

“Jake”

KEITH WINKING

Don “Jake” Jacoby is one of the most influential trumpet performers/teachers of this century. Jake’s professional career started in 1929 at age nine and spanned over half a century. Jake was scheduled to appear on the panel discussion regarding Ernest Williams at the 1991 ITG conference in Baton Rouge.

Unfortunately, Jake suffered a minor stroke at the conference prior to the panel discussion and was unable to participate. Following are excerpts from an interview conducted with Jake in his hospital room during the conference.

KW: Let’s start from the beginning. I understand you started playing when you were six-and-a-half years old.

DJ: That’s right. My first teacher was my uncle Art, who gave me an hour lesson after dinner 364 days a year, with Christmas off for good behavior. I had been to New York and appeared on the *Milton Cross Children’s Hour*, but I really started my solo career when I was nine years old on the *Horn and Hardart Children’s Hour*, which was broadcast every Sunday from Philadelphia. They still have Horn and Hardart Automats in New York. You know, you buy food out of them. The funny thing is that I was nine years old for four years, because on the *Children’s Hour* you never get any older. You could be 42 years old, and they would still say, “Here’s nine-year-old little Donald Jacoby.”

I played a different solo every Sunday with a piano player by the name of Billy James and a sound man named Horace Fehyl. Four years later Tastyeast started putting on a show from New York called *Tastyeast’s Pageant of Youth*. They had close to 3,000 kids who competed for this show. And Horace Fehyl went from being the sound man on the *Horn and Hardart’s Children’s Hour* to the producer of the *Tastyeast’s Pageant of Youth*. Radio City had recently been built, and the show was done in Studio 8H, which was their biggest studio. This was 1932, and I was twelve years old. I spent two years on that program every other Sunday playing solos

with Johnny Johnson’s Orchestra. I even did a mini-concert tour of the East Coast.

KW: Were you performing cornet solos?

DJ: I played all kinds of solos – Herbert Clarke, Bellstedt.... In fact, at one time, I probably had between 125 and 150 solos memorized and ready to play, because that was all I did every day. My uncle helped me with the solos, and my dad, unbeknownst to me, got me a lesson with Del Staigers. My mom and dad took me over to his studio, and he heard me play a little bit. He said a couple words about my playing, then spent the next half hour telling me about his career and everything. He charged my dad \$25.00, and I was out of there. That was a lot of money in those days. You know what I got paid for that children’s hour [Horn and Hardart’s]? A free meal for me and my family at Horn and Hardart’s. I don’t know if I got paid for the show in New York.

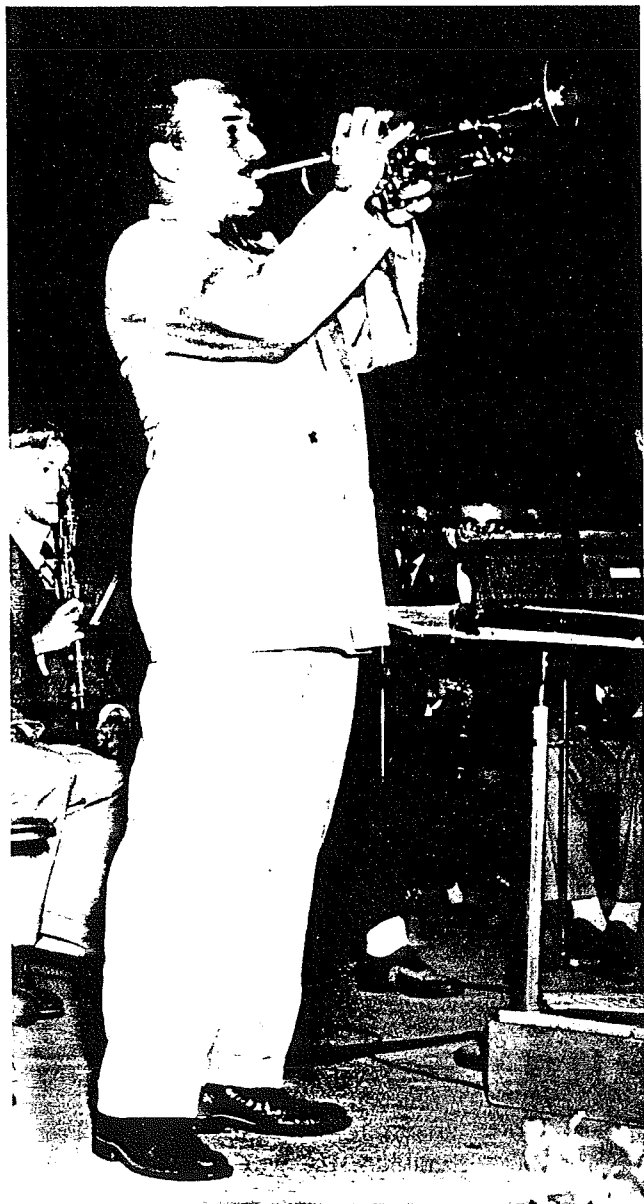
KW: When did you start studying with Ernest Williams?

DJ: My dad pushed me to go to school all the time. I did the first six years of grade school in four years. I graduated from high school two weeks before I was sixteen. A week-and-a-half later I went to the Ernest Williams Summer School in the Catskill Mountains. Boy, I never got over being awestruck just by the sight of him [Williams]. I was very fortunate in that he taught me sometimes five to six hours a week. He would wake me at four o’clock in the morning and have me come down to his studio. You would have had to see me standing there in my jockey shorts and bedroom slippers, my hair shooting all over the place, and not even awake. At that time he was doing lots of composing. He would set up 16 or 32 bars up in front of me and say, “Play that.” And I’d play it and stumble all over it, and he would cuss me out something terrible because I didn’t play it the way he wanted to hear it. I was lucky I could stand up. He was really something else.



KW: Were you the soloist at the school?

DJ: I was the soloist for the three years I was there. His plan for me was to stay in school one more year and then go to the Pittsburgh Symphony. I was nineteen years old, and I had had it up to my eyebrows with legitimate music. I heard the Glenn Miller band, and I was really excited. A friend of mine, Bennie Finkelstein, and I both got jobs with the Milt Britton Band. It was a comedy band. I've got pictures of it - getting fiddles broken over my head and squirted with seltzer water. I was making \$75.00 a week, and I was the richest cat you ever saw in your life, just reveling in what was happening, people laughing and applauding. My mother and dad came to see me "work" after all the money they had spent



on my education. (I never had a scholarship to the Williams School.) They came backstage, and my mother said, "My God, honey, are you happy?" I said, "Mom, I've never had a better time in my whole life. This is great." And she started crying. After all that studying, here I am playing *Hooray for Hollywood* and getting hit over the head with pillows and squirted with seltzer water. I went from that band to Van Alexander's Band. He wrote everything for the Chick Webb Band, whose singer was Ella Fitzgerald, including *A Tisket A Tasket*. Bennie and I played with that band for a little while, then I joined the Les Brown Band. I celebrated my 21st birthday with him about two months after I joined. I was at the Blackhawk Hotel in Chicago when World War II broke out. I was a prime candidate for the Army, and that's what made me join the Navy. I was stationed at Great Lakes for two years, and I got a call from Sam Donahue asking if I wanted to come with his Navy band. I jumped right in.

KW: Who else was in that trumpet section?

DJ: Frank Beach, who was first trumpet at 20th Century Fox for years; Johnny Best, who was the jazz trumpet player with Glenn Miller and Artie Shaw; Conrad Gozzo, and myself. Every once in a while we'd switch the books all around to keep from getting bored. It was one of the best sections I ever played in. There wasn't a band leader in the country who could have afforded that section after the war. I got out of the Navy at 4:30 in the afternoon and rejoined Les Brown at the Panther Room in Chicago the next evening. I stayed with Les on tour for about eight months. Then I left him and went back to Chicago to take an offer for a job on Don McNeil's *Breakfast Club* on ABC. That was December 1, 1946, and that job lasted nine-and-a-half years.

One day I got a pink slip with my check. I had been fired from ABC. Rex Maupin, the musical director, called me in and said, "Jake, we fired everybody on staff, and now we want to keep some of the guys. We would like to have you stay." I drew myself up tall - all 5 feet, 6 inches of me - and said "No, I'm sorry. You only get one chance to fire Jake." I figured I had nothing to worry about. So I went home, I kicked my shoes off, sat down in the big armchair next to the fireplace and waited for them to beat the door down. In four-and-a-half months, nobody even knocked. And the music business got along fine without me. So anytime you think you're playing real good, you look around the corner. There's somebody ready to cut you to ribbons. Don't ever think you're indispensable, because there is no such thing. So I

learned a lesson there. I spoke softly and tread lightly from there on. I went with CBS and started doing clinics and concerts.

KW: Was this with Conn?

DJ: No. I was with LeBlanc first, about 1955. I premiered the *Ode for Trumpet* by Alfred Reed with the Texas All-State High School Band. Clarence Sawhill, director of the UCLA band, conducted.

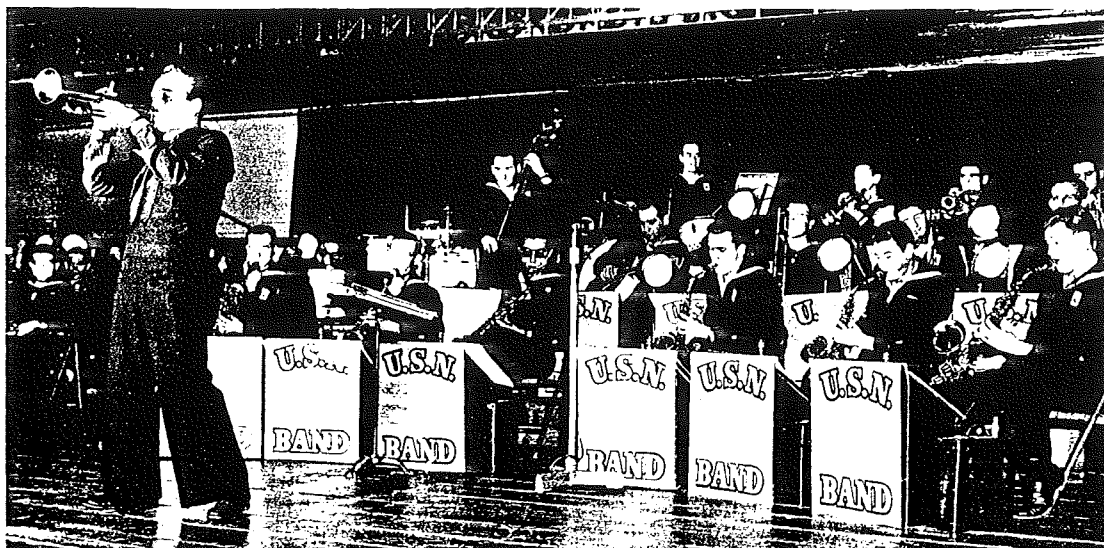
Alfred Reed gave me the solo a day and a half before the performance. I memorized the solo on the plane coming down to Dallas, because I never ever played a solo with music and I wasn't about to start then. The premiere performance went real well. Thank God for that, and I recorded it. A few months later I went with Conn. In 1958 I recorded the *Have Conns Will Travel* album. That was a really fine experience. I recorded the side with Napoli and all of the solos in one afternoon, then two days later I recorded the jazz side.

KW: The first side was with Vincent Cichowicz and Phil Farkas?

DJ: Yeah, and Arnold Jacobs, Frank Crisafulli, Jerry Stoll, and the Chicago Symphony woodwind section. We had 42 players and those who weren't from the symphony were filled in by players from CBS. It was a gas of a band.

KW: You mentioned to me before that Edwin Franko Goldman gave you your start in the clinic business.

DJ: The first clinic I did was at the Mid-West Band Clinic in Chicago. My wife and I walked into the party held by the Lyons Band Instrument Company at the end of the clinic, and I saw Edwin Franko Goldman standing there with eight or ten band directors around him. William Revelli, John Paynter, Fred Ebbs from Iowa, Don McGinnis from Ohio State, Dvorak from Wisconsin, all big names. During a lull in the conversation I tapped him [Goldman] on the shoulder and said, "Dr. Goldman, I don't know if you remember me, but I'm Don Jacoby." His mouth fell open and he backed up. He looked at me and came over and felt my face, my arms, my shoulders, and he turned around and said



Jake's Band at the Great Lakes Naval Stati

to these band directors, "Do you know what I remember about this young man besides his magnificent playing? Five times I asked him to be my soloist and five times he refused me." And that gave me the big start in the clinic business because they thought if Goldman thought this of me, I must be something.

KW: When did you leave Chicago and move to Dallas?

DJ: We moved to Dallas in 1964, and we've probably moved seven or eight times in the Dallas area. Now we live in Denton and just love it.

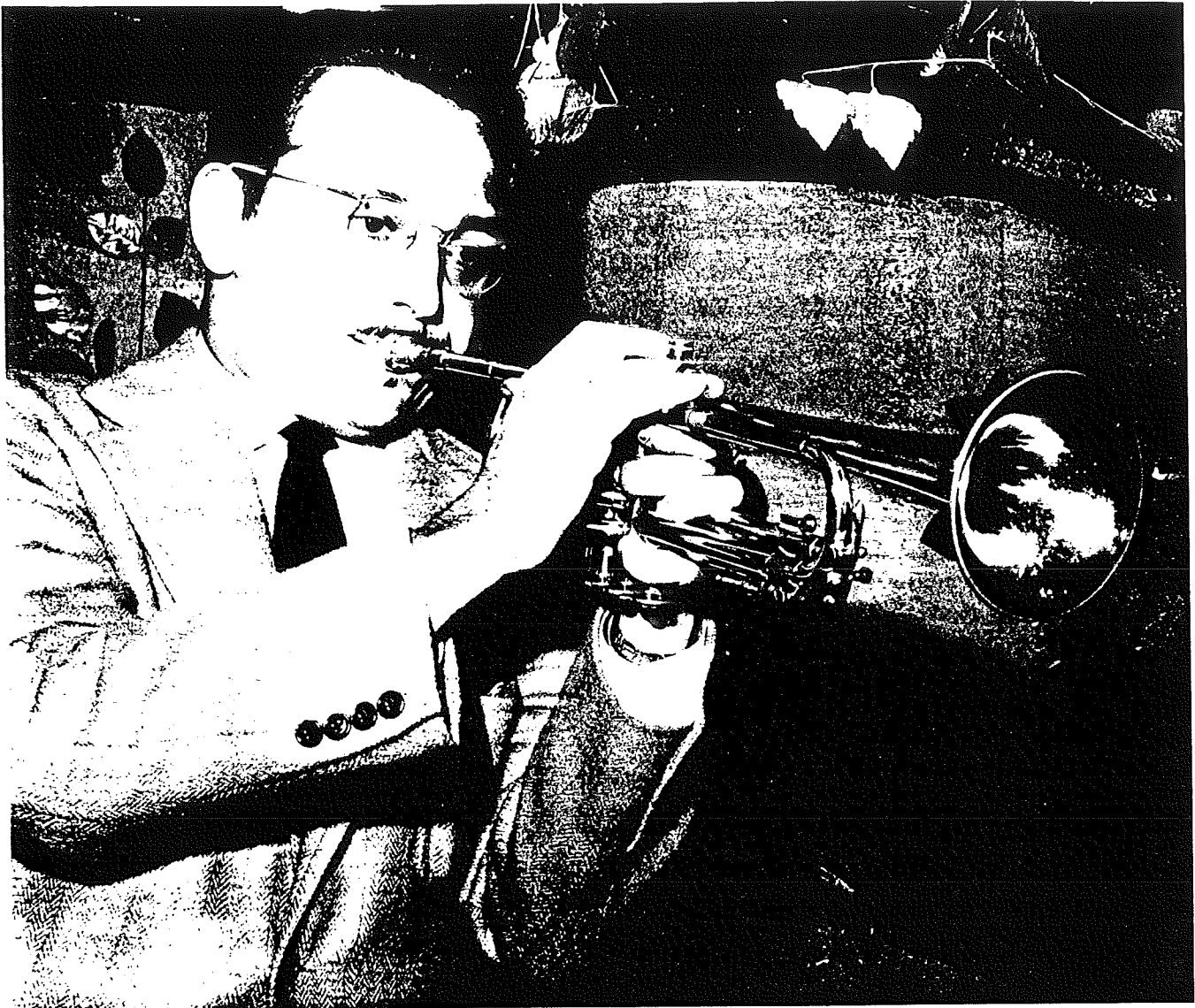
KW: Did you move to Dallas for commercial work?

DJ: Well, I had a band on the road, a big band account, and everything was fine. Three years later I quit the road and settled down in Dallas. While I was on the road I opened a hotel in Dallas called the Cabana. It was the forerunner to Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. I was working there 25 weeks a year in five-week engagements. I called up my wife Dory and said, "Honey, put the house up for sale, we're moving to Dallas."

KW: Did you do any clinics during the three years you were on the road?

DJ: No, I had given that up. I did them for 17 years, and that was enough. Every night the odds got smaller. I always lived in perpetual fear of screwing up a concert. I never did, thank God. Oh, I missed – in fact, I don't think there's a note written that I didn't miss! I left a whole bunch of them running down walls all across the country. If I could have played higher, I'd have missed more. It was an awful lot of fun, but I hated to travel alone, and to sit down and eat by myself. I'm not a loner. I need to be around people, you know?

KW: Let's talk about your teaching. You're con-



sidered one of the eminent teachers in the world. Players from all over come to take lessons with you. What problems do you usually spot first?

DJ: Well, most of them have no idea how to breath correctly. And there is nothing secret about it. It is exactly how we're breathing here now, except to a greater degree and that's all. Natural! You know, somebody says, "Take a deep breath," and you raise your chest, suck all the air in, and suck your stomach in. The only way you can hold the air back is with the throat. The throat has no function whatsoever in playing the instrument. We control the air with the diaphragm. That's the first problem. After we get the air in we have to do something with it. So I teach them how to play from the diaphragm and through the horn, not into or to the horn. Nobody's sitting in your horn listening to you – they're all out front. You play out of the bell. And when we get that

going, we can add things to it.

In my book [*Jake's Method*], I say after you learn to breathe and to play through the horn, there are only four basics to concern yourself with. Number one is a completely relaxed embouchure – a completely relaxed lip inside the mouthpiece. Number two is the use of the tongue to direct the airstream – as the use of the tongue when speaking. Number three is good strong corners of the embouchure to control the aperture so we don't have to talk about the aperture. That's one piece of pedagogy we knock out. Number four is the correct use of the diaphragm. Use the diaphragm only for what you need of any given note at any given volume and no more. Now, there are little tricks or little variations that we talk about as we go along, but those are the basics. I guarantee that in 15 minutes I can open a player's sound up to twice as big as it was before they started

playing for me.

KW: The number of lead players you've taught is interesting to me – Dan Miller, Craig Johnson, and Joe Jackson [trombone] with Maynard Ferguson, Mike Williams with Basie, and others. But you never talk about playing high notes to your students.

DJ: You'll notice I don't have a chapter on range in my book. I never taught Craig Johnson, Dan Miller, or Mike Williams to play high, and they all have double C's and higher. If you will do everything in my book exactly the way you're supposed to, you'll have no trouble with range. If I had put a chapter in my book on high-note playing, young kids would only work on that chapter, because they think that being a good trumpet player is being able to play high. Wrong. High playing is the result of being a good trumpet player, not the reason for playing.

KW: You don't mention embouchure in your book, either.

DJ: Everybody who comes to me has an embouchure. If they sound good and they're comfortable, I

don't care if their ears turn green and their eyes bug out. I'm won't change something just for the sake of change.

KW: You talked a lot about things natural things we do when we play.

DJ: Well, most of the actions it takes to play are natural. Breathing – nothing unnatural there. That's the way God meant you to do it. Tonguing – you use your tongue to speak thousand of words every day. Nothing unnatural about that. Listening – completely natural. Reading – a natural action for the eyes. Your fingers on the valves – you pick things up all day long, so nothing unnatural there. Your lips – now maybe we come to the controversial part of playing. Maybe the good Lord didn't mean to mash a hunk of metal on your chops for four hours at a time. Maybe the only thing He meant your chops to do was to keep food from falling out of your mouth. But as long as it could be the only controversial part, let's pay as little attention to it as possible and concentrate on the *natural* reactions.



I'll tell you something else. The word "teacher" is a very, very special word. It's used like the word "love." How many times have you told somebody "I love you" and you don't love them any more than you love a dog's tail. Love is one of the most misused words in the English language. The word teacher is also misused. "Teacher" is something you earn, and there is only one requirement. You have to be a perpetual student. You don't just decide that you know everything and go ahead and do it. No, you have to find out everything you can and file it in your head. So that no matter what kind of troubles you may run into with a student, you stand a better chance of helping him or her come out of it. I believe that every single rehearsal of every single organization on every single day should be an experience for everyone in the band. I teach privately because I need to get emotionally involved with students. They call me Jake and I call them by their first name. We have no teacher/student relationship. We're going to be friends, and we work together on the instrument. And every student progresses at his or her pace. There is not one lesson I give that I don't get a hug when they come in and a hug when they leave.

KW: You've touched so many people through your life with your music. Any final thoughts?

DJ: Every one of us who plays an instrument is so lucky. In what other field can you run the complete gamut of emotions in 20 minutes time just by playing? I never saw a doctor get goose pimples from cutting out an appendix, but I've seen guys play something that put goose pimples on them so big they start to fall off. I feel very, very strongly about music in general and playing in particular. If the good Lord looked down on you and smiled on you and gave you the talent to play an instrument, don't you think the only truthful thing, the only honest, the only decent thing to do is spend as much time as possible on that horn if for no other reason than to prove He wasn't wrong when he smiled on you? Musicians are so lucky.

[Editor's Note: *Jake's Method* is available from Jockobotz Publisher, P.O. Box 1986, Denton, TX 76202.]

About the Author: Keith Winking is currently an assistant professor at Southwest Texas State University where he directs the award-winning jazz program and performs with the Faculty Brass Quintet, The Southwest Brassworks. He has a BS in music education from Quincy College, and a MM in trumpet performance from Southwest Texas State

University. He is completing his DMA treatise, *Ernest Williams: His Career, His School, His Work, and His Teaching Philosophies*, at the University of Texas at Austin. His teachers have included Raymond Crisara, Don Jacoby, Vince Cichowicz, Jack Laumer, James Buckner, and Jeffrey Piper. Winking is active as a free-lance player and is staff trumpeter at Black Top Records in New Orleans.

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result of the amount and speed of the air. This is one more example that the body will react normally and efficiently if the breathing is correct. He stated that trumpet players also need to develop the ability to play what they hear inside their head. He asked the students how they would make a difficult entrance in a solo or orchestral piece if they couldn't hear their own part. Once again he used the word focus, this time applying it to the importance of listening and playing with the sound that we hear. He added that trumpet players should think less about what they're doing physically and just play.

Rudd and Lazarus were asked about their ability to change trumpets so often during pieces on their concerts. Rudd began by saying that at first it was difficult having to switch from flugelhorn to piccolo trumpet. However, it became easier simply through practice and knowing how each trumpet felt when he played. Lazarus added that when he joined The Dallas Brass he practiced a lot of horn changes. Both Rudd and Lazarus mentioned that their mouthpieces are standard for the majority of their playing, except on the piccolo trumpet. Rudd uses a Bach 1-1/2C and Lazarus uses a Bach 3C equivalent.

In closing, Rudd encouraged the students to try some of the concepts that he and Chuck Lazarus presented, in hopes that they would improve their musicianship and enjoy many more days of positive playing.

The Rommel and Dallas Brass trumpet master classes were scheduled by Joe F. Phelps, professor of trumpet at Appalachian State University and John Almeida, trumpet instructor at the University of North Florida. Phelps and Almeida teach trumpet at Cannon Music Camp.

About the Author: John Almeida is the ITG affiliate chapter coordinator. He is trumpet instructor at the University of North Florida and a Yamaha Performing Artist. Almeida performs regularly as a soloist and as a member of The Brass Works.