

# The Joe Allard Legacy

– Col Loughman

Mention the name Joe Allard to reed players in the United States and you soon become aware that, in the opinion of many, Joe was not only an expert on the subject of tone production, but was one of a kind in his ability to help saxophone and clarinet players (both classical and jazz) overcome problems involving the production of sound.

Joe had the unique ability to diagnose a problem, explain physically what was causing it, and then using concepts and principles “prescribe” one or two of his exercises to help the student correct it by teaching themselves. Just as you might visit a leading specialist in medicine, Joe was a leading specialist in tone production, a kind of “Tone Doctor” who could help you play in a natural and relaxed way, making it possible to reach your full potential musically. A list of those who sought his help certainly confirms the fact that Joe had something very special to offer as a teacher. They include Eddie Daniels, Harvey Pitel, Michael Brecker, Stan Getz, Victor Morosco, Eric Dolphy, all five members of the Glenn Miller saxophone section, Carmine Campione, Paul Winter, Harry Carney, Paul Cohen, Dave Liebman, Ken Radnosky, Bob Berg and the list goes on.

In Joe’s own words “It may have been a high note, a low note, pitch, breathing, something like that, they would come to me and I’d help them with their problem. Most teachers would tell the student to practice more or have them play out of a book”.

Joe’s teaching credentials covered a period of more than 50 years. They include: Juilliard, The Manhattan School of Music, Brooklyn College, Long Island University and The New England Conservatory of Music. He also taught at his home in New Jersey, his studio in New York City and at his summer home in Windham, New Hampshire. Upon his retirement from the New England Conservatory of Music in 1987, he was presented with an Honorary Doctorate Degree making him truly “The

Tone Doctor”, Dr. Joseph Allard.

Whilst Joe’s reputation as a great teacher is recognised universally, much less is known of his achievements as a player. Joe was born in Lowell Massachusetts in 1910. His first instrument was clarinet and later alto saxophone and bass clarinet. He studied clarinet under Daniel Bonade, Gaston Hamelin and Ralph MacLean and saxophone with Chester Hazlett, who Joe described as having the most beautiful saxophone sound he had ever heard.

Joe’s playing credits include bass clarinet with the N.B.C. Symphony Orchestra under Arturo Toscanini, (he was the only bass clarinetist under Toscanini to have never been fired!), clarinet with the New York Philharmonic under Leopold Stokowsky, jazz gigs with Red Nichols and his Five Pennies and Red Norvo. For seventeen years he was the solo clarinet with the Bell Telephone Hour. The other winds were the first chairs in the New York Philharmonic.

A lesson with Joe was full of wisdom, humour and great stories, like the one when he was asked to play bass clarinet under Toscanini.

“We were rehearsing *Till Eulenspiegel* Opus 38 By Richard Strauss. The opening starts on a low E and ends up on a high E. The first time I played it, the Maestro stopped the orchestra, looked at me and said in Italian ‘Chic-Chic-Chic Bravura!’ – meaning that I had played it like a chicken and that he wanted it played with courage. So I thought ‘I’ll blow the hell out of this thing’. He had me play it all alone about ten different ways. Each time I played double fortissimo. He may have fired every other bass clarinetist, and was testing me to see if I’d walk out, but I was determined he wasn’t going to fire me! After that incident he was fine and never said ‘Boo’ to me for the next five years. I found out later that the Maestro was a little hard of hearing, especially with the low-end instruments.”

All Joe’s stories had a point, which would lead to a concept he was trying to explain. He was a truly inspiring teacher.

The first I heard of Joe Allard was on a trip to the U.S.A. in 1972. I had a gig touring Canada as a backing musician with a cabaret act and when that finished I decided to go to New York and LA to check out the Jazz Clubs and Studios and to try and take some lessons.

I rented an apartment in LA and the landlord was a bass player named Ray Leatherwood who used to be with the Les Brown Band. One day I was practicing and I heard a knock on the door. My immediate response was “Oh Oh, here we go again. Someone’s complaining about the noise.” It was the landlord, but to my relief he was looking for a saxophone player to fill in on a big band rehearsal that night and I jumped at the chance. It was there that I met Vic Morosco. When I walked in he was warming up. I was amazed at his absolute virtuosity on the flute, clarinet and saxophone, so after the rehearsal I approached him about taking lessons.

Vic is also a great teacher and an expert on Joe’s principles. He made me re-think my whole way of playing, and any success I have had as a teacher or player I owe much to him and, of course, Joe. It was some eight years later that I decided to go and see the “master” himself.

I studied with Joe in 1980 at his home in Tenafly, New Jersey and again in 1983 at his summer home on the Lake in Windham, New Hampshire. The drive to New Hampshire was about 6 hours, so I would go up every weekend and sleep over Saturday night and drive back on Sunday afternoon. The lessons were amazing, everything I anticipated and more. The room I slept in was next to Joe’s and had an open partition at the ceiling, so the lessons would continue into the night. On Sunday mornings I would go to the local general store with Joe and have coffee with his friends. This would be followed by a trip to the supermarket (I would push the trolley) and then back to Joe’s for another lesson. Joe was a great person and a wonderful

teacher who taught with patience, compassion, wisdom and humour. Mix that with music, anatomy, physics and the experience of a lifetime of teaching and playing and there you have some idea of a lesson with Joe Allard. With all this talk of anatomy and the laws of physics one might conclude that Joe was a “mechanical” type of teacher. Nothing could be further from the truth. Everything he taught was a means to an end, to play in the freest way possible, unrestricted by unnecessary tension and with the end result ... music.

To detail all of Joe’s principles, exercises and their application to musical and instrumental problems would take many pages and may be the subject of perhaps another article some time. Some of Joe’s unique and more unusual exercises to stress the importance of the ear and to gain flexibility and control are:

1. Playing scales, arpeggios and tunes on the mouthpiece alone.
2. Bending notes down from a semitone to a fourth in certain registers without compromising the embouchure.
3. Playing a scale without moving fingers.
4. Fingering up while playing a descending scale, fingering down while playing an ascending scale.

I have personally found exercise number one (playing on the mouthpiece alone) to be one of the most beneficial exercises of Joe’s for gaining control and it is also a great warmup.

If you are too tight or have an inflexible embouchure you may find the mouthpiece exercise difficult at first, so be patient. With some practice you will be able to play scales, etc. within an octave or more. **Do not drop**

**the jaw** to descend or tighten up to ascend. Sliding the mouthpiece in a little as you ascend and sliding out as you descend will help. This exercise is a “wake up call” for the vocal cords, gets you in contact with the way the reed vibrates and helps you form a practical embouchure. To achieve the most benefit from this exercise, practise both softly and loud. Long tones using volume control (crescendo decrescendo etc.) should also be practised. Gaining control of the mouthpiece alone will make the job of playing the instrument easier and is also a great way to start beginners. After all, flute players begin with the headjoint, brass players with the mouthpiece. It makes sense that we should be able to control the **reed** first. A reed that is too hard or too soft will make this exercise more difficult to execute.

The key “C” is an example only. Each mouthpiece will produce a different pitch depending on what instrument you play, eg., clarinet, alto, tenor sax etc. Start on the highest note you can play **comfortably** and then try to change the pitch one note at a time. At first you may only be able to move a tone or a minor third. With practice you will achieve an octave or more. Remember **do not tighten up or drop the jaw**. It is the ear and the vocal cords that will help you achieve the result. Below are some suggested exercises. Make up some of your own as well. Play legato where possible.

[See musical examples below]

It has been some time now since Joe’s departure from this world, but his legacy still lives on through his many students and their students who continue to spread the word.

**Long live the Joe Allard Legacy**

– Col Loughnan teaches saxophone and woodwinds in the Jazz Department of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. He is well known in Australia as a soloist, composer and arranger. He has worked with artists as varied as Frank Sinatra, the Toshiko Tabakin Orchestra, Sammy Davis Jnr., Freddie Hubbard, Georgie Fame and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. He studied in the United States with Joe Allard, Eddie Daniels and Victor Morosco.

The image contains five musical exercises labeled A through E, each on a single staff in treble clef. Exercise A, 'All scales - major and minor', shows a single note with a long, sweeping line above it indicating a wide range of pitch bending. Exercise B, 'All arpeggios - major and minor', shows a single note with a long, sweeping line above it indicating a wide range of pitch bending. Exercise C, 'Scales in 3rds', shows a series of eighth notes with a slur over them, indicating a scale exercise. Exercise D, 'Expanding exercises', shows a series of eighth notes with a slur over them, indicating a scale exercise. Exercise E, 'Tunes', shows a series of eighth notes with a slur over them, indicating a tune exercise.