

In Memoriam: John A. Holmes 1918-1998

By Jane Murray
Newport, Rhode Island

When I heard in May that Jack was ill and had quickly passed, I thought it would be a lovely tribute to the remarkable man who had been my teacher to write an article about him for the *IDRS Journal*. I had studied with him in the 70's when he was playing second oboe in the Boston Symphony. I didn't know much about his career, I just knew that he was the kindest man I had ever known, had a wonderful sense of humor, and had meant the world to me at a difficult time in my training. I thought I would research his history, chronicle his career as an oboist, and perhaps invite others who had known him to offer a few words.

I spoke to Wayne Rapier after Jack's memorial service on September 26th. Wayne delivered a touching eulogy during the service and immediately offered me his notes for use in this article. I met with Robert Renton, who had been a close friend of Jack's for many years. Bob provided articles from Boston and Cleveland newspapers from the 40's, and the wonderful photographs of Jack. I made a few more calls, and sent a few e-mails, and immediately received generous and heartfelt reminiscences about Jack from colleagues and students he had touched. I have included them all, as they say everything about Jack. He was a great oboist, an extraordinary teacher, a generous and caring person, and a gentleman.

A Brief History ...

John A. Holmes was born in Cleveland Heights, Ohio on July 20, 1918. He began playing the trumpet at Cleveland Heights High School and, at the suggestion of music director Mark Hinsley, he switched to oboe in 1933 when he was 15. He continued his studies with Bert Gassman, who was English horn with the Cleveland Orchestra at that time. After graduating in 1936, Jack went on to the Eastman School of Music where he studied with Robert Bloom and Robert Sprenkle. He graduated in 1940 and went directly to the Oklahoma City Symphony. He studied with Fernand Gillet at Tanglewood in 1940 and 1941, where he caught the attention of Serge Koussevitsky. His career included seasons with the Kansas City Symphony, Buffalo Philharmonic, Cleveland Summer Orchestra, Lake Placid Sinfonietta, National Symphony and St. Louis Symphony. In 1947 Koussevitsky selected him to replace Gillet as



Top: Boston Symphony Orchestra, probably late 40s or early 50s.

Left: Jack at Tanglewood, 1970.

principal oboe in the Boston Symphony and he became the first American trained musician to occupy a principal chair in the 66 year history of that orchestra! He remained with the BSO for 30 years playing first and later second chair. He also played with the Opera Company of Boston, toured with the Zimmler Sinfonietta, and taught at Boston University and at Tanglewood.

In their own words ...

I knew Jack back in the late 40's, when I was still a student at the Eastman School of Music. Jack was somewhat older than I, but had also studied with my own teacher, Robert Sprenkle. I spent almost a whole summer studying with him at Tanglewood, when he played first oboe. Jack's sound was rich, fairly dark and very vibrant. In any case it was very different from the Frenchmen whom I remember well from that time (Jean deVergie played second and Louis Speyer played English horn). Jack was very generous with his time and treated me very nicely. My own opinion at the time was that he was a superb musician, as well as a great person. I have

very fond memories of him, and am very sorry to learn of his death.

David Lurie

I started taking lessons with Jack Holmes in July 1956, the summer between 8th and 9th grades. My band director said that he had written to the Boston Symphony office and they had sent him back two names: Jean deVergie and John Holmes. I had heard that the French guys could be pretty nasty teachers, so I went with the friendlier sounding name. Sure enough, Mr. Holmes turned out to be just wonderfully nice, with unflagging patience and good humor. Of course, I found out later that de Vergie was also nice, but I felt then, and now, that I couldn't have made a better choice.

I grew up in Pittsfield, Mass, which is 150 miles from Boston, but only 10 miles from Tanglewood. Jack rented a room with a family in Lenox, so he didn't feel he could teach there, but he said he would be happy to come to our house and teach me there. I remember the nervous tension I felt while waiting for him to show up for our first lesson. My apprehensions were completely dispelled within minutes of meeting him. I remember being surprised at his tone the first time he demonstrated something for me. It was much smoother and prettier than any oboe records I had. I had been making short scrape reeds like the ones in the Andraud *Oboe Method*, so it was a very radical change for me. Jack's lessons were the classic formula: scales in all variations including thirds and all articulations, etudes starting with Barret, followed by Ferling and Gillet. He always thought my single tongue was slow even though I could get up to sixteenths at M.M. 144. He could single tongue up to 160!

After a couple of lessons, Jack asked me if I'd ever been to a concert at Tanglewood. I had not. In fact, I had never heard a live orchestra play, so he offered to come pick me up and take me to one of his concerts that week. This turned into a weekly event for the rest of that summer session. The next summer, Jack got me a job at Tanglewood - bringing programs to the program girls. I got to hear every BSO service that summer.

I continued to study with Jack for four years, traveling to Boston twice a month in the winters and twice a week at home in the summers. When I first started going to Boston for lessons he lived in a very nice apartment right off Harvard Square in Cambridge. Then a couple of years later he moved to a *really* nice apartment on Marlborough St. in downtown Boston. After I left for college in 1960 he bought the house in Needham.

One year, while I was still in high school, he

toured Europe on his vacation - England, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy and France. The result of this trip was a shocking purchase. He had bought what had to be the world's weirdest looking car in 1957 - a Citroën - and had it shipped to Boston from France. People's jaws would drop when he drove by. He loved that car and continued to buy them for as long as they produced them, I think.

These are two of my favorite Jack Holmes quotes:

Referring to a viola player who at that time played in the BSO and later moved to the Philadelphia Orchestra, "There goes the perfect example of the fact that intelligence and talent are completely unrelated."

And "always remember the three I's: play in time, in time, and with intelligence."

Jack meant a great deal to me. I have always considered him to be my main teacher. The lessons he taught me have helped me throughout my career. I am glad that I had the chance to know him and study with him.

Don Baker

When I was fourteen years old I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life playing oboe. Jack Holmes first got my attention when he moved from first oboe in Oklahoma City to the St. Louis Symphony. The next year, of course, Jack got everyone's attention by getting the first oboe job in the BSO!

Jack visited our oboe class at Bob Sprenkle's house in Rochester, while I was at Eastman. I was so naive, I did not realize who he was, and Bob did not help in his introduction: "this is Jack Holmes, he plays oboe too!" I suppose that Bob told Jack that I was talented and needed some reed help. At any rate, Jack spent a few hours looking over my shoulder to get my reed-making into the ball park. I had a job at station WHAM, and between broadcasts I visited Jack at his parent's home in Cleveland Heights. He had just started to practice again after a couple of weeks off. He was playing through the Ferling etudes and I remember his getting louder and louder and I wondered at the time why the oboe had to get that big! I found out later that when you must occasionally predominate a first class string section, your sound must be traveling at about 110 MPH!

The next year, I was offered the first oboe job in the Indianapolis Symphony. Although I had most of the *Vade Mecum* orchestral repertoire memorized, I had only played one Beethoven symphony! Typical of Jack Holmes, he loaned me three volumes of the most beautifully hand written oboe orchestral

excerpts that I had ever seen of repertoire that you could not buy because of the copyright laws. On my way to Indianapolis from my home in Texas, I was carrying most of the things I owned in the rumble seat of my model A Ford and, somewhere along the way, one of the boxes fell off. Although I back-tracked over 100 miles, I never found one of Jack's books! About 21 years later, I was playing associate first oboe in the BSO and could not find the music to a Villa Lobos tune which we were scheduled to play. I phoned Jack and he said he would check his records: he phoned back about a half hour later and laughingly said "It says here that some young kid from Texas lost my book off a Model A Ford in 1950!!!"

In 1970 I was invited to stay with Jack the night before my semi-final BSO audition. He gave me priceless information about acoustics and characters. After I got into the Orchestra, Jack watched over me during my first BSO years. We carried on countless conversations during a few thousand concerts and rehearsals. Jack set an example of not only how to survive the very rough major orchestra schedule, but how to enjoy music and be a very caring person. I shall always remember Jack Holmes as an irreplaceable friend, colleague and great artist.

Wayne Rapier

Even though I never had the privilege of studying with John Holmes, I believe that my story is all the more telling about the wonderful character of the man. When I was a student at New England Conservatory in the early '70's I was contracted to play the Bach cantatas at Emmanuel Church on a weekly basis. Of course at that time I didn't have access to the very necessary oboe d'amore and was told that Jack might have one I could use. Indeed he did. I met him at Symphony Hall, picked up the instrument, complete with working reeds for my use, and went on my way. For the two years that I kept the instrument there were no calls from him to check on it, no remote mention of a rental fee - for a *virtual stranger*. It is unimaginable as I think of it today - his complete generosity to a needy student - and not one of his own! Every time that I saw him Mr. Holmes never failed to ask about my progress and show interest in my well being. What a great man.

Cheryl Priebe Bishkoff

And finally, my own story ...

I met Mr. Holmes in 1974 when I auditioned for entrance to the Boston University School for the Arts. I had only begun playing oboe a year earlier, so I was not ready to be accepted and I was not! I had, however, been a musician all my life, as a

singer and pianist, so I was not lacking in musical skills, just in oboe skills. I desperately wanted to be an oboe major, but no music school would take me at the time, so I enrolled at BU as a liberal arts major. I went immediately to the music department to arrange for oboe lessons and was placed (to my good fortune) with John Holmes. He worked with me diligently for a full semester, and realizing that I had potential, he auditioned me in December and accepted me into his studio as a performance major beginning my second semester!

I know that this was a gift from Jack - a gift that I will cherish always as the event that determined my future. We both knew that I was well behind everyone else in terms of oboe playing, but he saw my musical skills, dedication and drive, and he *never* discouraged me. Many others did, and four years of college where an uphill battle against those who constantly said I wasn't good enough. Jack was a terrific teacher - he showed me how to "make it work" no matter what it took, (he was playing second to Ralph Gomberg in the BSO at that time), which is probably the most valuable lesson I have ever learned. As I progressed, he wasn't reluctant to present more challenges. He kept me working slightly ahead of myself at all times. My senior recital included the Goossens *Concerto* and the Loeffler *Rhapsodies*. I had been an oboist for four and a half years! At the reception afterwards he finally admitted to my parents that he wasn't sure that I would get that far in four years, but here I was! It is a testament to the character of the man that he never expressed his doubts to me and, shortly after graduation, I was one of the first in my class to win an orchestra job!

When I was in school my lesson was always at lunchtime. Mr. Holmes was always eating something during my lesson, so it became a tradition that I would bring him lunch. I think he liked my cooking. When I visited him years after I graduated I would still bring him lunch. He got such a kick out of that. Those of us in Jack's studio were a close bunch - he never fostered competition between us as other teachers did. We would go out to his house on Avalon Road in Needham where he lived with his mother. He was always a heavy smoker and my oboe would always taste funny after he had played it. I could never understand how he could have such amazing breath control when he smoked that much! I think he finally did quit smoking after at least 40 years! When I went to his house to meet with Bob Renton and collect photos for this article, Bob gave me one of the prints that hung in Jack's teaching studio. I remember that room and that print, and I was touched that Bob would let me keep that little

piece of Jack. He was the most important person in my life as an oboist: patient, caring, generous and funny. He touched others with his incredible playing, extraordinary teaching and remarkable personality. He will be greatly missed.

About the author ...

Jane Murray has a busy career as performer, teacher and arts administrator. She is sought after as a soloist,

orchestral and chamber musician performing on oboe and English horn with the Rhode Island Philharmonic, New Bedford Symphony, Cape Cod and Ocean State Chamber Orchestras and Newport Music Festival, to name only a few. She teaches at Salve Regina University, UMass Dartmouth and University of Rhode Island, where she also coordinates the chamber music program, and direct the Preparatory Program. She is oboist and director of the Northeast Chamber Ensemble and artistic director for the Northeast Quintet Camp.

John Addison

(1920 - 1998)

An Obituary, a Personal Note and a Wind Repertoire List

by James Brown

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How sad it is to find myself writing about Jock in the past tense when as recently as last July he was so very much alive, in Manchester attending the World Premiere of his *Concertino for Bassoon and Orchestra*, with Graham Salvage as soloist and the Halle Orchestra conducted by Owain Arwel Hughes (see DRN 44). He had come over from his home in Vermont especially for the occasion and it was a delight to have him there. He was a composer of much skill and versatility whose music covered a very wide spectrum indeed. His works included a variety of commissions from prominent instrumentalists and the BBC; a ballet, *Carte Blanche* for the Sadlers Wells Company; a revue, *Cranks*, in collaboration with the dancer John Cranko; and incidental music for a number of productions at the Royal Court Theatre in London where he was Resident Composer in the 1950s, and where his great friend Tony Richardson was the Director. The list of his output is seemingly endless, but over the years he also wrote the scores for more than 70 feature films together with the incidental music for countless TV productions in the USA (where he and his wife Pamela lived for many years). Once of these latter, *Murder She Wrote*, earned him an Emmy Award for its signature tune.

I have deliberately left mention of Jock's solo chamber music until this point, as I want to show how his interest in wind instruments, and in the oboe in particular, came about. When he was a student at the Royal College of Music he studied with Gordon Jacob; Jock was always keen to acknowledge the immense influence that this

master of the genre had been in his development, even becoming a sort of father-figure to him. This affection from the RCM remained with him and I remember he told me quite recently that he would often walk slowly past the college when visiting London, "In case there was anyone still there who might remember me". He was even fishing for an invitation to lunch there, but I had to tell him that the college lunches were no longer what they used to be!

I will remember Jock Addison as a particularly kind and thoughtful person and as one of nature's gentlemen. Luckily for us double-reed players, he has served our interests generously and well and I do hope that many of you will want to explore his musical legacy further.

A Personal Note

I was fortunate enough to meet Jock Addison in 1955 when I became a member of the Sinfonia of London, the premier film orchestra in England of the 1950s and 1960s, with the extra good fortune to be its second oboist and cor anglais player alongside Léon Goossens. One hears quite often of the influence that Léon's playing had on different people when they were setting out in the world of music, and Jock was no exception in this respect. As a schoolboy at Wellington College he attended a recital that Léon gave in the school, thus kindling an interest in the oboe and in Léon that never left him. I believe that he may even have had a few oboe lessons at that time, but the idea of being a composer soon became paramount. In fact, one of his earliest compositions, whilst still a schoolboy, was a piece that I found in Léon's library after his death and which eventually went to the British Library together with the rest of his music. It is