

## Marc Lifschey — 1926-2000

By Jennifer Sperry  
Charlotte, North Carolina

Yesterday the oboe world lost Marc Lifschey, one of the greatest artists of all time, to a series of debilitating illnesses. Some say that the spirit hovers for awhile; his must be surrounded by the “matched pearls” he spoke of in lessons to describe phrasing. Marc managed to imbue his jewel-like tone with meaning even when simply testing a reed. He perfected his technique always with a purely musical aim in mind: never for the sake of physical proficiency alone.

I became Marc’s student at the age of fourteen, when he was the principal oboist of the San Francisco Symphony, and I remained a lifelong friend of his and of his brilliant and multi-talented wife Paula. I used to play for Marc from time to time as an adult, and always came away from lessons full of inspiration and fresh ideas. He focused with the utmost concentration and seriousness throughout each lesson, catching each nuance that could be improved. After Marc became professor of oboe at Indiana University, he hired me to make reeds, and I had the pleasure of speaking to him regularly about the craft of reedmaking, the art of oboe playing and life in general.

Marc’s radiant musicianship linked the humanity of a bygone era to the perfectionism of the present day: one of the many reasons why his playing was universally beloved. Marc used to reach up as if forming his embouchure by hand and muse, “People don’t really understand what we go through to make it sound effortless.”

As if to illustrate that point, a beginning student of mine who had just listened to Marc’s celebrated recording of *Ich Habe Genug* exclaimed, “He plays just like I do!” Marc’s playing communicated an elegant simplicity and inevitability that could mislead the unsophisticated listener. He used to speculate that even though most audience members might not know exactly why something sounded good or bad, they always knew the difference.



Marc always praised and never disparaged his colleagues. His high standard for decency and professionalism matched his musical standard. Marc was a warm friend, humorous, unassuming, a man of honor and discipline. May all who knew Marc Lifschey be consoled in their grief, and be blessed by his playing and the memory of his company.

*Marc Lifschey was born on June 16, 1926 in New York City. He held positions as principal oboe of the Cleveland Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic and the National Symphony. He served on the faculties of the San Francisco Conservatory and Indiana University. He studied with Fernand Gillet, Bert Brenner and Marcel Tabuteau. Marc Lifschey is survived by his wife, Paula Lifschey, and his son, Noah Lifschey.*

*Paula Lifschey asks that any gifts be in the form of a contribution to the American Diabetes Association in Marc’s honor.*