

Oboe Workshop with Earnest Harrison and Dan Ross

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Sometimes the coldest and gloomiest days are the ones filled with the most warmth and sunshine. Even though the thermometer was reading below freezing and the snow was rapidly falling, it was not enough to stop **Earnest Harrison** and **Dan Ross** from warming a few hearts at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music on November 13-15, 1997. Dan Ross is Professor of Music at Arkansas State University and renowned machinist and gouger manufacturer as owner of Ross Woodwind Specialists. Earnest Harrison is Professor Emeritus at Louisiana State University and former principal oboist of the National Symphony.

The workshop, hosted by **Dr. Mark S. Ostoich** (Professor of Oboe) and the CCM Oboe Studio, was kicked off on the evening of November 13 with a chamber music recital presented by oboist and Artist-Diploma candidate, **Tracy Christmas**, along with other CCM students. The next morning at nine o'clock, after the coffee arrived, of course, Mr. Harrison and Mr. Ross worked side-by-side, coaching students in Dr. Ostoich's oboe studio. Students performed etudes, orchestral excerpts, and pieces from the solo repertoire. The two men addressed issues such as embouchure, voicing of pitches, note groupings, and articulation. With every student who performed, both of the master teachers stressed the importance of singing, having fun, and enjoying making music. Mr. Harrison stated, "If it doesn't feel good, and it doesn't sound good, it probably isn't good." And Mr. Ross encouraged us to "warm a few souls" with every performance.

Around noon, the oboe congregation, led by Dr. Ostoich, went to a local Italian restaurant for a lunch break. The group, now with full stomachs, returned to Memorial Hall where Dan Ross led a reedmaking session. He passed cane around so we could feel and see the difference between a good piece and a bad piece. Mr. Ross also spoke about gouging machines and maintenance, shaper tips, mandrels and tubes, and convinced us all that reedmaking is easy. His advice was, "scrape away everything that's not a reed, and you'll have a reed." Afterwards, all of the students were involved in discussions and demonstrations led by Mr. Ross. During master class performances, we were often treated to some helpful playing

thoughts. We were often instructed to stand up, in order to note our body position. We were also shown how to feel the difference between blowing to one's throat, and blowing to the tip of the reed. The day concluded the way it began: with more student performances.

Saturday morning commenced with Mr. Ross adjusting gouging machines. As students entered Memorial Hall, Dan Ross invited them to sit down and make a reed with him. The atmosphere was like a big family gathering, with stories and jokes being told, while we worked. Between the stories, he gave practical advice to individuals, and showed his "dirty reed secrets" to any and all who were willing to listen. He also took the time to give everyone a few tips on oboe maintenance. While this was taking place, Mr. Harrison was busy coaching more students on performances. Mr. Harrison had plenty of stories to share as well. He told stories about playing in youth orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, and stories about his career. Mr. Harrison also had many words of experience to pass on. He stressed the importance of having a strong grasp of all the fundamentals of playing the oboe. He also stated that if one can truly play through the Barret Method and the Ferling Etudes, having transposed them and even memorized a few, then one can play just about anything. On talking about music Mr. Harrison said that, "You must become what you play. If you are representing a character, you must become that character. You must act in the manner that that character would act in."

The music, the crows, and the sounds of reed scraping finally ended around six o'clock p.m. to the mellifluous strains of Mrs. Harrison and Mrs. Ostoich calling us to dinner. With that, the students bid a fond farewell to Mr. Harrison and Mr. Ross. The workshop was run in the very manner these two musicians were trying to get us to approach music: in a relaxed, positive, and simple manner; always with an open heart.

Making beautiful music is a very personal and satisfying experience. Both Mr. Harrison and Mr. Ross conveyed that message to us through the way they approached the workshop. Not only do they "warm a few souls" when they perform, but they warm a few souls when they teach as well. Thank you, Dan and Earnie! ❖