: Approximately 95 to 96 percent of my students return for regular lessons after my initial three-hour Orientation and Analysis period. Lessons are never rostered until the performer has had a two to four-week “incubation period” following my initial three-hour presentation. This provides time for the performer to settle down, study his entire personal-



A Reinhardt trumpet student with an early transparent mouthpiece model used for analyses

ized presentation, study the *Augmented Encyclopedia of the Pivot System*, and make notes on the many and varied questions which beset him during this time. Only under the most unusual circumstances with the students coming from foreign countries do I ever make exceptions to these rules. The four or five percent of the students who do not return for lessons on a regular basis may be attributed to the following reasons:

1. Most of my students are in the profession and they are “on the road” with groups, bands, orchestras, etc., and it is impossible for them to take lessons on a regular basis. I have one student who has been with me since 1954, and throughout his professional career we have kept in contact through “checkups,” four to eight times a year. I have a large group of students who fall into this category; I call them the “check-up group.” The reasons for them not taking regular lessons following my orientation and analysis period should be quite obvious.
2. My students come from all over the world, and they manage to fit in a rather “crammed course of instruction” during their once-a-year vacations with me. During the interim, the telephone does suffice. About 35 of my students fall into this category.
3. If a performer has a serious playing problem, but must support his family and himself with his instrumental talents, and the adjustment cannot be made under such circumstances, I tell him that I will work with him during the first “free time” that occurs in his professional work. In some cases, this is both necessary and proper.
4. Some students have been “sold” some preconceived idea that I would “change their embouchures,” and they come in with a combination of fear and general mistrust. Some out-dated instructors who know nothing about the Pivot System, but “come on” as world authorities often spread these rumors. I wish to state in this regard that I have changed only one embouchure since 1960, and this was for Mr. Lyle Van Wie. This can be proven. He insisted upon the change.
5. With some, my Orientation and Analysis period alone is expected to cure their incorrect playing, which they have been years in acquiring. I am supposed to “wave a magic wand” and immedi-

ately erase their many “brass playing sins.” The Orientation and Analysis period is exactly what the title suggests. Oddly enough, this type of frustrated individual would not expect to have his hernia removed and move around a Steinway piano the next day. This type does not return for lessons on any basis, regular or irregular.

6. Some are so conceited regarding their “super talents” that they could learn nothing from anyone. These are “the self-made boys.” This is another type who, if they returned for lessons, would have their ego seriously deflated. So, you never see or hear from them again as a student or in the profession.
7. Some are just “curiosity seekers” and do not intend to ever become serious about study in the first place.
8. I always tell the truth and some resent the truth. I am honored when the public pays one of my students a compliment, however, I admit that I seldom do. It is my job to find the “leak in the dike and repair it,” not to use the old trick of flattering the student. Unfortunately, some instructors pull this “Superman” build-up on their students. Fortunately, some play well in spite of their instructors.

See Also

Ralph Dudgeon. “Credit Where Credit is Due: The Life and Brass Teaching of Donald S. Reinhardt.” *International Trumpet Guild Journal*, June 2000. pp. 26-39.



About the Author: Serving as Director of Bands and Director of the Jazz Program at Harvard University for almost thirty years, Tom Everett has made many contributions to the instrumental music world. Founder and first President of the International Trombone Association, former Trombone Editor of *The Brass World*, he has contributed numerous articles on bass trombone repertoire and his *Annotated Guide to Bass Trombone Literature* (now in its third edition) is the standard reference in the field. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Recital Hall and was one of the first bass trombone recitalists/specialists. He has commissioned and premiered over thirty original compositions by such composers as Gordon Jacobs, Walter Hartley, Samuel Adler, Warren Benson, T.J. Anderson, and Frigyes Hidas. Founder of the Harvard University Jazz Program, he is an authority on the evolution and personalities of the jazz trombone.

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