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WILLIAM SCARLETT ON ARNOLD JACOBS

BY LUIS LOUBRIEL

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WILLIAM SCARLETT ON ARNOLD JACOBS

BY LUIS LOUBRIEL

In the winter of 2004 I met with my former trumpet teacher William Scarlett to talk about some of the pedagogical principles used and developed by Arnold Jacobs. Our meeting took place in his northern Illinois home in McHenry, overlooking a beautiful lake. The conversation quickly evolved to include subjects such as the singing approach as applied to brass playing, the aging process as found in middle-aged brass players, and the state of trumpet pedagogy today.

William Scarlett was born and raised in Chicago. He studied with Renold Schilke and attended Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. He then served in the Army,

played with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and finally joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1964. In that position, Scarlett served as co-principal trumpet until his retirement in 1998.

After Jacobs' passing in 1998, Scarlett took over the lease of room 428 in the Fine Arts Building in Chicago where Jacobs taught from 1973 to 1998. Today Scarlett teaches in his private studio in McHenry County, IL where he has many of Jacobs' teaching tools.

This interview is part of a larger work titled *The Pedagogical Approach of Arnold Jacobs* to be published by Morris Publishing in the fall of 2005.

Loubriel: *What I basically ask people in these interviews is to see in which ways you understood what Jacobs was teaching and how that understanding helped you as a player and as a teacher. I know that you studied with Jacobs. When was your first lesson?*

Scarlett: About June of 1956.

Loubriel: *And that was before you were in the symphony?*

Scarlett: Yes. I had just graduated from Northwestern. That summer I was playing in the Grant Park Orchestra so I wanted to see Jake. I was scheduled to play third trumpet in the Chicago Lyric Opera that coming fall. After that I got drafted into the Army.

When I started at Northwestern I had been a fairly free player. In other words, I was blowing freely. However, Schilke, my teacher at that time, was a really tight player. I did not know what was right or wrong and as a result I acquired some of his playing habits. After four years of studies with him I still wanted to play better. When Schilke suggested that I take the Civic Orchestra audition I did. I got into the Civic Orchestra and as a result I studied with Bud (Adolph Herseth). Some of that tightness remained, so I decided to take a lesson with Jake to see what he had to say. I went to Jake in the summer of 1956.

After I came back from the Army, in September of 1958, I became the first trumpet player at the opera. I was still not satisfied with my playing so I went to see Jake for another summer.

After I got in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Jacobs and I would talk shop and just from talking I would learn. He was always free about talking and sharing ideas and I felt like we

talked the same language. It was very easy to converse with him and we understood each other. This rapport was there until the day he died. I totally agreed with what he had to say.



William Scarlett and Arnold Jacobs in the 1970s

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 this information 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 Jacobs' teaching 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

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direction. Few students know those medical words anyway.

Some people think that Jake used those words to impress everybody or to be two steps ahead of what everybody else was teaching. That could be, I don't know. But in the end he could see

that playing is an "art form," which he said from the beginning, and it's not a "medical term form" in which you have to be absorbed in all the medical knowledge. You don't.

I can remember him telling me in my first lesson that this is an art form. I didn't even know what he meant by that. If somebody says that this is an art form, what does that mean? It means that one makes music by thinking artistically not physically or mechanically, which I had not been taught before. However, as a kid it came naturally.

Loubriel: *At the time, right after college, what was in your*

playing that you were not happy about?

Scarlett: Very tight, shallow breathing and a tight belly. That was the approach that Schilke would teach but what was revealing was when Jacobs put me on the respirometer and I broke the machine. I had to be free to take a full breath. The machine registered up to nine liters but he had only enough liquid to measure six liters. I did not know that at the time. He had the whole thing set up with the tubes, the paper, the ink, and all. The inner dome would rise when you blew air into a tube. It would register how much air would go into the dome and write the results on the graph sheet. We were all set and he gave me the tube to blow into. The dome kept going higher and higher until it came out of the water and he was very angry with me. "What are you doing?" He said, "Just keep your lips wrapped around the tube because you are drawing extra air in." He was visibly angry with me because I had wrecked his calibration. He took ten minutes or more to set it up again and said, "Now, I want you to get your mouth tight around that tube." It was the same thing he said before, which I followed precisely. We started, and the dome started to go up until it came out of the water again at which he point he said, "Oh, you are a freak!" and he started to laugh. At that point he found out that I had more air than somebody my size should have. Actually I found out later that I had 6.8 liters. I don't have that now.

That was very revealing because normally I would take a shallow breath and it would be the same quantity as my neighbor in the trumpet section. I was always very inefficient in my breathing down low in my lung capacity but it was an equal amount to what my neighbors in the section were using. I was breathing in a shallow way.

Loubriel: *Because you were not quite setting up?*

Scarlett: I did not fill up to where I could get into the positive air pressures where your body wants to blow air out. That is when you have extra air inside and it is a lot easier to get quantities of air out. It is much easier to do that when you are full than when you are almost empty. I found out that I was gifted with a great air capacity but I was using it very inefficiently and that was a problem for me which I didn't know until I went to see Jacobs.

It was the beginning of an understanding for playing better and Jacobs found this out in the first lesson. He told me that he had seen that same condition a few times. I asked him at that first lesson, "Do you have any of this written down because I like to go home and study?" and he said, "No, I have to do it some day but I just don't have time."

Loubriel: *After that you came back for more lessons. What kinds of things was he working on with you?*

Scarlett: He tried to get the strength out of my breathing – in and out. It was much too strong, much too labored. He would move his arm and say, "it's not like sawing wood but more like a violin bow on a string."

When a person is as stiff and tight as I was that sounds like a "pie in the sky," a dream, but you could actually do it. How-

ever, it takes time and tremendous mental concentration. At that time his medical terminology sometimes translated into physical awareness. Physical thoughts can get in a person's way of playing and that is precisely why he changed his teaching over the years. He got away from the physical and more into making music or as he called it, "the song in the head."

In those early days he was known as an expert on breathing. It was not until the later years that he began to emphasize the artist in the head. He did talk about the artist in the early years

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but the emphasis was on good breathing. Later on he got into the artistic output; he would say, "you've got a trumpet in your head and you've got a trumpet in your hand."

Loubriel: *In those first lessons, where there any mental approaches that he would work on?*

Scarlett: Psychological perhaps?

Loubriel: *Yes. Perhaps cognitive approaches?*

Scarlett: I can think of many examples later on but from those days I can't think of anything. In those days he was very much into the mouthpiece ring, trying to get the person to concentrate on the buzz. I never found it to work as well on the trumpet as it did for the low brass instruments.

Loubriel: *You mean rim buzzing?*

Scarlett: Yes. And that also could turn into physical effort. In my own teaching, I try to avoid physical ideas unless I have to "jump-start" a student, trying to achieve better breathing.

Loubriel: *I find the rim helpful for someone really in trouble to, as you say, "jump-start" them. I think mouthpiece buzzing is much better.*

Scarlett: The mouthpiece is good as long as it is played as an artist and not as a physical activity. Jake (Jacobs) had people play "Pop Goes the Weasel" and he made everybody play it on the mouthpiece. That was good. That was an artistic idea.

Loubriel: *You took that one set of lessons and you came back?*

Scarlett: I had another set during the summer of 1959.

Loubriel: *Did you work on different things?*

Scarlett: It was a continuation of where we left off before. He always preferred to have people come for a set of four to six lessons. Then the student would go home and work on those

"You can't be an artist if your breathing is not good; it just does not work."

ideas so they would become part of their playing and become a habit. Then the student would be ready to come back for more. He didn't suggest that people come for lessons every week unless they were part of that package of four to six lessons.

I follow the same idea and it works well because the learning process is not a straight line upward starting from zero; it's like a "zig-zag" going up. It improves and then settles back but the overall pattern is up.

Loubriel: *Now that many years have passed, what thoughts or approaches stand out as the most influential?*

Scarlett: I want to be a fine teacher myself, just like Jake, and fix the physical things but very much emphasize the artistic goals. You can't be an artist if your breathing is not good; it just does not work. There are teachers, and I think that it is the majority of them, who are physical teachers. They are all over the world. I have students who come for lessons and they have

been taught all kinds of physical stuff without paying much attention to the artistic side. It looks as if the field is getting worse. Their teachers teach that way and as a result there will be a whole new generation of teachers who teach the same way.

Look at any brass magazine and they are full of physical things. Somebody has written a book about 250 things that can go wrong with your embouchure. It takes your mind into muscle thoughts and we are supposed to be musicians working for music. Thinking musically is going to take you past many physical problems simply because the brain is analyzing all the time, at subconscious levels, how to do something in a better way. If we go after a perfect sound, a perfect tone, or articulation, or all of those things that you can imagine, listening to that artist in the head that is perfect, then you do not need to know all of the physical stuff. We need to send signals from the brain to the body to reproduce what we heard in our head. We have to constantly be working for that. Bud did it on every note he ever played.

Loubriel: *Why do you think those teachers all over the world are teaching from a physical perspective?*

Scarlett: Most of them are just repeating what they were taught. They are thinking that if you have ten or twenty muscles doing the right thing, then you are going to be a good player. It does not work that way.

Loubriel: *It takes a lot of experience and preparation to be a good teacher and few people are willing to do the work.*

Scarlett: There are a lot of teachers in small schools or small universities who are the only teacher around. Perhaps there is a graduate assistant who does not know anything from experience. They come up with all kinds of goofy ideas like the teacher who said that good blowing is the same “feel” as when you are throwing up. The sad part is that there is nobody there to tell them that they are wrong. They are the “professor of trumpet” and their ideas are not subject to criticism.

Loubriel: *They also do not have chances to go out and perform to see if those ideas work in a performance situation.*

Scarlett: Right, most of them have never performed. It is very sad. It just keeps students coming here to the studio.

Loubriel: *You mentioned how efficiently Herseth played and I remember Jacobs saying that it was when he heard Herseth play that he realized how easy and efficient brass playing could be.*

Scarlett: One of the last times I saw him in his studio, Jake said, “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 his 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. I wish I had known when I was twenty what I have picked up from him and others in my career because I would love to start over again.

Loubriel: *Hasselmann told me the story that when he asked James Greco (Herseth's teacher in Minnesota and former trumpeter in the Minneapolis Symphony) how Herseth was when he was a kid Greco said something like, “That little kid. He would come and play fast scales going up and down and then ask me, ‘Can you do that?’”*

Scarlett: I have never heard that one before. (laughing) 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 happened 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 I 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. Well, Bjorling was at the Lyric Opera for one or two seasons when I was there. Wonderful singer. Nobody could sing like him.

Loubriel: *It is interesting that you mention the vocal approach because that was something that Jacobs stressed in his teaching.*

Scarlett: I have never taken any vocal lesson myself. I simply try to emulate good operatic singers and the fact that I did not use my vocal chords to sing does not mean that I did not have the same thing going on in my head. I do not feel that it was necessary for me to be a singer but I used the same musical thinking, the same apparatus to play the trumpet.

Loubriel: *Well they are so close. The lips are the vocal chords.*

Scarlett: Yes. Yes. Jake would say that if you have the music in your head it does not matter what you have in your hand: a

“Jake would say that if you have the music in your head it does not matter what you have in your hand: a clarinet, a violin, or a tuba.”

clarinet, a violin, or a tuba. If you have the music in your head it will find its way out through whatever instrument you have in your hand.

Loubriel: *Towards the end of his teaching career Jacobs had a “one liner” that said “It's not blow, blow, blow but buzz, buzz, buzz.” I always thought that “one liner” came as a reaction to some people who overstressed the breathing aspects.*

Scarlett: I did not hear that “one-liner.” People get a number of impressions from their own experiences. I've had a number of former Jacobs students who came for a check up and some of them, a larger number that I would have expected, had become heavily involved with using the “breathing toys” (breathing aids). They had become experts at using those “toys” but they had forgotten to transfer the benefits of using the “toys” to their instruments. Observing that has changed my teaching a little bit in that I do not use the “breathing toys” a lot. I do when somebody is in bad shape. I mean when their breathing is really labored. I need to give them a quick start. I do not recommend them for long-term use. The students of Jake who went to him for a number of years became very proficient at using those “toys.” Perhaps at some point they had transferred the benefits of using the “toys” to their playing but by the time they came to my studio they had gotten away from that. Those “breathing toys” encourage the learning of physical motion. They have no music-making value unless the efficient breathing is available to the artist in the head.

As you get older you lose breath capacity. I do not have 6.8

liters any more. I have trouble getting to 4.5. I lost a big third. That's not shocking; it's just normal. Bud, when in his prime, had 4.5 liters. A couple of years ago (ca. 2001) I asked him if he wanted to measure his breathing capacity with a spirometer and he said no. He just didn't want to know the news but he did say that he suspected that his capacity was somewhere in the three-liter range or less.

Loubriel: *The aging process is something very interesting in brass playing.*

Scarlett: Yes, you have to breathe more often to get the same quantity of air you had when you were young, which is what Bud did at the end of his career. He was taking more frequent breaths than he had ever taken before. He simply had to. I know that and I perfectly understand. Recently I got a call from a first trumpet in the East Coast who was asking, "What can I do about my playing? Things are not as easy as they used to be." The person was taking a breath "feeling" the same quantity as he did ten or fifteen years ago. It feels like the same quantity but it isn't. A musical phrase that was easy fifteen years ago is more difficult now and as a result playing, in general, becomes more difficult. I told him, "You have to take what feels like a bigger breath now than you did fifteen years ago in order to get something close to the quantity that you took then." You also must keep the same artistic goals as before. The quantity of air your body can take in diminishes as you age because you are not as elastic as you once were.

Loubriel: *I think trumpet players used to traditionally retire when they were in their mid-fifties.*

Scarlett: It was common, but I have found that the players who played inefficiently retired earlier. The ones who played efficiently had longer careers. Right now I am retired but I can go down to orchestra hall and play a concert and know that I could fit right in. I still practice a couple of times a day. I have to breathe more often but playing is still easy and fun for me. I still try to put the same artistry into my playing and I still enjoy playing.

Loubriel: *Jacobs mentioned that most of the players who came to his studio were trumpet players. Do you have any thoughts about that?*

Scarlett: Right. The same happens in my studio. There are good reasons for that. The lower brass instruments require more air. You cannot play a low brass instrument using "stiff air" like you can when you play the trumpet. The blowing for low brass instruments naturally causes better breathing. Some low brass instrumentalists might not have the most efficient breathing, but it is still better than the breathing used by the average trumpet player. Of course, the low brass players must also have the artist in the head to make music.

When brass players are using more air, they get the good benefits of using more air—better tone, etc. A good trumpet

player playing artistically encourages that type of good breathing. Trumpet players play with elevated air pressures when compared with trombone or tuba players. Achieving those elevated air pressures requires the muscle strength that can easily become static; where the muscles are not moving and instead they are fighting against each other without much movement. That is the trap for the high brass player. You don't find a low brass player with that same problem.

Loubriel: *They say that there are three basic blueprints in the human body that use the same set of muscles: one for defecation, one for combat, and one for blowing.*

Scarlett: I don't know about that blueprint. For wind instrument playing we have two sets of muscles; the muscles used for blowing and the muscles used for inhaling. If they are working against each other that becomes another problem that we commonly call stiffness. I work with a number of people that have that problem. We have to isolate muscle groups so that only one set of muscles is working at a time.

Loubriel: *And all of that you teach in an artistic way as well.*

Scarlett: Try to. That is the "nice oil on the gears;" the artistic part. Thinking artistically can get us over physical problems quicker than anything else. How many players do you know who want to play artistically but they work from a physical point of view in the practice room? Then they go on to the stage and expect to be an artist! It does not work. You've got to practice being an artist in the practice room.

Loubriel: *One of the things that Jacobs talked about was the concept of round sounds.*

Scarlett: That is a wonderful idea. It is an artistic idea. If I were teaching you and I want you to play a high "c" with the most brilliant penetrating sound and I tell you, "Play it right now" you would have a lot of muscles engaging. Now if I ask you play to play with a nice warm round sound, what happens? You don't have the same muscle activity. For Jake to say that you should play with a round sound worked as a muscle relaxing idea.

Loubriel: *That brings us to the other point because we think of Jacobs teaching the classical players but he also taught lead jazz players and I wonder how his ideas apply to other areas of music; like jazz solo work, etc.*

Scarlett: Efficiency is necessary no matter what kind of music you play. Some jazz players who play very, very high don't last that long. However, those high jazz players who use very strong and stiff muscles often keep those muscles moving and not static. They last longer. Look at all of those method books that tell you how to be a "screech trumpet player." What they all have in common is a whole section on pedal tones. Did you ever notice? That's simply a way for opening up the airflow after they have been screeching up high. Look at Maynard Ferguson. He plays the baritone during his concerts; it opens the air and relaxes the muscles. For him that is the way to keep things working. If he played only trumpet all night long he might be much stiffer. Perhaps you should ask him.

Loubriel: *Was there something else that Jacobs did in his lessons that you recall?*

Scarlett: Well, in my own teaching I prefer to use the inspi-

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ration that Jake and Bud used. Bud was very inspiring. Bud was not a “how to play trumpet type” of teacher. He admits it. When I went to him with problems he had never experienced, he may have been baffled. I don’t say that as a negative but it was just that I had too many problems and he was so efficient. But he inspired me by the way he played. I always asked him to play in my lessons. Sometimes he did not want to because he had just played a concert on a Friday afternoon. His inspired playing was very helpful because I tried to copy that model on an artistic level. Jake wanted to teach with the same inspiration while helping you with the mechanics.

Loubriel: *So do you find yourself teaching that way now?*

Scarlett: Yes, I gravitate as much as possible towards the artistic and let the physical take care of itself because if you are trying to play with a nice round sound, for example, your body is not going to be tight. The signal from your brain to your body matches the artistic thought in order to play the way you are thinking. In other words, the artistic part sends signals to encourage the muscular part without thinking about the muscles. I don’t like to talk about muscles because it takes the player’s thoughts away from music.

Loubriel: *It’s a very psychological approach.*

Scarlett: Very much so. It’s the main part of teaching. Jake used to say, “You should be thinking 85% artistically and 15% physically.” I would like to change that. I would suggest 98% artistically and 2% or less physically.

Loubriel: *Jacobs also said that the great soloists who would play with the symphony played with 100% music in their heads.*

Scarlett: That’s the goal. I would say the same thing.

Loubriel: *In music education we study more cognitive*

approaches to teaching...

Scarlett: In the trumpet world we are going in a negative direction. We talk too much about muscles and we’re analyzing the physical all the time. The approach seems to be less about music and more about muscles. I like to hear results right now, not in six weeks. Thinking musically goes right to the heart of how to improve. I like the combination of a few physical ideas that need to be talked about briefly and then much emphasis on the artistic that will bring us results right now. You get better results if the technique part is played musically.

As you can tell I am a big fan of Jake and the music making he encouraged is something that we all need.

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 Arabu 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.

