Leonard Sharrow: An Oral History

By William Kaplan
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Leonard Sharrow, an honorary member of IDRS, has enjoyed a distinguished career as both artist and teacher. He played principal bassoon in the NBC Symphony under Arturo Toscanini, the Chicago Symphony under Rafael Kubelik and Fritz Reiner, and the Pittsburgh Symphony under Andre Previn. From 1964 to 1977 he was professor of bassoon at Indiana University.

William Kaplan was a student of Leonard Sharrow from 1952 to 1956. He holds degrees from the Juilliard School, University of Chicago, and University of Michigan, and since 1966 has been a member of the faculty of the University of Illinois at Chicago. Prior to coming to UIC, he played for eight years in the Denver and Detroit Symphony Orchestras.

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WK: Can you say something about your earliest years? Where did you grow up?

LS: Mostly in the Bronx. I was born in Manhattan—Harlem, specifically—and a few years later we moved to the Bronx—the South Bronx, which is not a particularly savory neighborhood now, though at that time it was. At any rate, I have a sister three years younger than I. My father was a violinist, a professional violinist. He at one time was the assistant concertmaster of the New York Symphony, which was conducted by Walter Damrosch. About 1928 or 29 that orchestra merged with the New York Philharmonic. Certain players were then taken into the Philharmonic and my father was one of them. He stayed there for a few years until Damrosch became a sort of music director at NBC. He begged my father to leave the Philharmonic and come on staff at NBC. This was long before the formation of the NBC Symphony as we knew it later. It was a staff orchestra, which in a way was a good job in those days. It was year round, with a good scale, whereas in most symphony orchestras you had a 24-28 week season in the winter, and if you were lucky you had maybe six weeks in the summer.

I, for whatever the reason, studied violin with my father and with some of his colleagues, and my sister studied piano. She became quite an accomplished pianist. Never really worked at it professionally, except in the Los Angeles area where she lives now and has been living for many years. She works with choruses, and does accompanying and things of that sort. She's very, very good, an excellent chamber music player. Anyhow, I started studying the violin to some degree against my will. I was not very enthusiastic about it, and was made to practice. And as I developed some facility, some skill on the instrument, there was no thought of my going into music professionally at that time.

I began to play in amateur orchestras around New York and to play chamber music with some friends of mine—string quartets. And somewhere along the line, being exposed to all this music, I suddenly fell in love with it. I decided that this is what I would like to do. But I also realized that by no stretch of the imagination would I ever be any competition to Jascha Heifetz. So, if I was going to stay in music there would have to be some other outlet, another instrument perhaps. Having played in these amateur orchestras around New York, I heard the other instruments and in particular the sound of the bassoon. One of the people I heard was Sol Schoenbach. This was in an orchestra called the Heckscher Foundation Orchestra; I played violin, Steve Maxym, the bassoon player, played the viola in that orchestra, and the bassoonist was Sol Schoenbach.

WK: When do you think that was?

LS: Oh, that must have been in the very early 1930's.

WK: So Sol was older than you.

LS: Maybe a year or two, yes. I was already in high school at that time. So I decided that I would like to study the bassoon. What to do? I wrote to Frank Damrosch who was the head of the Institute of Musical Art at that time, which later became part of the Juilliard School. I wrote to him about a scholarship. It was kind of nervy on my part; I didn't know anything about the bassoon, I didn't know one end from the other. And he suggested that I try for what they referred to as a Philharmonic Scholarship—members of the Philharmonic used to teach the various instruments. The bassoon teacher was Simon Kovar. I had no idea what I was doing, and my father was no help because I didn't ask him. I really should have, because he knew Kovar; and Kovar, with his friendship with my father, would have arranged for a scholarship for me to study with him. But instead my father spoke with Georges

Barrere, the famous flute player who had played first flute in the New York Symphony under Damrosch. At the time that I am speaking of, when I went to study the bassoon, he was the head of the woodwind department at the Institute of Musical Art. Now, at the Institute there were two bassoon teachers—Simon Kovar and Louis Letelier, a Frenchman who had been first bassoon with Damrosch for many years. My father knew him very well and of course Barrere also; the two were not only countrymen but had also played in the woodwind section with Damrosch. So my father spoke with Louis Letelier about my desire to study the bassoon, Letelier spoke with Barrere, and I got myself a scholarship with Louis Letelier at the Institute of Musical Art.

WK: But he played French bassoon?

LS: Exactly. I didn't know anything then. I didn't know if it was French bassoon, German bassoon, Scandinavian bassoon. I didn't know from nothing. I got the French bassoon and it didn't take me very long to find out that I was a maverick. I was the only one who studied and was playing the French bassoon.

WK: Are you saying that Letelier played principal on French bassoon while Kovar played second on the German bassoon?

LS: No, in the Philharmonic was Benjamin Kohon on first bassoon. Letelier did not go into the Philharmonic, he went on staff at NBC. In the Philharmonic it was Kohon, Kovar; third bassoon was, I think, Sensale, and I forget who the contra bassoon was. There was a rather funny story about Barrere, who had a wonderful sense of humor (he didn't go into the Philharmonic either). He was a marvelous flute player and when the merger took place, they were talking about this or that player coming in, moving to the Philharmonic. Referring to the then-principal flute in the Philharmonic, he said "I don't mind if he plays second to me but I won't play second to him." So he didn't go into the Philharmonic. At any rate, about the time of the merger, there was a very wealthy man, Harry Harkness Flagler, who was the support of the New York Symphony, the big financial support. And he gave a party for the orchestra. Every man in the orchestra got a set of cuff links—gold cuff links; on one side were the man's initials, on the other side the letters NYSO-New York Symphony Orchestra. At the party these cuff links were presented to the gentlemen, and Barrere was asked to make a speech. (I wasn't there of course; my father told me about this.) In his remarks he said something to the effect that "first they take the shirts off our back and then they give us cuff links."

Anyway, to get back to the bassoon: I studied with Letelier on the French bassoon for about 3 1/2 years and I knew it was kind of a dead end. But there was nothing that I could do. I started using German reeds everywhere but at my lessons, and they worked very well; I used to get my reeds from Kovar. I'd go to Kovar and sit there for two hours just trying reeds. While I was trying reeds he would say "Let me hear you play this, now play this, no, don't play it that way, do it like this." It was like a lesson. I was using the school instrument, an old Buffet, and each summer Letelier would take his vacation in France. My father asked him if he could look around for a good instrument for me—a new instrument. And each summer Letelier would come back and say he couldn't find anything—there was nothing available. Which I now find hard to believe, because there were bassoon students in France, all over the place, and they were playing the Buffet bassoon; they must have been good instruments. I think now that in the back of Letelier's mind was the realization that somewhere along the line, if I was going to play professionally, I'm going to have to make that switch. He didn't want to admit it, he didn't want to say it, but maybe this was one way of justifying my not buying an instrument. Anyway, in my last year at school I became disillusioned with the idea of the French instrument.

WK: You mean your last year of high school?

LS: Yes, I got into the Institute before finishing high school. I remember that we used to have Thursday afternoon rehearsals at the Institute. I used to have to cut my last class or two classes at school and run, catch the subway, and then a taxi to the Institute building for that 2:30 rehearsal. The conductor of the orchestra was a very short tempered Dutchman who also taught cello. He was apoplectic about my coming in late. He said, "I throw you out from the Institute," that sort of thing. I began neglecting all my secondary subjects—theory, piano, all the other things, so my scholarship could not be continued. Barrere or no Barrere, they couldn't continue it. So now I had no scholarship, I couldn't study with Letelier any more; I went to Kovar and told him. Right away he said OK, and we ordered an instrument from Heckel.

WK: You would have been about 19 at that time?

LS: Yes, around that, because at the age of 20 I went to the National Symphony on the German instrument. Kovar ordered a Heckel bassoon for me and meanwhile I would come up to his house almost every day. He had a Puchner bassoon for me to practice on and to play. That summer I worked like mad on the German instrument.

WK: He really took you under his wing.

LS: Yes. When my instrument finally came from Germany, sometime during the latter part of the summer, I began working on that one and practicing just to get familiar with it; then one day he called me up and told me that there was an opening in Washington—the National Symphony—with Hans Kindler conducting. He wanted me to audition for it. So I did and miraculously I got the job. I don't know how; to this day I don't know how I ever got that job.

WK: Was that on principal?

LS: Principal, yes. Second bassoon was Louie Angelucci who played second bassoon in Philadelphia for many years with Sol Schoenbach. I got the job but it was torture for me that first season because I was scared to death. Kindler was not very gentle in his approach; he was a very difficult man. The first oboe was Harold Gomberg and the first flute was Harold Bennett, both Curtis products who had gone through several years with Fritz Reiner. So Kindler to them was like water off a duck's back. He didn't bother them at all, you know. But I was scared to death. I remember one incident during my first year; we were rehearsing something, I don't recall what. Kindler stopped and said, "Mr. Sharrow, I would like you to play this particular passage thus and so." I'll never know what prompted me to do this, but I said "Well, I thought I did play it that way." I have never talked back to a conductor, and I don't know why I did this time. Then Harold Bennett at that point, who was sitting right in front of me, turned around with a smirk on his face and said "You ought to know how you played the darn thing." Kindler couldn't hear what he said, but just saw him talking to me, and with that smirk on his face thought he was saying something derogatory about him. He said "Turn around, Mr. Bennett, you are not so good either." At which point Gomberg yelled out, "Yes he is." Kindler didn't know which way to turn; he had a three cornered fight on his hands and called intermission right away. I didn't say anything and from that point on he left us alone. He never said anything to any of us.

Now, I must say at this point, I owe a great debt of gratitude to both Harold Gomberg and Harold Bennett. When I first came there, one of the first things I had to play was Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony.

WK: You were only 20 years old.

LS: Just 20 years old, yes. And Kindler wanted vibrato. I didn't have the slightest idea how to produce a vibrato. Kovar never taught that; he didn't know himself. And I didn't know. But Gomberg and Bennett came to my rescue; they showed me the principles, from a mechanical standpoint, of how to develop it, how to work it up, and how to produce it. Then, at that point, what you do with the vibrato is a reflection of your own musicianship, naturally—how you apply it.

I remember that summer Jackie Knitzer came to play second bassoon with me. The orchestra itself put on the summer season because management didn't want to do it, so we did it on a cooperative basis. Knitzer and I lived in the same rooming house. He had the room above me and we were practicing long tones; we sounded like a couple of sick cows—woo, woo, woo—all that sort of thing. But by the time my second season began, I had it down very well; I could do it. I mean this was part of my ammunition; I was able to play.

WK: What bassoonists were playing with vibrato at that time—1940 or so? Any American bassoonists?

LS: Well, sure: Guetter in the Philadelphia Orchestra, Benny Kohon—and others. It was not as prevalent then as it is now, but there were a number. Enough for us to listen to. There was also Allard who played in the Boston Symphony at that time, who was the uncle of Maurice Allard; he played the French bassoon—but a beautiful sound, a beautiful singing quality. Over the years I have heard a number of French bassoon players, and if you can accept the fact that it is going to be a somewhat different timbre because of the structure of the instrument, in the hands of a good player it can sound absolutely beautiful, really, They had very, very good schooling: like Paul Hongne for example, who died quite a number of years ago, just to name one. A marvelous player.

WK: It seemed to me that your vibrato set you apart from everyone. It was fast, intense: is that what you tried to achieve?

LS: Well, I developed it. In the back of my mind what I wanted was a vibrato that could be varied—not fast all the time, but slowed down as the phrase demanded, let's say—not always the same. Remember, I played violin for about eight years or so before I played the bassoon, so I used string players as my model in using vibrato, and good singers too.

One of the things that I have always told my students is that the vibrato is a variation in intensity; you push and retreat, push and retreat. Try to visualize holding one note with a series of sforzandos. But you are not going to do it with the tongue, you are going to do it with the breath. Also, it is not supposed to be a variation of pitch, but inevitably it becomes a little bit like that, because when you push you are then going to retreat for the next push, so you let up a little bit in the amount of air coming through. So the pitch is going

to sag just a little bit. Then you push back again. This is what happens on a string instrument. If you watch a string player carefully you will note the finger on the fingerboard—on the string—vibrating, but it goes below the note or pitch, and up to, below and up to—never above. Because if it goes above then you get wow-wow-wow, you begin to lose the center of the pitch—which is bad. A little bit below and back into the intensity on the pitch itself; that's the thing

WK: Let me ask you about reeds. My first lessons were with Kovar, and my recollection is that he bought his reeds from someone in Germany; Kovar didn't make them or fix them.

LS: Yes, Eisenhart was the man he got his reeds from.

WK: Then from whom did you learn reed making if not from him?

LS: To some degree, from Eli Carmen. We were very, very close friends—good friends all the years of his life. He helped me a lot, he showed me a lot of things. He advised me on the tools that I would need and the shaping of the reed, the whole thing. But most of it, without trying to pat myself on the back, I developed myself—remembering the little things that Eli Carmen had showed me, and working and experimenting and trying to develop and see what happened. I read a few articles here and there, that sort of thing. I didn't actually study reed making as such.

WK: Did you buy your cane in tubes?

LS: When I started making reeds seriously, I bought my cane in tubes, yes. I bought a gouging machine and used to split the tube into four pieces, I think, if the tube was large enough, and proceed from there. Later on I got a profiler. The thing is, when I first started making reeds, profilers were not as extant as they became later. And when we first started using them none of us had the feeling—at least I didn't—that you'd run the profiler over the reed, shape it, fold it, cut off the tip, and boom—you had a reed. Not so! The profiler only helps you get to a point where you have to work on the reed by hand. It gets you there quicker and with a little more accuracy than if you were working by hand. So you have a little more consistency, one piece of cane compared with another. That's the advantage of the profiler.

WK: My recollection is that your reeds were narrow and fairly short. Am I right?

LS: I don't know by what standard you mean that, because there's so much variation. Each player develops what he needs. Goslee, for example, used a rather large reed. Garfield, on the other hand, used a rather small one. I don't know if either one could have played on the other one's, but each developed the reed that suited his way of playing. So I would hesitate to classify my own. What you do is give certain measurements to beginning students so that they will have some degree of consistency; but later on, with experience, they can vary these things.

WK: Did your reeds crow to an E flat?

LS: I don't know; I never checked them that way, though I know that many players do. I would crow the reed as I was making it just to see how it sounded—what the quality was like— and I wanted to be sure that it did not sink on the E natural—also that I could get a good E flat without using any other keys. If I could get a good, well controlled E flat without using the right hand, and if the E would hold up, then I had the beginnings of a good reed. Then it was just a matter of making sure the quality and response were what I wanted.

WK: How long did a reed last you?

LS: A reed would last me quite a while because I was always making them; there was a replacement process. But here is something I always told my students: I would have a box of, say, six reeds in my case, all of which played. I would not use reed number one exclusively, but would alternate them, because if you use number one all the time, eventually it is going to just give out, since it's organic material. Well, if you've been playing only number one, you're not worried when it fails because you have reed number two in the background. OK, fine: number one gives up, you go to number two, and YOU CAN'T USE IT! It's not that number two has changed, rather that number ONE has been changing over time, and you've been changing with it; you've been favoring it, and now number two doesn't feel right. So the idea is to play on all of your reeds and gradually replenish them so that you don't get that sudden change like when you're weariing a size 8 shoe and suddenly have to put your foot into a size 6!

WK: How many years did you play in the National Symphony, and what hall did they use?

LS: Constitution Hall; I was there for two years, and there's a funny story connected with that. In 1937 the formation of the NBC Symphony, with Toscanini as conductor, was announced. Artur Rodzinski was asked to put it together. He used a nucleus of men from what was then the NBC staff orchestra, and also brought in some players from the outside. For example, Bill Polisi, his own first bassoon from Cleveland, Robert Bloom to be first oboe, John Wummer, who was in Detroit at that time, to be first flute, Albert Stagliano on first horn, and so on. And for other positions, he was in NewYork all summer long holding auditions—woodwinds, brass, strings, everything.

I auditioned for second bassoon, must have played for three quarters of an hour—a long audition for him. He had all the parts there—all the study books—and I remember that he put something in front of me from *Death and Transfiguration.* There is a theme near the end of it: two bassoons, also I think bass clarinet, violas, cellos—all the way up, then down again, and then the opening theme returns. Anyway, I had never played the piece. I started, and played notes that Strauss had never heard of. Rodzinski looked at me and said "You played two years in the National Symphony and you never played *Death and Transfiguration?"* I felt that I had to say something, so I replied "They had a small repertoire in that orchestra."

Anyway, there must have been something he liked about my playing, because I got the job. It was second bassoon, and even though I was first bassoon in Washington, I thought of the players I would be surrounded by at NBC and the top-notch conductors—Toscanini, Bruno Walter—and knew it would be a marvelous learning experience. There was no doubt in my mind that I should take that job, aside from the fact that it paid better too. So I signed the contract with NBC and just then Kovar called me, saying "Klemperer is in town, he's auditioning for Pittsburgh, I want you to play for him." So I said, "I can't do that, I've already signed my contract for the NBC Symphony." He said, "Don't argue with me, you go play for Klemperer." So I went to Carnegie Hall. There was a stand and a chair set up on the stage and sitting in the audience was Otto Klemperer, Michel Piastro, who was concertmaster of the Philharmonic at that time, and the personnel manager of the Philharmonic. So I played—a whole lot of things, I don't remember. Steve Maxym also played. Later that afternoon I got a phone call: "Well, we decided that we want you to come to Pittsburgh." I said, "I can't go." "What do you mean you can't go?" I said, "I've signed a contract with NBC Symphony; I can't get out of that." He said, "Why did you waste your time and our time by playing the audition?" I said, "My teacher made me do it." It sounds ludicrous now when I think about it, but I was just a young kid. So Steve Maxym went to Pittsburgh.

The second time I was asked to go to Pittsburgh was by Reiner, who was guest conducting the NBC. He had an opening on first so I auditioned for him and he wanted me to come out, but that year he had this brainstorm, this wild idea of having the first and second players alternate week by week. I told him I'd be willing to take a loss financially to go there to play first, but this way I was neither fish nor fowl.

The third time I was asked to play in Pittsburgh was after I'd been teaching at IU (Indiana University). Sidney Cohen, who was the manager of the orchestra at that time, called me to play first bassoon. I told him there were a lot of things to consider, "but one thing I'll tell you right now, I am not going to play any audition. I am not a kid anymore."

"No, no, you don't have to play an audition. You come to Pittsburgh, play the week with us, we give the other guy the week off." Previn was the conductor. "At the end of the week if you like us and we like you, we will sit down and talk." I said ok, I went there and played, and everything went fine.

WK: That was 1977?

LS: Yes, I stayed there for ten or eleven years, at which point I thought it was time to retire, which I did.

WK: Let's go back to the NBC. I think your father was a violinist there during those same years?

LS: Yes. When I joined before the war, he had already been on staff at NBC. We played together under Toscanini.

WK: That's extraordinary, being in the same orchestra with your father.

LS: Yes. My father was always very, very critical, you know. Things had to be just right, and I don't remember—whether it was when I was playing second bassoon or when I came back later to take over the first chair—I don't remember getting a word of approval from my father. I would look at him, and he was always "Do this" or "Do that." Finally at one point I faced him up to it and said, "Look, I seem to be satisfying all my colleagues and the conductors; everything is good for everybody, but you don't seem to be happy with what I do. I never get any kind of smile of approval or an acknowledgment from you; what's wrong?" And then he got flustered. He was of the school that thought that if you praised a student, that student would think he's pretty good and he'd sit back and not practice. This school of thought is self-defeating because after a while the student begins to feel that there's no way he or she can ever satisfy the teacher. I don't remember what my father answered, but from then on if there was anything ok, he would give me a sign—you know, approval.

WK: So you stayed at NBC on second bassoon till what year?

LS: Until 1941, when I went into the army. This was before Pearl Harbor. They were drafting men into the army for a year of training and then out, just to build up a reserve army. I was the first man from the NBC to be called. I went into the service

and stayed there until the war was over. I was sent for 13 weeks of basic training with the combat engineers. It was basically infantry training with the whole bit, rifle and everything. I became an expert marksman—had never handled a gun in my life until then, but I took to it very readily, felt very much at home with the rifle. We used to build bridges and learn how to blow them up—typical army engineer work.

After basic, men were being sent to all sorts of places; I'd heard that a Signal Corps band in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, was looking for a bassoon player, so I wrote to the band leader there. As a further precaution I wrote to Toscanini, told him where I was, what was happening, and the possibility of getting into the band where I could keep playing. I asked if there was any chance that he could write something to help me get into the band, and told him where he could write. Then I didn't hear from anyone, but when the time came, there was my name on the bulletin board, with orders to report to the band at Fort Monmouth. When I got to the band leader's office there was this desk with a glass top, and underneath the glass a letter in the unmistakable handwriting of Toscanini. That letter must have knocked him for a loop! I don't know what Toscanini wrote, but it was enough.

So I spent the war years mostly playing, including a long stretch touring the United States with the show "This is the Army!" The whole cast consisted of GI's, and at the end of the tour we made it into a movie; that was in Los Angeles. After that they shipped half the outfit overseas and those who remained were transferred to different outfits here in the States.

To backtrack a little: while we were making the movie, a clarinet player from the army band stationed in San Bernardino—he'd been a studio musician before being drafted—had approached me and asked if I'd like to be transferred to that band. So now I was free to do it. This band consisted of many studio players, and used to go into LA every week to do a show called Mail Call, which was conducted by Meredith Willson. The show was recorded and sent overseas.

The funny thing is that they needed a couple more strings in the band, so they got me a GI fiddle, and I played violin every week in that show.

Just as that band was being broken up I felt that I'd had it with music in the army so I talked to the corporal in charge of reclassification and asked about photography, since I'd been classified as an expert photographer when I first entered the service. They sent me to an outfit in Utah where I spent all day in a dark room swishing prints through chemicals. Finally I got tired of being in the darkroom all day so I went to the commanding officer of the photo unit and asked if I could be sent out on a photo assignment, since I was familiar with all the cameras and equipment they were using. His answer to that was that it wasn't possible because I "was not trained the army way!" At that point I got transferred to an army sinfonietta in Florida and played there till the war was over.

WK: Now when you got out, you had the right to reclaim your job.

LS: Yes, true, but I thought to myself that if I go back [to NBC] I would like to play first bassoon from here on. I remember that Ralph Lorr, who was playing second bassoon for NBC at that time, called and wanted to know if I would claim my old job, and I told him it was his; I wanted to see if I could get first chair somewhere.

Now William Steinberg heard that I was out of the army and got in touch with me. Would I care to come out and finish the last ten weeks of his season in Buffalo? For me it was a wonderful thing because I had a chance to get back into symphony playing with a conductor whom I knew from his guest conducting at NBC, and whom I liked and respected. So I went to Buffalo and while I was there I heard about the opening in Detroit. So it was Detroit for a year and then back to NBC to take over the first chair.

WK: Did you audition for Detroit?

LS: Yes. It was a strange audition. I had never played an audition like that before. The conductor, Karl Krueger, said, "Play whatever you want." He didn't ask me to play this, that, or the other. I started out with the Mozart *Concerto*. He said, "All right, play something else." I played a few more excerpts—*Scheherazade, Rite of Spring*—the usual things. When I was through he said, "All right, I would like you to play high A natural, hold it for four beats, make a diminuendo, and slur up to a high C." OK, I did that. And a few other things like that—intervals, different dynamics. He assumed with my background that I knew the repertoire, he just wanted to know what was the extent of my control of the instrument—what I could do. Apparently it was satisfactory; it was a strange audition.

WK: Was that the time that Detroit was playing the Ford Sunday Evening Hour broadcast?

LS: No, this came afterward.

WK: Did you have to audition to assume the principal job in the NBC?

LS: No. But I had been in the NBC Symphony, and when Benny Kohon said he was retiring, I think Toscanini remembered me from Buenos Aires. I'd been there in 1940 with him as principal bassoon.

WK: Do you want to talk about that?

LS: Oh, yes. In 1940 Toscanini went to South America with the whole NBC Orchestra. Bill Polisi was first bassoon at that time, I was playing second. We played in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Montevideo—we played all those big capitals including Buenos Aires, a number of concerts in each place. Very successful, of course, and we came home. It was 1940 and the war in Europe was already on, but Pearl Harbor hadn't taken place yet.

Now Toscanini was asked to go back to conduct the orchestra of the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires—a series of six concerts, I think. But it was right in the middle of their opera season; those poor guys had to do all the operas and also play the concerts with Toscanini, so six of us went with him to help—five from the Cleveland Orchestra, whom Rodzinski recommended, and me.

Toscanini told Steinberg that he remembered me from the orchestra as a second bassoonist but he was a bit concerned if I'd be able to play first. Steinberg, of course, assured him that there would be no problem—absolutely, that he wouldn't regret taking me to Buenos Aires. Steinberg knew me from the times I had played for him in the NBC when Bll Polisi took time off.

WK: You're saying that the first time you played first bassoon for Toscanini was in South America?

LS: Yes, in South America. We did the Verdi *Requiem*, the Beethoven *Ninth*, the Prelude to *Parsifal*—a number of things. So anyway, he knew me, he remembered me from there, I'm sure. Because in 1947 when I was in Detroit, fully expecting to get a contract for the following year, I got this communique from the manager of the NBC asking me if I'd be interested in coming back. Benny Kohon was retiring, and the manager didn't tell me that Toscanini had told him to call me, but otherwise how would he know to call me? It must have been that Toscanini remembered me, and asked him to find out if I was available and interested. And of course I was.

WK: Talk a little bit about the NBC routine. Was that a 52 week job?

LS: Yes.

WK: Did you have other obligations?

LS: Yes, of course. It was a staff orchestra 52 weeks a year; the symphony broadcasts on Saturday night were only part of that year. The rest of the time we did commercial shows.

WK: Would you say something about Toscanini? What was it like working for him?

LS: Oh, I found it marvelous. I'll never forget my first impression. In 1937 the orchestra was formed and then we had three weeks of rehearsals with Rodzinski, just to whip it into shape, with Rodzinski. He had formed the orchestra. We rehearsed *Heldenleben* for three weeks, if you can imagine that! One piece for three weeks, and then they decided to do a broadcast—a public rehearsal of *Heldenleben*. Then the season officially opened with Pierre Monteux; he had three weeks. After him, Rodzinski came back for three weeks. This was in October or November; I don't recall. Then, around Christmas, Toscanini was supposed to start.

Our first rehearsal scheduled with Toscanini had Brahms' *First* on the program and some other things that I don't recall. Toscanini came out. He was shorter than I expected—a rather short man with white hair. He used to speak in sort of a croaky voice; I used to say that he spoke in double stops—a rough, course voice. He always had the score with him but he would never look at it except in case of a dispute, if you can imagine that. And he didn't like to wear his glasses when he rehearsed, so he would hold the score up two inches from his nose so he could see the music, but it was always at his side.

WK: Very poor eyes?

LS: Very poor eyesight, he couldn't see. But he didn't like to wear glasses at rehearsals, so he didn't wear them. So now he came out, and there was no flowery speech, no nothing. He might have said just "Buon giorno" and then "Allora, we play Brahms." We started and went right through like a broadcast, like a concert performance. I don't think I've ever played a Brahms *First* like that in my life since then. Very few of the men had ever worked with Toscanini before—very, very few. So we had no idea what it would be like. We were all on the edge of our chairs, tense, listening to each other, watching him like a bunch of hungry hawks and responding to the slightest move, the slightest gesture he would make—anything. We finished and he said, "Bene, see you tomorrow." He just wanted to get the feel of the orchestra and the orchestra get the feel of what he was like, and that was it. Then of course we started rehearsing from then on.

And of course all the stories that you've heard about Toscanini—about the yelling, the raving, the screaming—they're true. They did happen. Oh sure. But the thing is there was nothing personal about it. What happened on Monday was not carried over to Tuesday and nobody was immune, from the concertmaster on down. Anybody could have been called a pig, an assassin, or any number of choice Italian names. I learned a lot of Italian from him which I couldn't repeat in polite society. He would break the stick, throw the music off the stand, yell, and walk off yelling like thunder receding into the distance—like the *Pastoral*

Symphony. But there were other times when he was like an angel, when he had the patience of a saint. You had to learn how to cope with that sort of thing, otherwise you'd go crazy; you had to learn to roll with the punches.

There were times when things were marvelous. This story, which I've told many times, showed an entirely different aspect of Toscanini. Does the name William Bell ring a bell for you? He was the tuba player in the orchestra. Now there is a man who changed the whole character of the tuba. It was no longer um-pah, it was a voice, a musical instrument. It was something beautiful to listen to. When I was in the orchestra the first time, just a young impressionable kid—22 years old—we were scheduled to do the *Faust Overture* by Wagner. In the very beginning it's two bars where the tuba and string basses play in unison. It's always a problem because of intonation between them, also the balance is touchy—very difficult. So Toscanini started conducting and they played this in a very, very slow four—two bars or so. He stopped. He didn't say anything, just begin again. They played it again. And still once more, and we could see by this time that Bill was getting itchy. Going through his head was "What's wrong? What does he want? Why doesn't he tell me, and I'll do what he wants? But he doesn't say anything!" So they had to play it again—and once more, then another time. By this time Toscanini felt that he had to say something. He couldn't see Bill, but he looked in his direction and said, "Caro, there is nothing wrong. I've never heard it played so beautifully; I just wanted to hear it again."

This sort of thing has remained in my mind since then. There were occasions like that where he'd compliment somebody, but this is not the sort of thing that gets written about; it's more exciting to hear about the yelling.

It was wonderful to work with him. Also, whenever the orchestra went on tour, if it was here in the States, we had our own train, of course. The Toscanini family had their private car in the back and he would walk through the train, kibbitzing all the card games, making sure everybody was having a good time. If the train would stop somewhere and pull over to a siding, he would get out, go for a little walk. Then we'd all get out and surround him with cameras—no problem. The only thing that used to bother him was the flash—otherwise, no problem at all. On the boat when we went to South America he was up on deck with the men at all times. And whenever we would come back from a trip, he would always have a party out at his house for the orchestra, and he'd be table hopping to make sure that everyone was having a good time.

WK: Who played principal clarinet?

LS: Oh, this is another thing. When the orchestra started, it was Augustin Duques. From the very first day, Toscanini didn't like him. Why, I don't know; he was a good clarinet player, but Toscanini didn't like him. I remember that we had a manager of the orchestra who was thoroughly detested by everyone; they couldn't stand him—an ignorant, boorish type of individual, but there he was.

One day in rehearsal I had nothing to play so I was sitting in [studio] 8H listening, and Toscanini was having trouble with one instrument; I don't know if it was the clarinet, but he had the man repeat the passage again and again. He was getting angry, he was getting worked up, but he had him play it repeatedly, and at some point the manager walked onto the stage and said, "Maestro, if you don't like this man we will get rid of him and get someone else." Now the old man turned on him like a fury, and he said, "Get away from me! What do you mean, fire him? You always want to fire people! This man—I will make him play!" Now, he didn't like Duques from the beginning, but kept him for ten years before he finally, in 1947, brought in Bob McGinnis—the year that I came back to the orchestra. He was nothing like Reiner. Reiner would fire you if you blinked your eyeball wrong—not Toscanini.

WK: Would you say something about your recording of the Mozart *Concerto*?

LS: Right. Just after I signed my contract to play first, I was told that Toscanini wanted to do the Mozart *Bassoon Concerto* in a performance. Which was fine with me. I worked it up and we performed it—November, 1947. But about two weeks before the broadcast he called me up, wanted me to come out to his house, he had something he wanted to give me. I got there and he presented me with a set of cadenzas that he had written for the *Concerto*. Well, I had been working on the Guetter cadenzas, which I had played many times before. Here it is two weeks before the broadcast, and I am supposed to learn a new set of cadenzas. To Toscanini you don't say, "Where were you, buddy, about two months ago? You're a little bit late." You just take them and woodshed them.

WK: Did you like them?

LS: No, not particularly. I still preferred Guetter's. But now I had Toscanini's, in his own manuscript. I made some little changes here and there which I felt would be better for the instrument, and before the first rehearsal I told him that I had taken the liberty of making these changes. He said something like, "Well, you have to do what you think is best. After all, what do I know about the bassoon? I am only a cellist." So that was

it; I played the *Concerto* and figured that now I could just put it away, not worry about it, and tend to my duties as principal bassoon.

A couple of months later the manager announced to the Orchestra that the following week there was going to be a recording session with Toscanini—a Mozart serenade for strings and horns and the *Bassoon Concerto*. This was two months after the air performance, and I hadn't touched it since then, so this came like a bolt out of the blue. Nobody had asked me if I wanted to do it or if I'd be willing to do it. Nobody had spoken to me about how I'd be paid—nothing. This really took me aback, but I had no choice—there really wasn't very much I could do. So OK, I went through with it.

It was a double session. They started out with the serenade for strings and horns; the horn parts were very high. After a break they all came back for the *Bassoon Concerto*. While we were working out part of the first movement for balance, I knew the horn players were tired already because I could hear them complaining about the high parts in the concerto—and they had just finished the serenade, with its high horn parts. Now this man who was moving the mike, getting instructions from the control room about my placement, muttered under his breath something like, "Come on, let's get this over with." Then at one point during the test, Toscanini turned to me and asked, "Are you tired?" I said, "Maestro, I'm not tired, I've just started." Mostly to himself, he said, "Io sono stanco, molto stanco." [I'm tired, very tired.]

I thought to myself, this is great. He's tired, the horn players are tired, the technicians are tired and fed up, they want to get out. If I stop for anything, I'll be killed. I'd better go through this like a concert performance. And remember, for two months I hadn't even touched the piece. So all this is weighing heavily on my mind. We went through it with no stops for anything, no retakes.

WK: All three movements?

LS: Yes, three movements, no retakes. And of course a few things here and there were not to my liking. At the end, my father and I looked at each other and just sort of shook our heads. We were not very happy, because the air performance had been better, much better. Afterward I went to Toscanini and told him, "Maestro, I was not very happy with my playing." I didn't mention anything else. He said, "Well, you will have a chance when they have the master pressing. RCA will call you and then you can listen to it. If you like it, OK; if you don't, just say no, and that's the end of it."

Fine. Well, it took several months before they called me. Meanwhile, I began tossing the thing around in my mind, and you know how you can exaggerate things until they grow bigger and bigger. That's the way it was with me. In my mind I had built the problem up to such proportions that when I finally heard the test pressing from RCA, it was not as bad as I had blown it up in my mind. But over the years, every time I've listened to it, I've felt sorry that I had let it go. Because of the little things that rankle, shall I say, in my mind.

WK: Who decided on the fast tempos?

LS: That was Toscanini. They didn't bother me much except in the slow movement. I would like to have had that slower so it would have a chance to sing. It's marked **Andante ma Adagio**, which is a very specific indication. **Andante** really is not a very slow tempo; it comes from the Italian word andare, which means to walk—not a funeral march, just a nice pleasant stroll. But Mozart also put down **ma adagio**—but slowly. So: moving, but slowly. In other words, take time to say it. But the **adagio** part was sort of out in left field somewhere.

WK: Did you know that it would go on the other side of the *Jupiter Symphony*?

LS: No, I didn't know what it would be coupled with. As a matter of fact, on the *Jupiter* I think it was Benny Kohon playing, not me—which means it was much earlier. It was RCA's decision to couple those two things.

WK: What brought you to Chicago?

LS: It was 1951 and I'd been playing first bassoon at NBC for four years now. By this time you could sort of see the handwriting on the wall; television was coming into the ascendancy but NBC was making no move to use the orchestra in television—nothing. Radio was becoming a stepchild. I knew that it would be just a matter of time before the ax would fall and the NBC Symphony would no longer exist; we'd be cast adrift. A couple of years earlier, Rodzinski, who'd been the conductor in Chicago, had already been in touch with Julius Baker [flute], Clark Brody [clarinet], and me about coming out there, but then we heard that he'd suddenly been fired, so we didn't know where we stood. When [Rafael] Kubelik took over the Chicago Symphony he contacted the three of us and we all went there.

WK: Does that mean that Kubelik knew your playing?

LS: Yes, he'd heard the Mozart Concerto recording, knew my playing at NBC.

WK: Did you like Kubelik?

LS: I liked him very much. He was young, somewhat inexperienced. I liked his musicianship; his technique left a little bit to be desired. But he was crucified by Claudia Cassidy [music and drama critic of the *Chicago Tribune*]. She killed him, really.

Of course when Reiner came in, she couldn't say anything bad about him.

The average concertgoer didn't know Reiner all that well, but musicians had tremendous respect for him as a conductor. They couldn't stand him as a human being—that's something else again. He was a very difficult man to work with. He was very intolerant, unforgiving. If he had absolute confidence in you, if he knew that he could depend on you to do exactly what he wanted all the time, there was no problem. But if there was any doubt in his mind, if someone slipped or did anything he didn't like, he would never forget it. He would frequently refer to it and he'd always find something to say that would hurt.

I remember once we were rehearsing something with him and he stopped the orchestra and addressed the piccolo player: "I don't like the sound; there is too much air in your sound. Do something about it." I could see the back of the man's neck was getting red—he was getting upset. Do something—but what? So Reiner went on, conducted a few more bars, stopped again, turned back to the man, and asked, "By the way, how many pounds do you carry?" Comparing him to a tire! It was absolutely uncalled for; stick a knife in a man's back, but that's not enough—then twist it.

WK: I recall that the orchestra was supposed to go to Europe and at the last minute he cancelled.

LS: Yes, one of the things that irked a lot of us was that Chicago was known as the second city, but we didn't feel we were number two to anybody. We thought a tour would put us on the map to some degree. Then there was some talk also about a tour to the Soviet Union. When we heard that he cancelled we were fit to be tied. One of the men found an old set of tails in the locker room, put it on the floor with his name, and everybody walked all over it.

Usually at rehearsal when the conductor comes out to the podium there are the usual sounds—of guys noodling around, tuning up, talking—and when he taps for quiet, then they stop. But at the first rehearsal after the announcement of the tour being cancelled, he walked to the podium in deathly silence—not a sound; there was a feeling in the air that the men were ready to kill him.

He must have felt that he had to say something, so he made some sort of apology—something about the weather at that time of year being very bad over there. It didn't hold water with us, and it rankled.

WK: What do you remember about recording the [Ravel] *Alborada* with him?

LS: I have to confess that he let me go my own way completely—didn't make any suggestions, he just let me do what I wanted. If he had confidence in a player, he'd give you a free hand.

WK: There's been so much written about his stick technique.

LS: Yes, where he developed it or how, I don't know, but it was a small beat. Sometimes it got larger, just for effect, but most of the time it was within a four-inch circle—but absolutely precise. Regardless of the complexity of the piece, regardless of rhythmic difficulties, you could always depend on him to be accurate and clear. You couldn't get lost with him.

He'd never cow-tow to an audience, or wonder how they'd react or what they thought of him, and he didn't much care for publicity, but he did have his moments; I think it was the *Roman Carnival Overture,* and at the very end there was a big chord in the violins. He said, "Play it up-bow and hold your bows in the air; a little show biz doesn't hurt." That's the term he used.

By the way, I'm sure you must know the story about the bass player with the telescope. Well, it's true: "I'm trying to find the beat," the man said. That tiny beat was just his way; he didn't do it to agitate anybody. Of course the man was fired.

WK: You and he got along OK?

LS: I had no problem with him—none.

WK: But you never had problems with any conductor.

LS: Not really, no—except with Kindler in Washington, in my early years, and that was primarily a combination of his temperament and my lack of experience.

WK: Was there an orchestra committee when you were in the CSO?

LS: Not at first. We wanted to have one to represent us because a lot of things were done wrong. The orchestra was run on a very paternalistic basis. For example, the business of a pension: the orchestra board alone decided who would get one. If a man had been in the orchestra long enough to earn a pension and they found out that he'd given conductors a bad time over the years, they might just decide that he'd been a bad boy, so no pension—that sort of thing. Or if somebody retired and got a job in another orchestra, well, he doesn't need a pension; he's got another job. The players had no voice at all.

The big stumbling block was Petrillo; he didn't want any committee, so we fought him tooth and nail. He said, "I'm your committee." We didn't even know what was in the new contract until it was posted on the bulletin board. One day we descended in a body on union headquarters. We stayed there for several hours, arguing with members of the union board till finally he came

downstairs. "You guys still here?" "Yeah, and we're going to stay." And he responded with "All right, you can have your_______committee." I don't want to say the word he used; he could be very profane at times. "You can have your committee, but remember I'm still the boss here." At least it was a start. We had our foot in the door, but it was a long, uphill fight. I was very much involved in those things—pushing for the committee and being a member of it.

WK: How many years did you play in the CSO?

LS: Thirteen. I joined in '51 and left in 1964 to go to Indiana University.

WK: You were still in your prime. What led to that move?

LS: Well, a couple of things. A few of my colleagues from the Chicago Symphony had preceded me to IU: Janos Starker, the cellist, Phil Farkas, horn player, and Jerry Sirucek, oboe player. They began working on me to come. But in addition to that, we had a manager at that time who was cordially disliked by the orchestra. I had my own personal vendetta with him and got to the point where I just couldn't stand the sight of the man, so when the opportunity came to leave, I took it.

WK: Were you happy at IU?

LS: Oh yes. I enjoyed the teaching very much, had some very, very good students, played in the quintet which was very active, and was given lots of freedom. I used to go to Aspen in the summer—didn't teach summer school. So it was a very enjoyable setup. And of course it's a nice city—a southern Indiana town with a major university connected with it and all that a major university can offer. Very alive. Opera is first class; they give five or six a year. The orchestra consists only of students—and it's not the same personnel each time—and of course the cast is students. I'll never forget in my early years a performance of *Der Rosenkavalier;* I was knocked on my ear. It was absolutely marvelous, both the cast and the orchestra. Wonderful. And there were also three or four student orchestras which gave concerts throughout the year and did very, very well. They played beautifully.

WK: Did you use a double tongue?

LS: I began to work on it because I knew it could be done. I felt that most of the things we have to play are possible with a well developed single tongue, but every once in a while something comes along so terrifically fast that you sweat bullets—it's very, very difficult, and what are you going to do?

So I started working on it—never perfected it to a great degree but got to the point where if there was a "*William Tell*" rhythm, I could do that very easily—no problem. I'd always played Beethoven's *Fourth* with a single tongue, though I did begin practicing it with a double tongue. Sometimes conductors are sympathetic, you know; there's a little section just before the bassoon comes in where the tempo can be slowed down imperceptibly to make it a little bit easier. But I think it was Reiner conducting, once, and the tempo was not to be believed: FAST! So I thought to myself, what am I going to do? Single tongue at that tempo would never make it, and he wouldn't accept any slurs because I remembered that one time years earlier when I auditioned for Pittsburgh he had asked for the Beethoven *Fourth* and I slurred the top two notes—the G and F—and he just said "no slurs." So it was go for broke one way or the other; I tried the single tongue, and fortunately it worked. But I sweated bullets—it was touch and go.

In the heat of battle you get carried away. You do things you didn't think were possible, like an athlete. In fact, after the piece was over, under the cover of applause, I tried to play it again at the same tempo, and it didn't quite go—the stress was gone.

But the double tongue is a good tool to have. Bernie Garfield in Philadelphia has had it for many, many years. He always had it, and he feels—Sol does too, and so do I—that it is one of the things that helped him get that job when Sol left.

In Germany and Russia the double tongue has been part of their training for a long time. Meuser in Cincinnati used it, and I think Moritz, out in California, did too. I think it was part of their training, and still is. But for some reason here in the States it was not insisted upon or emphasized.

WK: Were there things in the repertory that you particularly liked or other things that you didn't like?

LS: Well, I had my favorites, of course. One of the things that I didn't particularly care for was the Cesar Franck *Symphony*. It got a little boring, playing along with the basses and cellos all the time. But I'd hate to put my finger on this or that as my favorite.

WK: How did you feel about playing *Bolero*?

LS: It's an exercise in building up intensity. The bassoon solo is part of that, it grows in intensity, and I don't think it's terribly difficult.

After all, what's difficult and what isn't difficult? If the player is competent, is in full control, and has a good reed, the *Bolero* is not difficult. It starts with the snare drum; you can barely hear it—pianissimo. Flute comes in—in an easy register—also pianissimo. Then comes the clarinet, also in an easy register, also pianissimo. Then the bassoon is the first instrument to state the other theme. But

it's not marked pianissimo—mezzo piano, I think—so why be so tentative? Just play it, play it comfortably. Get into the high B flat, be careful about your rhythm, and with a decent reed it should be no problem.

When you mention the *Rite of Spring* to students, they quake. But there is nothing difficult about it. No, really. Because a high D in today's repertoire is standard; you play it all the time. The difficulty in *Rite* is getting the rhythmic divisions. Yes it is difficult in a sense, but playable.

For me the opening of Tchaikovsky's *Sixth* is much more difficult. Why? You sit there and you try it again and again, then you have to be quiet and wait for the conductor to come out. Make sure your reed stays wet. After all the applause dies down and he turns around, he looks at the basses and they come in pianissimo on low E and B. The best bass section in the world is not going to be perfectly in tune. Who do you tune to? You're coming in on low E natural, which on most instruments is a little bit sharp, so it's difficult to begin. You've got to sneak in, you have to ooze in, it's pianissimo, very, very soft, and you are not quite prepared for it because you haven't been playing. So that first note is very tentative, much more difficult than *Rite of Spring,* where you begin by yourself at a comfortable dynamic level on that high C.

Another thing that's difficult, in that same sense, is the opening of Beethoven's *Fourth Symphony*. There's that big B flat chord, and right out of it are the two bassoons in octaves holding B flats, the first, above the staff, the second, an octave lower—it's in a very, very slow four; two clarinets in unison on B flat, two horns on the B flat also in octaves, all jockeying for position to make sure that B flat is in tune. So you've been holding that for five long bars, and lockjaw sets in; then down to an F natural pianissimo eighth note, and a bar of rest. Now you have to join the first violins on a high G flat. You say to yourself, "How am I going to find that high G flat?" You don't know where to find it; it's difficult and it's murder. Fortunately a colleague of mine in one of the orchestras in Switzerland gave me a marvelous, marvelous fingering for it—it works like a charm.

WK: You share that with your students?

LS: Sure, I'd share it with anybody. It's simply nothing at all in the left hand. Right hand is second finger and the little finger A flat key— just those two. You have to try it a couple of times to know where it fits with your embouchure and your reed, but when you get it under control and you know where it is, it comes in like a charm. You hold it for three beats—and it sounds good too, well in tune—and slur from there to the E natural just below it—no problem—and then to the F. It's wonderful.

The point is, the things that really are difficult may not appear so at first; and the reverse is equally true.

WK: You always seemed so cool. Did you have nerves?

LS: Oh, I did; everybody does. If there were difficult things coming up, I felt some apprehension. Even though I had no problems with Reiner, or Rodzinski, or Toscanini, still I was concerned. The point is, there's a difference between nervousness and panic. If you're nervous but you still have control of yourself and the instrument, you can do what you have to do. But with panic, everything falls apart; you can't recover from it.

WK: The high register didn't hold any terrors for you? You were comfortable above C?

LS: Oh, yes. Going up to high E—sometimes there's some difficulty, like in the Ravel *Piano Concerto.* To this day I don't know how to finger high F; luckily I haven't needed it.

WK: Did Moennig do all your work?

LS: Yes, ever since I started playing the German bassoon. And even when I moved to Indiana I used to go back to Philadelphia with my instruments. I'd make an appointment with him and I'd sit there, because if you'd leave it with him it was out of sight, out of mind. I'd run errands for him, but I'd be there.

Also Jim Laslie in Indianapolis is an excellent, excellent repairman—very knowledgeable, very fine. Once in my early years at Indiana, when Moennig was still alive and working, something happened to my instrument. I didn't have time to go to Philadelphia so I brought it to Laslie and he took care of it very well. Now Moennig always recognized his own work. The next time I went to him he looked at the bassoon, noticed something, and said, "Who did that?" I told him it was Laslie. So he studied it for a little while longer, and finally said, "Very good, very good." Later, when I told Jim about that, he was on cloud nine. Praise from the master.

WK: Did Moennig install water tubes for you?

LS: Yes, and this is interesting too. I had them on my seven thousand and then when I got my eight thousand, a brand new instrument, I wanted to have tubes put in. But he told me to play it for a year first, so we'd know where the intonation is. Then, when we knew which notes were right or wrong, he'd adjust them and after that fit water tubes. He wouldn't do it on a brand new instrument.

Once I asked him about oiling the bassoon. He said that as long as I play it every day it's not

necessary. If I were going to let it sit around for six months, then maybe.

WK: Did he do anything else, like rollers?

LS: Yes—rollers, extra keys, little things. For example—and this is something I've recommended to my students—for the low C sharp, D sharp: many instruments have rollers there, but they don't come out to the end of the keys. When your left little finger sits on those keys it lies rather flat and comes out to the end, but that's where you have no rollers. So I had him make rollers that would extend out to the end. Fox does that now—he calls them endless rollers. I thought that was much more practical.

And he did something else for me. There was a vogue at one time for people to make a crutch from the whisper key to the high A so that when you finger high A it would close the whisper key. I never found it to be an advantage, but I decided to go along with the pack, so to speak, and had Moennig construct that crutch. But after a while I felt that there were times when maybe I'd rather leave the whisper key open. So he made a sliding mechanism that gave me the option of adjusting it so it would stay open or closed, as I wished. He was a marvelous craftsman.

WK: Do you do much playing any more?

LS: None; I'm not connected with any ensemble and I do very little teaching. I still feel like I can coach master classes, but as far as playing is concerned, I can't do now what I was able to do with ease just two, three years ago. What the reason is, I don't know—age maybe, but I'd be the first to admit it. So I don't try to stick my neck out any more. I never believed in teaching without the instrument there beside me to illustrate; now that would be a little bit more difficult.

WK: Did you ever teach reedmaking in a class setting?

LS: No, I didn't do much of that, though there were some who did—Harold Goltzer, I think.

I feel that each student has to develop his own particular reed because no two people have the same embouchure or play the same way. For example, my embouchure should be all wrong—at least in theory. In the normal bite, the upper teeth are in front of the lower, but my teeth are the other way around. That was Eli Carmen too: he looked like a bulldog when he played.

But when I play, my upper lip is further out on the reed than my lower lip—like Andy Gump. Remember him in the funny papers? Underslung lower jaw. My upper lip gets fairly close to the wire, and if I do any bearing down at all, it's with the top lip, and the lower lip is sort of pulled away—so it's not an ee sound but an oh sound.

So I think that the student has to develop the embouchure that works best for him, which means that reed making has to be a relatively private, individual thing.

WK: Did you use a dial indicator?

LS: I had one, tried it for awhile, but didn't particularly like it. The thing is, you don't make a reed in spots, and spots are all that a dial indicator measures.

WK: Increasingly I hear that what conductors are looking for in auditions is a big sound; what does that mean for reeds?

LS: It doesn't necessarily mean a hard, stiff reed. I never saw one of Guetter's reeds, but they tell me he used a very light reed—and had a big, rich, full sound. So it's a question of how you use it, how well it projects.

I will say this: I don't think that a reed should be so dark that it makes you feel like you're sitting in a closet lined with towels and with absolutely no resonance at all. I hate the term "reediness," but there has to be some of that to enable the sound to carry. Whatever reediness the sound has is dissipated within ten feet, but it helps the sound to carry—to ring. Whereas a very dark sound will not carry through the modern orchestra. You shouldn't be in a position where you have to blow like the top of your head is going to come off. Playing should always be comfortable; exerting tremendous effort to produce your sound means something isn't right.

WK: Did you feel it was necessary to play concertos from memory?

LS: That's interesting: I once played the Mozart in Chicago under Reiner and assumed that since it was on a regular series concert I should play from memory, and did. Well, at some point—I don't remember where—I faltered a bit, but recovered right away. Later, Reiner asked to see me, because he'd noticed it. He said that playing from memory, for a wind player, is like being a fish out of water; you're not in your normal element, just when you want the odds in your favor. Violinists and pianists are trained from childhood to play from memory, so with them it's a completely different situation. After that I took his advice. Along those lines, I remember something I heard from William Kapell, the pianist. He said that Myra Hess felt free to use music, and a page turner, when she performed concertos, but that if he, as a young artist, tried the same thing, Claudia Cassidy would crucify him.

WK: What haven't we talked about?

LS: Well, I like to tell people that one of the advantages of having played in an orchestra is that when I travel, especially in Europe, I have opposite numbers there—colleagues. If I go to Berlin,

London, Paris, Rome—wherever—there are bassoon players there whom I know through correspondence. I let them know I'm coming, and they make me feel like I'm at home.

It was like that when I was on sabbatical from Indiana University in the early seventies. I spent the whole year in Europe, rented a little house in Brussels, bought a Mercedes at the factory. And here's an interesting thing: I travelled around Germany giving master classes, and the students kept asking me questions—which I wanted. They asked a lot about vibrato, until at one point I said, "I don't understand this tremendous preoccupation with vibrato!"

I told them that I remembered hearing recordings of German orchestras from back in the late twenties and thirties. The playing was very good—good sound, good phrasing, technically very fine—no vibrato, straight sound, but other than that, fine. So why these questions now? They said that over the years they'd heard recordings and they'd heard visiting orchestras—American, especially—with this different kind of singing quality, and now they wanted to break with the old tradition. And many of them have. Thunemann plays with vibrato, so does the Viennese bassoonist—Turkovic—and his colleagues tell him he belongs half way across the Atlantic, because he doesn't play like a Viennese! In Vienna especially, when I was there in 1970, no vibrato.

WK: Any other conductors, beside Toscanini, that you especially liked and respected?

LS: William Steinberg—very fine, a thorough musician. Bruno Walter—wonderful, a gentleman; and he was one of the few conductors who, no matter where he went, he knew the names of many of the players in the orchestra. He made it his business to know at least the principals, so he would not say just "first bassoon," or "first clarinet," but Mr. So and So—which is a very nice personal touch. Carlo Maria Giulini—fine gentleman, fine conductor, wonderful rapport with an orchestra; I enjoyed working with him. He was well liked by everyone.

Getting onto a different subject, people ask me my favorite composer, favorite piece. I can't answer that because I can't pin it down to one. It's ridiculous: How do you compare Mozart with Debussy, or Ravel with Tchaikovsky? I can't; I like them all, and don't try to rate them. They ask, "Don't you ever get tired playing the same things again and again and again?" I say, "Not really." Let's say I'm playing in an orchestra, there's a guest conductor, and his program includes Brahms' *First Symphony* and some overture that I've played a million times. The first reaction—a normal reaction—would be, "Oh, no, not Brahms' *First* again." I might feel that way, but at the rehearsal, with that first downbeat, with the timpani and those wonderful harmonies, I get carried away all over again. You never lose your love for the music.

I have very nice memories. I don't regret a minute that I spent in music. It has been a wonderful experience, a wonderful life. I made a lot of friends and played some wonderful music. The challenge has always been there—kept it interesting, kept it alive; but more than that, it was the sheer beauty of the music I've played.

WK: You've had a long, glorious career. My colleagues over the years, fellow bassoonists, musicians, friends—we've always felt that you were blessed with the divine spark. I'm just terribly moved by all you've said today. Thanks so much. ❖