

know that Paul Hindemith said in his treatise on instrumentation that “the German bassoon has gone through so many modifications of bore and manufacture that it has lost its original character.”

Certainly habits are habits, and we have all been immunized by the sound of our own instrument, by the sounds of our teachers, by the sounds that we hear regularly, daily. But allow me to remind you that many composers wrote for the bassoon with the timbre of the French bassoon in their ear. I could name all the French composers, surely, but also those of the Paris school, and many illustrious visitors to my country, such as de Falla and Stravinsky, who wrote in France and who gave the first performances of the *Firebird* in 1919, *Petrouchka* in 1911, and *The Rite of Spring* in 1913 in Paris.

I feel that it is charming that a symphony of Mozart should sound differently in Toronto than in Salzburg, that the “Four Seasons” of Vivaldi should sound differently in Germany than in Italy, that the *Bolero* of Ravel should sound differently in Boston than in Paris. I hope that the ideal of an internationalization of sounds—the ideal of certain conductors is never reached, for it would bring about a regrettable evening out of all orchestras. These orchestras, on the contrary, should retain and protect their personalities.

I also feel that all my colleagues should be free to choose the make of instrument they prefer. But that does not keep me from wishing that, in imitation of certain of our eminent colleagues from North America, England, Ireland, Italy, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Israel and Poland, who have already concluded that many works should be played only on the French bassoon, many of the accomplished players of the German bassoon either present here or absent but who know a bit about the possibilities of the French bassoon should also have the curiosity to try out my instrument.

I can tell you with all sincerity that I believe my instrument to be the best, that it has innumerable and varied possibilities. I can also tell you that its manufacture is not static, that its development follows the demands of the artists who play it and the development of music and of methods of teaching. In concrete terms, this means that the range, the flexibility, the response from the lowest to the highest register, the variety of sound, the evenness of sound, and the roundness of sound are constantly being improved and will continue to be so.

Before concluding, allow me to quote Claude Debussy who wrote on the 24th of July, 1909: “Our bassoons are truly admirable—capable of the pathos of Tchaikovsky and the irony of Jules Renard.”

For myself, speaking of the BUFFET-CRAMPON bassoon, I offer you a truly French slogan: “Try it, and you’ll buy it!”

I will end by saying that I hope that the IDRS enjoys a long and happy future, and that you all have my very best wishes. And I thank you for having listened to me. Long live the IDRS.!

#### JERRY E. SIRUCEK

Jerry E. Sirucek is currently professor emeritus of oboe and English horn at the School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington. He has a high reputation both as teacher and an active performer. His performing career includes 16 years as a member of the Chicago



Symphony Orchestra, also the Houston Symphony Orchestra, the Aspen Festival, and the Chautauqua Festival. Very active in chamber music, he was a member of the Chicago Symphony Woodwind Quintet, the American Woodwind Quintet, and the Baroque Chamber Players. Records include a solo album for Coronet Records, concertos with the Morehead State University Band with conductor Robert Hawkins, and numerous chamber music albums with the Baroque Chamber Music Players including both baroque and specially commissioned contemporary works. In 1982 he performed the United States premier of the *Concerto for Oboe and Orchestra* by Juan Orrepeg-Salas.

A graduate of Roosevelt University and a student of Robert Mayer, Mr. Sirucek taught at Northwestern University, the Chicago Musical College (now affiliated with Roosevelt University), and from 1961-1988 was professor of oboe and English horn at the Indiana University School of Music. His interest and success as a teacher is evident from positions achieved by his former students in major symphonies and universities both in the United States and abroad. His present work includes teaching and coaching with the National Youth Symphony of Spain. Also, at present, he is involved in experimental computer work relative to oboe reeds and to orchestral excerpts.

Recently retired from Indiana University, Mr. Sirucek plans to continue trips to Spain; get exercise operating his farm; and with his wife, Lorraine, fly his own Cessna Centurion airplane to visit his children and grandchildren.

The International Double Reed Society is pleased to welcome Misters Jerry Sirucek and Maurice Allard as our new Honorary Members for 1988.

Sadly, **Jerry Sirucek** died in 1996. Following his death a former student of Jerry’s, IDRS member James Brody wrote the article “Jerry Sirucek: Honoring a Life in Music”, which was printed in *The Journal of the IDRS*, Number 24, 1996 (pp. 5-21). The section containing tributes from his former students is reprinted below.

### WORDS FROM HIS STUDENTS

**Emily Agnew** played second oboe in the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra and is currently on the faculty of SUNY-Geneseo.

As a teacher, Mr. Sirucek was a wonderful combination of organization and enthusiasm. In four years, we covered every possible scale in thirds and fourths; studies of Barret, Hugot, Singer and Gillet; and numerous sonatas, concertos, suites and other solo pieces, some well-known, some less so. His specific goal was to address the basic technical difficulties and interpretational challenges in a variety of works, leaving me with a sort of library on which to draw for future recitals and teaching. I have often appreciated this broad exposure to the repertoire and meticulous approach to technical problems which provided me with a facility that has stayed with me.

I only wish that (as a teacher) I could demonstrate in lessons as did Mr. Sirucek. He would whip off passages with cool authority, then look at me appraisingly. I fell for this basic motivation technique week after week but could never “catch up”; which, of course, was just the point! I was all the more impressed knowing that on many mornings he had come directly from the farm where he had been rounding up his cows before dawn. (They always seemed to be escaping.) At the time, I had no idea how important it was for me, seeing a teacher as committed and dedicated as he was who also clearly had a much beloved life and identity away from the oboe.

Now that I teach a great deal, I understand both the difficulty and the crucial importance of giving one’s full attention to each student at each level of talent and accomplishment. I learned this egalitarian approach from Mr. Sirucek. He assigned repertoire thoughtfully and carefully rotated students in and out of the half-dozen IU orchestras and bands, making certain that each student played repertoire that would challenge but not overwhelm.

My teaching style comes directly from Mr. Sirucek. Like him, I give students of all ages a weekly three part lesson assignment: scales and tone production exercises, etudes, and solo repertoire. On a more general level, I strive, as Mr. Sirucek did, to nurture my students’ independent thinking by revealing and analyzing the way I solve problems on the oboe. And I try to respect each student’s individuality with uniquely suitable assignments. Finally, I emulate his perseverance by really hanging in there with a problem until I see that light bulb go off for the student. As for knocking the socks off my students with impromptu renditions of devilishly difficult passages: give me a few more years, JS. I’ll catch up with you yet!

**Stephen Colburn** is principal oboe of the Milwaukee Symphony.

Jerry Sirucek is a great player, teacher and human

being. I initially studied with him (as a beginner on the oboe) at a studio in Des Plaines IL. My first eye-opening experience with him was when he suggested that I go to Aspen with him in 1962, where he was the primary oboe teacher. It was a revelation to be exposed to such a high level of playing. He then encouraged me to attend IU. I wasn’t proficient enough to be accepted on oboe, so I actually auditioned on bass clarinet. Somehow, he got me admitted.

While at IU, all the oboists performed in a series of studio recitals. My first recital performance was pretty “rough.” When we spoke about it the next day, he said: “So it didn’t go well. It was your first time. Pick up the pieces, learn from the experience, and next time — it will go better.” I then determined one thing that I *could* control: that I would work harder than anyone else. After many, *many* hours of practice, my next performance went well. From that point on, I started to develop some confidence in myself.

When I walked into a lesson one day, Jerry asked me what I had “going” that week. After telling him my schedule, he told me that he had already arranged to change my rehearsal schedule because I would be going to Memphis to play principal in the symphony! Their oboist was ill, Jerry was unable to go, so he sent *me*. Again, thanks to Jerry, it went well, and it helped to further develop my self-confidence.

Jerry was always there to help me with reeds or through a new piece of music. He took phone calls at any time of the day or night, and would even teach a lesson at his home if it seemed necessary. He always knew there was a way to solve a problem if you looked hard enough.

Jerry was demanding and tough to please. But he instilled in you a tremendous desire not to let him down, because you felt that he had made an investment in you as a musician, an oboist and a person. Without his patience, enthusiasm and musical knowledge, I never would have become an oboist. He is an unusual man. I always wondered how I could pay him back. One day, I asked him that question. His response was that I should do those very same things for my own students.

**Michael Ericson** has taught at Western Illinois University since 1986.

I have many wonderful memories of my studies with Mr. Sirucek. After reading the testimonials of others, I was struck by the similarities. We were all professionally challenged by his methodology. He believed that if you studied *anything* in a careful and structured manner that you would be prepared to handle whatever challenges that might be presented. He was and still is consistently and ultimately musical. He never believed that there was one “perfect” way to play a phrase. Yet, to satisfy his demands, you needed to be able to justify your approach. I remember a

lesson where I thought I had a phrase worked out “perfectly”, even though it didn’t agree with what I knew to be his interpretation. When he questioned my performance, I presented him with my justification. I’ll never forget his response. “Well, it’s up to you. You can do it that way, but if it was *me*, I’d play it musically!” Ouch. Point taken. It’s a phrase I’ve used more than once with my students when no other explanation seemed to suffice.

Even though I had not met them, I felt as though I *knew* former students through his stories. He would often make his points by saying: “Marc Fink did [this] while playing this concerto. Sylar did [this and this].” It was part of your education, your motivation to hear about former students who were “successful.”

Like a very few other students, I had the pleasure and privilege of flying with him in his plane and working closely with him on his farm for four years. During those times out of the studio, I learned things about life and the “other side” of being a college professor. I realized that Mr. Sirucek didn’t mention his former students only to motivate us. He talked about them because to him they were (and still are) his extended family. He genuinely cared about each and every one of his hundreds of students. More than anything else, he wanted them to be successful in life. He was fully aware of the difficulties in putting food on the table as an oboist. While pushing all of us to be the best players we could be, he also encouraged the development of other skills that would provide a good life after graduation.

Mr. Sirucek loved teaching and I believe he loved his students. For my part, it was an honor to be his student.

**Marc Fink** received the BME and MM degrees from IU. Since 1973, he has been professor of oboe at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is currently First Vice President of the IDRS.

Jerry was and continues to be a major influence on me as a teacher, artist, and person. From my first meeting with him, Jerry impressed me as not just a fabulous oboist, but as a complete human being who was as much at home on the concert stage as behind the wheel of a tractor on his farm.

Our class of students was really like a family, and from the perspective of twenty-plus years of college teaching, I can appreciate how important and rare that is. Although the competition among us was present, Jerry created an environment of respect, good humor, and humility because of his personality and approach to teaching. During orchestral excerpt classes, the time was not spent on seeing who could play the fastest or loudest, but rather how you would approach the phrase in question, where each note belonged within the phrase, how to practice the difficult passage, what is happening in the rest of the orchestra during the

solo, etc. These classes were always interspersed with anecdotes and stories and, at times, jokes accumulated from his orchestra career. I remember a particular story of a contest he had with Ray Still during a rehearsal of *La Mer*. The rules: start scraping a blank [unscraped reed] as the conductor gives the initial downbeat; the first entrance must be played on that reed. A pretty good test of reed making, no?

The inspirational, beautifully organized, thorough and complete lessons were always complimented with a tremendous personal touch. In the days before it was common to tape record lessons, I spent the hour after each lesson in the student lounge, writing up notes about it. To this day, I refer to that notebook for suggestions in practice technique, phrasing, or other performance aspects. In the years since my studies in Bloomington, I have had many occasions to visit with Jerry, and have hosted him in Madison to give classes. His vitality for life and absolute love of music-making and teaching are as fresh as they were thirty years ago when I first met him. Our generation of oboe students at IU was unbelievably fortunate and this tribute to such an outstanding mentor, humanitarian, and friend is most appropriate.

**Jill Marchione** currently performs and teaches in Spain. JS spent some time here in Spain as the oboe professor with the Spanish National Youth Orchestra. Though his time here was limited, I still encounter oboists who remember JS fondly. Some of these players hold important positions here. Mr. Sirucek’s enthusiasm for *everything*, not only the music, definitely made a lasting impression on these students.

Now, nearly ten years after my last year of study at IU, I realize that some of JS’s most lasting influence on me came from the things he taught outside the classroom. I had the good fortune to play in the IU Summer Festival Orchestra with JS as principal. Having the chance to see JS using his ideas “on the job” was quite enlightening. They really worked! His interpretation of *Scheherazade* was *gorgeous*, something very special.

I have another lasting impression of JS. One warm, spring day I was walking down a street in Bloomington. A car pulled up behind me and I heard a loud wolf-whistle. I whirled around, prepared to tell off the sexist jerk, when I realized it was JS in his bright yellow Corvette, laughing his head off. He knew I was mad!

**Kevin Schilling** received the DM in oboe from IU. He teaches oboe, bassoon, and theory at Iowa State University, and tours with Basically Baroque, playing oboe, Baroque oboe and bassoon.

Jerry Sirucek deserves notice for his mastery at preparing students for oboe careers as well as being a caring, dedicated mentor.

I came to IU in the fall of 1969 to pursue a masters

degree in oboe. I was fortunate to be his Associate Instructor (IU's classier-sounding name for a TA). The experience I gained by teaching as many as twelve students each semester was very important. Mr. Sirucek was always there to support and guide me, but he also trusted me to fulfill my teaching responsibilities as I saw fit. The supportive, almost collegial attitude I sensed from Mr. Sirucek was characteristic of the IU faculty, a fact which might be surprising to those who only know IU by its "factory" reputation.

In the studio, what I appreciated most was the constant awareness of the music. He had ideas about how to do everything. There was never a sense of the music "taking care of itself." While we didn't always agree (and perhaps agree less now that I have become a Baroque oboist), there was never anything I could "find wrong" with his suggestions. After orchestra excerpt classes, I would listen to recording after recording, only to find that most were pedantic compared to what we had been taught. One challenge I made for myself was to walk into a lesson someday knowing how my teacher would approach a piece. I never did succeed. No matter how well I thought I did, he always had some terrific ideas that had never occurred to me.

I'll relate one tiny, but interesting experience. I had returned to Bloomington for exams, and was waiting outside the oboe studio. Mr. Sirucek played one of the Barret melodic etudes for a student. It was so incredibly expressive that I felt very humbled thinking about my renditions which I had thought must be so inspirational for my students.

**Sherry Sylar** studied with JS in the 70s, was second oboe of the Louisville Orchestra for 2 1/2 years, and has been associate principal of the New York Philharmonic since 1983.

Jerry Sirucek's teaching style has had a lasting influence on my skill as an oboist. I will always be grateful for his insistence on technical studies, scales (ad infinitum!), and orchestral excerpts. My technique and confidence in my technique are a direct result from those years at IU.

After each lesson during my first two years as his student, I wrote down every word he said to me. Every semester, we had orchestral classes that I always found challenging and interesting. I also remember "New Music" class recitals, when I scrambled to find music which had not been performed. He encouraged the avant garde. I became intrigued with Baroque performance practice through his infectious love and involvement with his Baroque Chamber Players group. His recording of the Vivaldi G Minor Sonata is still one of my all-time favorite oboe recordings.

JS was such a solid, steady, and fair teacher it would have been difficult *not* to learn from him. I count

myself very fortunate to have had his supervision at that point in my career.

**William Wielgus** plays second oboe in the National Symphony Orchestra.

After studying with Mr. Sirucek at IU in the 80s I've often reflected that the real mark of a teacher's contribution occurs during those decades when the student stands alone. Now we see the reason for those endless technical exercises: with 4-5 concerts a week, finding practice time is a miracle. Now we see the reason for learning all those obscure repertoire pieces: audiences really like to hear them! Yet no matter how immaculate the technique and refined the phrasing there still had to be something that came from within. "Soulful" was his word, and not just in Czech music.

My strongest memory of Jerry Sirucek as a musician was his performance of Juan Orrego-Salas' *Oboe Concerto* with a student orchestra, a performance devoid of the foot-stomping, eye-bulging, hair-tossing histrionics so alarmingly encouraged nowadays among soloistic wannabes, but totally satisfying with his feet-on-the-floor integrity, warm sound, and (need I say it?) immaculate technique.

But unquestionably my most memorable experience occurred when we were going over a list of excerpts for an upcoming second oboe audition. When I got to the infamous slow movement opening of Dvorak's *Seventh Symphony* my big, beautiful reed with delusions of grandeur was just plain missing every other note. This provoked an immediate, indignant response, and after a sensitive demonstration on one of his ancient, coffee-blackened reeds, he growled: "When I was in Chicago, we took this on tour —with Reiner, — and I got it every time — AND I USED A HARD REED!"

**Kerry Willingham** received the BM degree from IU in 1977. He is principal oboe with the United States Army Field Band in Washington DC.

I have a small town, farming background. As soon as Mr. S found out that I knew my way around a John Deere 4020 tractor and was not afraid of a Shredder (a huge, lawn-mower type implement that chops corn stubble), he put me to work. One summer, I lived on his farm, tending to the cattle and crops.

One year, he had a party at his farm, including an old-fashioned hay ride and a spelunking expedition in the main cave on their place. Most of the students were city kids, so this was a unique experience for them. We went several hundred yards back into the cave. We were all cold and wet; fortunately, our flashlights were strong. Mr. S had us all sit down, and said: "You really need to hear and sense what total darkness is like, so turn off your flashlights and sit still!" We obeyed, and found that the darkness and silence was unnerving. After about a minute, Mr. S started singing (in his coarse voice) one of the more

difficult Barret etudes. It was totally unexpected and quite funny! He always had a sense of the dramatic.

Mr. S was quite frugal in making purchases for his farm. (Some might even call it “cheap.”) Once he and I were putting up a *very* large grain storage facility. It had a corrugated metal floor, and we were using electric drills to install sheet metal screws. The “cheap” extension cord being used wasn’t adequate for the amperage, and one of the cords short circuited, burning the rubber coating off *while Mr. S was holding it*. He dropped it on the metal floor, and it started dancing like it was alive. I jumped on a wooden 2x4 that was nearby, and Mr. S *dove* out the 2x3 foot opening in the side of the bin. Smoke was everywhere. He may have thought he had an opening in his oboe

studio at this point! The electric box on the pole outside melted down and shut off, and no further harm came to either of us.

His farm was his respite from IU and the oboe. We never talked oboe out there, just soybeans, cattle, and how to fix a D5 Caterpillar. He could be very aggressive at the wheel of that machine! I was amazed at his physical conditioning: in the 70s, he could outrun me, which I discovered while chasing cattle that had wandered from the pasture.

The reader is also referred to James Brody’s tribute to Jerry Sirucek: “Fond Memories” (*The Double Reed*, Vol 19, No. 2, p. 58), which appeared at the time of Jerry’s obituary. ❖