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BY VERA HØRVEN

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URBAN AGNAS AT THE NORWEGIAN TRUMPET FORUM

BY VERA HØRVEN

Swedish trumpet professor Urban Agnas, teaching at the Hochschule für Musik Köln, Germany, gave the members of the Norwegian Trumpet Forum (NTF) a most educating and entertaining seminar in March, 2005. Urban Agnas was invited by Odd Lund, the president of NTF, to give masterclasses and a recital at the Norwegian Academy of Music during the annual NTF conference. His accompanist was Ida Moe, the concert pianist of the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra and a former student of the Academy. Two weeks prior to the seminar, Agnas and Moe recorded a CD together. NTF participants got to hear parts of that collaboration during the concert they gave on the second night of the seminar. The CD will be released in late 2005.

Urban Agnas advocated a relaxed and self-accepting approach to practicing and performing which was very refreshing. He differentiated clearly between accepting oneself as a player who made mistakes while not accepting one's mistakes. His numerous ways of conveying energy to the students while they played for him enabled them to stretch for their potential in new ways both technically and musically. The results were very rewarding!



Agnas dances to inspire Anne Marit's interpretation of Tomasi

It was not so much Urban Agnas' lecturing that affected the students' playing, but what he actually did and how his palette of methods changed the thoughts and feelings of the players, enabling them to express more as musicians.

In addition to being a trumpeter performing in the classical, contemporary, and jazz idioms, Urban Agnas is also an incredible percussionist. When teaching and conveying energy to the students, he utilized the arts of drama and dance when he wasn't accompanying the students on the grand piano, percussion

instruments, or on his own trumpet.

Agnas lectured on how important it is to relax the chest and stomach area during inhalation and avoid actively pushing the air out so that the lips have to act like brakes. Ordinary lip buzzing is not a favorite activity of his, because it achieves something different than what we do when we play the instrument. "But buzzing like with a large tuba mouthpiece may be beneficial," he said and showed us how with his fingers far apart on the upper and lower lip. "The air can flow more freely when the lips do this kind of buzzing without pushing from the abdomen."



Lip buzzing demonstration (as on a tuba mouthpiece)

Emphasis was placed on teaching students how to stand with the body well balanced. The feet should be separated and toes pointing straight ahead (also when sitting) with the body weight equally distributed on both legs. Relaxing and softly bending the knees while the neck also relaxed would ease the inhalation and promote a good sound. Agnas checked the neck tension of students while they were performing and made



Agnas addresses tension as Ingrid Eliassen plays Honegger

them aware of unnecessary tension. This was new information and a big help to many. Agnas also let some of the students perform with their backs being supported by a wall to promote their correct, relaxed posture.

Participants were warned against letting daily drills become like the numbered sheets of paper laid out on the floor during dancing lessons. Instead he advocated practicing in keys with lots of sharps and flats while making up your own melodies. "Then, when you have warmed up and taken a break, it is time to grab hold of yourself and pull everything back into shape. Find out exactly what you want to express musically and go for it." His advice for the female gender included the exhortation, "Many girls prefer control rather than giving it their all. Even when they know their piece perfectly, they choose to play safe. The danger is then to just deliver a lot of notes that are boring to listen to. Take chances, girls! Let the joy out!"



Anne Solberg is coached to let the joy out on Tomasi

Anne Solberg played the first movement of the Tomasi *Concerto*. When Agnas told her to play it again and pretend that she was at home playing only to herself without an audience, her phrasing improved dramatically and she truly spoke to the hearts of the audience through her instrument.

Ingrid Eliassen performed the *Concert Piece* by Brandt, and Agnas made her play it in many different ways. The way that made us close our eyes and dream of the Russian concept of beauty was when she was told to exaggerate her musical expression almost to the level of being unmusical, while Agnas improvised invigorating rhythms on the percussions to inspire her and help her maintain the tempo to create the best intensity and swing. This was one of the highlights of the seminar.

Another nice surprise took place when Elin Kurverud played the first movement of the Haydn *Concerto*. Ida Moe was out for a minute, so Agnas sat down by the grand piano and accompanied her with an improvised piano part overflowing with dancing rhythms and inner drive. This inspiration increased Elin's ability to convey more energy later on when she played the piece with Ida Moe's more traditional accompaniment.

Every trumpeter present was handed a copy of Urban Agnas' 20 daily etudes. These can be highly recommended! For good

players it takes about 40 minutes to play them through every morning. "These etudes are made to help you find the good feeling inside. Feel the tone within you, and then play it. Stand up and feel free while you play!" Agnas continued: "Don't focus on producing good results when you warm up. Just let the music come out of you when you play. Never mind if your horn gurgles, just let it all out. There are 'trees' on your road. Don't bump into them. In the C-major scale, the 'tree' is between the G and the A. Just accept the fact that you might miss it."



Elin Kurverud is urged to give more emotion in her rendition of Haydn

Agnas warned against letting feelings disturb one's practicing. "Accept yourself, and focus on doing the job, not on the feelings that come and disturb you when you are at work in the practicing room." He also used some unconventional methods to "fool" the students into accomplishing difficult passages. He would ask students to just blow the passage while he did the fingering. Without telling the student, he transposed it one



Vilhjalmur's gains more confidence on Haydn

step down, and the passage came out easily and with a remarkably good sound. Equipped with a new sense of confidence, the students played the passage beautifully in the correct key

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the next time they tried.

Another topic dealt with the differences we all feel that result when we recognize that there is a first trumpeter inside us or a second trumpeter practicing or performing. Another method was to make someone imagine a madman running around, but “it doesn’t matter to you, because you love the music so much, that you just play! Learn to focus on the music and not your disturbing feelings.” Agnas also demonstrated what difference it makes whether you use your right or left hand to do the fingering. He asked all of the master class attendants to play along with their left hand doing the fingering instead of the right (thereby confusing the right and left sides of their brains). Everyone automatically breathed and blew with more ease!

On the last day of the seminar, Agnas let the participants play through some of his etudes while he accompanied them on the piano or percussion instruments. He divided the audience into different groups and made them clap different



L – R: Finn Ingebritsen, Odd Lund, and Ole Jørgen Utnes
(all members of the Norwegian Trumpet Forum Board)

rhythms that fit together. He then suddenly threw himself into African dancing while his rhythmical shouts and screams were accompanied by the audience clapping their hands. Agnas stressed that even though rhythmical figures give energy to the music, it is important to not increase the tempo, because the maintenance of tempo will give the music a greater swing.



Agnas accompanies master class participants
as they play his etudes

Agnas likes Monette’s instruments very much, because they are made to enable the player to perform in a more relaxed manner. In the concert, where Agnas’ old teacher Harry Kvebæk and another of Kvebæk’s students, Ole Edvard Antonsen, were present, Agnas and Moe performed works by Honegger, Karl Pilss, Jean Françaix, Marcel Bitsch, George Enescu, and Jacques Castérède. We could closely study how he applied his own teaching on breathing and posture and how well it worked. For encores he played the *Concert Etude* by Goedicke and a very warm and innovative jazz version of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*. Through his brilliant seminar and concert, Urban Agnas truly took us over the rainbow in many ways!

About the author: Vera Hørven is an amateur trumpet player and frequent contributor to the *Journal* who reports on many notable events in Europe. She was the official digital photographer of the past five ITG Conferences and further serves ITG as a member of the Board of Directors. Hørven enjoys performing in church and teaching young trumpet students.

