

some wonderful oboe writing in Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin*, Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony*, and Mozart's *Serenade for Winds*.

"If I've learned one thing, or if I could pass on one thing, it's that music is not a technical art, it's an expressive art," he adds. "The oboe is such an expressive instrument. When it starts to play, it's a unique sound and everyone is intrigued with it — I hope!" he adds, laughing.

"I feel we've been truly blessed," says Sydelle. "We have four wonderful children, we've made such friends in the orchestra and among those associated with the orchestra. Whenever I meet other oboists' wives, there's a real camaraderie between us. Try living with someone who goes around the house dropping little shavings from their reeds everywhere."

"It's the law of compensation," adds Ralph. "If you play the *oboe*," he says, emphasizing both syllables, then you figure *something* good has to come back to you from all that suffering! I have the happiest memories of my years here. And now there's the excitement of the years ahead with Sydelle, my kids ..."

"And our new baby," injects Sydelle. "A Siamese blue point."

"What more could you ask?" concludes her husband, with a shrug of his shoulders and that characteristic Gomberg grin.

French bassoon legend **Maurice Allard** (b. 1923) and American oboist/teacher **Jerry Sirucek** (1922-1996) became IDRS Honorary Members number nineteen and twenty at the Conference in Victoria, British Columbia, in August, 1988. Their pictures graced the cover of the Fall, 1988 (Vol. 11, No. 2) issue of *The Double Reed* in a composite photograph, and the following report was printed on page 8 of the same issue:

**IDRS Welcomes Two New Double Reed Artists  
As Honorary Members of the Society**

*Ronald Klimko - Moscow, Idaho*

*By unanimous acclamation at the second general meeting of the International Double Reed Society in Victoria, British Columbia last August, the members of the Society voted approval for two new members into its ranks of distinguished Honorary Members. The two members elected are Maurice Allard and Jerry Sirucek.*

**MAURICE ALLARD**

Maurice Allard was born in Sin-le-Noble (Nord) on March 25, 1923. He first studied at the Douai Conservatory and then at the Paris Conservatoire, winning Second Prize in bassoon in 1939 and First Prize in 1940 at the age of 17. Two years later he

first appeared as solo bassoonist in the Concerts Lamoureux and the Concerts Oubradous. In 1949 Allard took First Prize at the Concours International de Genève. In the same year he was appointed principal bassoon at the Opéra, a position he retained until retiring on July 16, 1983. He



**Maurice Allard**

succeeded his teacher, Gustave Dhérin, as bassoon professor at the Conservatoire in 1957. In 1975 Allard founded and is currently president of Les Amis du Basson Français, an organization devoted to promoting the French bassoon. Allard has also written a *Méthode de Basson* (Billaudot, 1976), a collection of 30 solos entitled *Courtes pièces dans tous les tons* (Billaudot, 1975), and some study material called *Tablature, trilles, gammes diatoniques et Chromatiques pour le Basson* (Billaudot, 1974). Among the many works written for Allard, those by Bitsch, Gotkovsky, Jolivet, Rivier, Tomasi, and Vaubourgoin have been used as *concours* solos.

*[Biography reprinted from The Paris Conservatoire and the Contest Solos for Bassoon, by Kristine K. Fletcher, 1988 Indiana University Press, pp. 35-36.]*

**Maurice Allard** gave an interesting "Address on the French School and the French Bassoon" to the IDRS Conference in Toronto, Canada, in 1976. It appeared in the Vol. 6, No.2 (p.1) issue of *To the World's Bassoonists*, and is reprinted below.

**ADDRESS ON THE FRENCH SCHOOL  
AND THE FRENCH BASSOON**

*by Maurice Allard*

*(Editor's note: Following in its entirety is the talk given by Maurice Allard at the conclusion of his magnificent performance at this August's IDRS Annual Meeting. I wish to sincerely thank oboists Stewart Grant and Karen Rottenberg for their beautiful assistance to the Society in not only translating Mr. Allard's talk but in serving also as full-time hosts/guides/translators for our honored guest during the entire six days of his Toronto visit. Bravo and MILLE MERCI.)*

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you and to be received by you. The letters I exchanged with members of the IDRS Committee during the past few weeks and months foretold the very good atmosphere of your meetings and assured me of a warm welcome in Toronto. The descriptions I

received in correspondence were understated. Words can hardly express what I wish to convey. The feeling here is truly extraordinary and your welcome very warm. I am very touched; very touched and very honored.

The fact of your receiving me, listening to me just now and again listening to my words is not only a personal honor, which I appreciate very much, but it is also a show of interest and respect for the French school and for the instrumental company which I represent here.

I wish to sincerely thank those who invited me to come and who have arranged my trip and made my stay here most comfortable. I have received much solicitous care and attention.

I would like to offer Monica Gaylord my congratulations and thanks for the great talent and help she has brought to me. I will keep the fondest memories of the time I have spent with you here.

The point of view I bring to you today is not that of a scientist or a researcher. Rather, I see myself as a practical performer — a user and a consumer. I use and consume bassoons and reeds in order to make music.

I have of course my own ideas concerning history and acoustics, but it is not my intention to talk about musicology, the physical, theoretical, or applied mechanics of music, botany and the anatomy of cane. I would like instead to explain how I see the bassoon in music, how I use it and teach it. I would also like to say a few words about the instrument I myself play.

How do I see the position of the bassoon in music? The bassoon is my life—I hold it in true veneration. My aim is to serve it, to encourage its reputation and to make it known and loved; to give it the position it deserves in music. For it does not yet have that position. Only Vivaldi gave it its truly deserved honor in writing 39 bassoon concerti amongst the 454 he composed in all.

Without doubt the other illustrious composers have written for the bassoon, but so very little!

I would say that the design and manufacture of our instruments have developed too slowly over the years. I would even go so far as to say that bassoonists of the past, with a few exceptions, have by and large allowed the idea to formulate in the minds of others that the bassoon's primary function is as a harmonic support. Perhaps on occasion it could be liberated for a few seconds to perform a melodic or rhythmic function but it should never be allowed to stray from its main role for long.

How many conductors, even the greatest ones, have only one thing to say to bassoonists—too loud!—and yet in so many recordings and concerts there is a flagrant disparity in the sound volume of

solo passages for the flute, oboe, and clarinet . . . and those for the bassoon. Listen to the recordings of Brahms' Symphonies. Whenever the bassoon comes to the fore you must rush to your record player and turn up the volume level in order to hear its solo passages.

I think you would all agree with me that there is regretfully a certain paucity in our literature, and would condemn with me the practice of considering the bassoon as mostly a harmonic functionary. For we have another role to play; a role grand and dignified. We have a wonderful instrument, capable of the most diverse sonorous effects, sensitive enough to adapt itself to any expressive climate. The bassoon is equally: the most beautiful cello and the most beautiful baritone voice.

Its range of sound, already advanced to an excellent state, must progress still further. For without neglecting its role of "continuo," it must be able to live up to the demands of volume of sound. This is certainly difficult, but also an exciting possibility. Between a "trio d'anches" (oboe, clarinet, and bassoon), a small chamber orchestra, a large symphony orchestra, or a concerto accompanied by a large orchestra— "what enormous differences of sound power are called for!"

Fingering technique and tonguing ability have made an enormous evolution, permitting some composers to write the most outrageous things.

The style of bassoonists has also evolved; the development and refinement of phrasing and staccato have fortunately, happily, led more and more composers away from the sarcastic possibilities of our instrument. This sarcasm, this doubting irony . . . sometimes grotesque . . . was identified and wrongly so as the predominant character of our instrument!

With the evolution of bassoon playing in general, our instrument has now acquired a more noble character. Someone once said to me, "What is mediocre is very easy." Of course one must work enormously hard to make progress, but what joy, what satisfaction lies in the recognition that we have progressed.

Our duty is to enthusiastically encourage the reputation and diffusion of our instrument. That is, to create an undying interest in the bassoon, through research into old music and through the encouragement of young composers to write solo works for our instrument, be they orchestral works or chamber music.

It is a question of each one of us playing it ourselves, loving the bassoon and in turn encouraging others to love our instrument and play it as we do. It is a question of communicating our passion to our students who will in turn communicate it to their students, of making the

bassoon sing, produce different tone colors and the various nuances, and to increase its agility, its range of sound and its sensitivity.

### HOW I PLAY

The bassoon, my instrument, is for me one of the most wonderful ways in which I can express myself. Very early in my study under the guidance of gifted teachers, I quickly learned that in order to experience the joys and satisfactions of our art and profession, I had to have a perfect mastery over my instrument. But also, and above all, I knew that I must read perfectly, hear perfectly, and understand perfectly—everything about music.

I have experienced the satisfaction of producing “all the notes” exactly in the way I wish, after many many hours of work. However, I obtain even greater satisfaction in understanding the “why, when, how” and the importance of the sounds I produce. That is to say that for me, the bassoon is a means to make music.

### HOW I TEACH

To begin with, I ask my students to consider the following words and never to forget them: “Technique is a means, not an end, but a means that is indispensable.” I repeat, “Technique is a means, not an end, but a means that is indispensable.”

Technique, this vast term, does not only mean glibness and speed.

Technique is an art—the art of producing the sound one wants (or more modestly the sound one hopes for), of producing sounds at the desired volume and the desired intonation (this varies according to the harmonic role, the given instrument and to the other instruments or musicians performing at the same time).

Technique is also the accentuation—light and bouncing or fat and heavy; the enunciation of staccato; the supple legato of stepwise motion and of all slurred intervals; the portamento; and also the possibilities of giving different colors, atmosphere. The same note can be neutral, serious, sad, gay, charming or passionate.

Technique is also the complete art of producing and directing the sound, the supported air column and correct breathing; it includes the proper functioning of the diaphragm, the throat, the tongue, and the lips. It is the art of vibrato—be it discreet supple, tight, fast, slow, wide or intense; as well as the absence of vibrato.

Technique is also judgment. It is knowing for one’s self what is the best state of balance between relaxation and tension, knowing what equipment to use for the extreme high register or the extreme low register of the instrument.

To return to the beginning of this section,

technique is certainly involved with the speed of the fingers and of the tongue; but it is also, and I insist it must never be forgotten, —the science of the reed.

If you wish, in a little while, I will give you my point of view on anything that interests you about what I have just mentioned concerning technique. I will limit myself for the moment to very quickly saying a few words about the sound that I try to teach my students, about finger technique, tonguing, interpretation, and about the all-important reed.

The sound that I aim for is full and centered, more full and centered than that of the majority of French bassoonists of years past; and darker, yet not without color. It is noble, robust, warm, big, open, supple. The fault that I cannot tolerate is a sound like “a sheet of metal”—the “nest of bees”! With the throat properly open, the lips rounded forming a circle about the reed, surrounding the reed, a player should have the basic conditions necessary to obtain this ideal sound.

As for the fingers, exercises in intervals on diatonic scales and especially on chromatic scales give the best results.

Regarding tonguing, only good articulation, articulation suited to the natural capabilities of the performer, is of value.

And as for interpretation, here in two words is my program: learn to use lots of sauce and then learn to discriminate the quality and quantity appropriate for each work or for each passage in a work. For this end, I suggest works or studies that can be played with a heart “big like this,” and then it is simply a matter of lessening, increasing, shaping or disciplining.

### REEDS

I certainly must not forget to say a few words about reeds. This would be a grave oversight at a meeting of the International Double Reed Society.

You know that we all have our sense of well-being caught up in the box which holds our reeds! And you all know the story of the sister who says to her younger brother, “Watch out: Papa’s in a bad mood, he doesn’t have any reeds.” Reeds are enormously important.

I’ll start with an anecdote. About twelve years ago I was vacationing in the Var. The Var is the Riviera, but for all of us it is known as the area where cane is grown. Setting out to practice my favorite sport—fresh water fishing—and having made myself comfortable in a good seat—I was surveying the area for a nice shady spot with lots of fish, when I caught sight of some water and a fisherman. I walked up to him intending to ask him what were the customs of the area, the habits of the fish, and the preferred bait. But before I could speak I noticed a cane fishing

rod that he held in his hand. Superb! A single piece of cane six meters in length that had a blend of the colors of the sun and gold!

I was very admiring - my questions about the river were replaced by, "Where did you buy this piece of cane? How long have you had it? How do you care for it?"

The fisherman answered that he was a cane cutter by profession for the last eight years and that his rod was kept by his door outside the house all year long. He never took special care of it no matter what the weather. Seeing my skepticism, he explained further. In the course of his work—cutting cane—when he would come upon a beautiful piece, flexible and of the proper length, before cutting it he would stop and figure out if it were the right day in the right phase of the moon. If not, he would leave the cane and continue with his work, promising himself to come back to it on the most favorable day! For, he assured me, a piece of cane can only age properly and retain its quality if it is cut on the "right day of the right phase of the moon."

The rest of the story is incredible but, unfortunately true. I went to the cutter's boss who had me taste all of the wines in his cellar but who refused to give me even one kilogram of cane cut on the famous "right day." For him, cane was for making baskets for shipping flowers, and only the ends and rejects went to reed salesmen! He would give me no information about the famous phase of the moon. I left his place convinced that he knew the right day to cut cane and furious that I had not succeeded in convincing him to sell me some, and my ears very red—from drinking his good wine!

Later, all the cane salesmen and reed manufacturers that I spoke to assured me that they got their cane from serious growers who knew their work perfectly. I certainly don't doubt this, but if I can think of one extraordinary reed - with which I played my audition to get into the Opera, that I also played four months later at the Geneva international solo competition, and which was subsequently played continually by my brother-in-law for two years—I can also think of others that I have played for a single act of an opera and which were afterwards unusable. Undoubtedly these pieces of cane were not cut on the same day. I hope that all of you never has anything but magnificent reeds cut on the "right day of the right phase of the moon."

The shape and dimensions that I aim for are always the same: 9 mm width of shape at the back of the blades (wire 1) 16 mm width of shape at the tip of the reed, 29 mm length of tube, 30 mm length of the blades, thickness of gouge: 1.2 mm (side edges) and 1.3 mm (center line thickness), or 1.1 mm (side edges) and 1.3 mm (center line thickness).

I try to have tools which absolutely conform to my requirements: a bellied plaque—13 mm in the middle. Pliers are very important and I try to have them curved on the inside near the tip.

As for scraping, what counts above all is the balance—the balance between the tip, the middle and the back, and also the balance between the center and the wings.

First I adjust the wires so that there is a regular progression (even taper) from the tip of the reed to the third wire. I prefer the wires to be more on the round shape than a flatter shape.

Next I work for response and good intonation. The tone quality comes later. Response comes from the tip with the least possible crescent form. This very pretty design certainly helps the high register, but it gets in the way of the over-all response. Often one gives an extra scrape of the file so that the design looks even nicer and secondarily (hopefully) to improve the flexibility and suppleness of the reed. But again this will be detrimental to the response, and you will end up with a reed that collapses on the sides; and I am absolutely against reeds which collapse this way. With the slightest pressure from the lips the area which collapses becomes even larger. Do not forget that this part does not sound, and that half of the reed's vibrations are thus taken away, leaving you with an English horn reed!

I always aim for a tip which is hollowed and not curved. 9 times out of 10, a well-balanced reed with good response and intonation, scraped as I have just described, has too bright a sound. You can muffle it a bit by thinning the sides or the middle of the back, but you will weaken the reed by doing this. So, there is a scrape at the tip which will give the best results, quickly, and without weakening the reed.

Everyone knows of this cut, made across the tip of the reed (with a file or sandpaper) at right angles to the reed fibers— which eliminates superfluous, disagreeable and metallic vibrations. Essential conditions are required before this operation is performed: the reed must have an easy response and must not be too sharp in pitch, because this cut, the "coup de raclette," holds back response and makes the low register a bit more difficult.

What I have just told you about reeds is certainly most succinct. But I must now tell you about the instrument which I play, the French bassoon,

#### **BUFFET-CRAMPON**

You all know that the bassoons you find in museums, the very first bassoons, resembled in shape the French bassoon. Likewise, you should

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### JERRY E. SIRUCEK

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



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

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

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

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

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