

the generous hospitality when the Gillets' guest room and kitchen were welcome rest breaks between marathon lessons over several days of "overhaul and rejuvenation." Many of us remember the gracious dinners with the candlelight reflected in the sparkling crystal of the formal dining room while relishing the ambrosian flavor of Mrs. Gillet's Coquille St. Jacques and chicken in wine sauce. We also remember the more informal fun of the basement party room with our host and hostess presiding behind the small bar. Robert Freeman noted that in Mr. Gillet's response to his honorary Doctorate at the Eastman School of Music, "He spoke from his heart in gratitude for the personal and musical happiness he and Mme. Gillet have found together in the United States."

Jack Holmes relates the story of the Gillets' visit to Tanglewood in the summer of 1975. As Mr. Gillet was talking with George Humphrey, he said, "You know Humphrey, I will soon be 93." George replied, "Well, the calendar says you have to be, but how do you do it!?" The typical Gillet answer was, "By waiting." Jack added, "From a listener's point of view, what always impressed me most about Gillet's performance was the enormous vitality. This is the most notable thing about his personality even now at 93!"

A few years ago on an icy winter morning in Brookline, as Mr. Gillet was hurrying down the driveway to reach the trash can, he slipped, fell and injured his right shoulder. This injury subsequently prevented him from holding his oboe in proper playing position, however in his true spirit, he called out to the collectors. "Hey there, don't take me out with the garbage!"

A couple of summers ago Ray and Olivia Toubman picked up the Gillets at an inn in Rockport where they had been vacationing. Ray mentioned to the innkeeper Mr. Gillet's fame in music. The innkeeper, after seeing him for two weeks said, "I don't know about the music, but I do know that he is a real gentleman, a great and good man." Ray added, "You always feel depth of culture in him even at times when he has been playfully sarcastic; there is always good will."

Rosario Mazzeo concludes, "To study with him was an exquisite pleasure and privilege. Gillet added new dimensions, subtleties, and sophistication to my musical life. It would be difficult to find an artist, and a man deserving of a more profound respect than he. I bow to him."

I would like to express my gratitude to the following persons who so willingly communicated their thoughts and experiences:

\* Richard Blair — Professor of Oboe, The University of Texas at Austin.

\* Robert Freeman — Director, Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York.

\* Jack Holmes — Recently retired after 30 years with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

\* Rosario Mazzeo — Internationally known clarinetist, scholar, retired Personnel Manager of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

\* Rodney Pierce — Solo Oboist, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.

\* Raymond Toubman — Free lance artist in the Boston area, Boston Philharmonic, formerly with the Atlanta and Oklahoma City Symphonies.

\* Allan Vogel — Professor of Oboe, California Institute of the Arts, School of Music, Valencia, California,

\* AND most of all to Mme. Marie Gillet, who supplied materials and encouragement.

The reader is also referred to the obituary for Gillet, which appeared on page 22 of *The Journal of the IDRS*, No. 8, 1980, also written by Jean Northrup.

The third Honorary Membership of the Society was bestowed on the Viennese bassoonist and teacher **Karl Öhlberger** (b. 1912), at the Fifth Conference in Toronto, Canada, on August 18, 1976. In his report on the Conference in the Vol. 4, No. 2 issue of *To the World's Oboists*, President Clemens noted that, after sending the congratulatory telegram to Karl Öhlberger in August 23, 1976..."I have received a letter from Karl. To quote in part: '...I am only too aware of the honor you have conferred upon me and hope I am worthy of it. The fact that this membership was given me by colleagues makes me appreciate it that much more...my heart felt thanks and warmest regards to you and the gentlemen of the Committee.'

Since his election to Honorary Membership, Karl Öhlberger has remained a close friend and contributor to the IDRS. He wrote a nice report of the IDRS Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1980, which is reprinted in the chapter on the Conferences, and, as noted in the Vol. 1, No. 1, issue of *The Double Reed*, he has contributed a number of rare bassoon works to the IDRS Library/Archives.

At IDRS Conference # 6 in Evansville, Indiana, in August, 1977, the Society elected Honorary Members number four and five. These were **Benjamin Kohon** (1890-1984) and **Robert deGourdon** (1912-1993). In his report on the Conference, editor Gerald Corey wrote (*TTWB*, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 3):

"Two Honorary IDRS Members were nominated

and elected by unanimous vote: **Mr. Benjamin Kohon**, former solo bassoon of the New York Philharmonic during the Toscanini years, and **Monsieur Robert de Gourdon**, director of the Loreé establishment. IDRS is honored to welcome these exemplary artists to this place of recognition in our Society from all their efforts in behalf of the art of music and particularly for double reeds.”

**Benjamin Kohon** was an occasional contributor to the publications of the IDRS. His first article appeared in the Vol. 4, No. 2, October, 1981 issue of *The Double Reed* (pp. 41-44). It was a reprint from an article originally appearing in the Vol. XLVIII, No. 7 issue of *The Metronome* ( p. 12) in July, 1932. It described a bit of his early bassoon career:

#### A FEW NOTES ON THE BASSOON

*Benjamin Kohon*

(Solo Bassoon of New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra)

*Reprinted from "The Metronome," Vol. XLVIII, No. 7, July, 1932, p. 12.*

*(Ed: My thanks to Bill Waterhouse who sent me a copy of this interesting article culled from the files of Lyndesay Langwill's papers. As you well know, Mr. Kohon is one of our distinguished honorary members and this was written when he was a mere "lad" in his thirties. It is refreshing to read that the "plight" of the bassoon was about the same in 1932 as it is at the present time!)*

The bassoon was invented by an Italian monk in the 16th century, and was called the fagotto, from the Italian for stick, due to its resemblance in appearance in its original uncouth form to a bundle of sticks. The modern bassoon is much more presentable, and, in fact, handsome, due to its finely polished surface and greater number of shining silver or nickel plated keys. Kindred instruments invented later are the fagotino, or tenor bassoon, now obsolete, and later the contra-bassoon, which is the contra-bass of the woodwind section, and is used now in very large orchestras. There is a fine collection of early specimens of the bassoon family in the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York.

The bassoon has been more or less facetiously referred to in textbooks and by musicologists as the "clown of the orchestra." This is a classification the justness of which I never could see. It is true that grotesque effects can be produced on the lower register by playing with a rough quality of tone, or by playing exaggerated staccato, but this is a minor characteristic of the instrument. I remember, as a youngster, before I had read or heard of the reputation of the bassoon in this respect, when I would hear my father play on his bassoon, or when I

went to concerts and would distinguish the various instruments, I never detected any of this 'burlesqueness' or so-called clownishness. The bassoon always gave me an impression of being an instrument of dignity, due to fullness of tone in the lower register, and possessing fine lyric qualities in its upper notes. The instrument can of course always be used to give a comic effect - mostly combined with an underlying touch of melancholy- and some of the great composers make such uses of it. In the extensive orchestral repertoire that I have played, I have found that the masters employ the bassoon decidedly more frequently lyrically than for buffoonery.

I was brought up on the bassoon and it was quite natural for me to adopt it as my instrument. When I was about eleven years old, my father, a bassoon player, started to give me instruction on the bassoon in very small doses, so I was still of too tender an age to take up a wind instrument too arduously. Very shortly after I began the study of the bassoon, my father placed me with the New York Boys' Symphony Orchestra, composed of about 65 boys, conducted by Mr. Frank Pinto, a harpist - which orchestra was featured in Sunday night vaudeville shows in various theatres in New York, and later played a summer engagement in Willow Grove Park, near Philadelphia. As my knowledge of the instrument at that time was still definitely limited having had just a few lessons-I must confess that my appearance, equipped as I was with a tall old bassoon of my father's, must have been more impressive and convincing than my performance. My efforts and my ambitions in those early performances were mostly concerned with looking innocent and keeping perfectly silent, (in short, playing possum), during the difficult passages that I neither dared nor knew how to attempt.

But my association with this boys' group, fired me with ambition to become a bassoon player, in spite of the fact that my parents wished me to devote myself to the piano. This Boys' Orchestra did not last very long, and, soon after, I joined Volpe's Young Men's Symphony Orchestra, which was semiprofessional, and where I met many of my youthful colleagues of the Pinto Orchestra. Here under Mr. Volpe's able instruction, we rehearsed an extensive symphony repertoire every Sunday morning and thereby gained valuable orchestra routine. Many of the members of both orchestras have become outstanding members of the profession. (I need mention of these only Nathaniel Shilkret, now prominently known as conductor and composer, and Harry Weisbach, concertmaster for many years with the Theodore Thomas Orchestra of Chicago.)

After I joined the Union at the age of 16, I began to

play engagements in theatres and hotels in New York, and soon joined the Russian Symphony Orchestra under Modest Altschuler. Simono Mantia, the well-known trombone and baritone virtuoso, was also a member of this orchestra and manager of Pryor's Band, and he engaged me to play with Pryor, the following summer, in Willow Grove. From that time on, I played for many summer seasons in Willow Grove with Pryor's Band, Victor Herbert's Orchestra, Nahan Franko's Orchestra, Conway's Band, and other organizations. At the age of 18, I was engaged to play first bassoon with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, then conducted by Vassili Safonoff, and since this first engagement as Solo Bassoon, have always played Solo Bassoon in any organization with which I have been connected. I remained with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra for four seasons, playing there also under Gustav Mahler, and then joined the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski as Solo Bassoon, remaining there for three seasons. After leaving the Philadelphia Orchestra, I joined Diaghileff's Ballet Russe Orchestra, which was then touring the United States, conducted in its first season by Ansermet and in the second season by Monteux-both of them renowned French conductors. I enjoyed my connection with this artistic organization -particularly since we made a coast-to-coast trip -which I had never made before, nor have I been to the coast since; (I admit that it was the lure of this coast-to-coast trip that induced me to join the organization.) When the United States entered the World War, I enlisted in the United States Navy as bandsman. When I was mustered out, at the conclusion of the war, I joined the National Symphony Orchestra under Artur Bodanzsky, who divided his time between the National Symphony Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera Company.

In 1921, the National Symphony Orchestra merged with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra - I was among those National Symphony men who were taken into the Philharmonic and I again was Solo Bassoon in the organization that I had joined in early youth, and have been there since-playing under such conductors (among others) as Mengelberg, Furtwangler, Kleiber, Molinari, Gabilowitsch, Sir Thomas Beecham, Bruno Walter, and the Great Maestro, himself, Arturo Toscanini. In addition to the Philharmonic, I fill in engagements in Chamber Music, having played frequently with the Barrere Organization. I also play radio engagements - broadcasting at present under Shilkret, Horlick, etc., and for the National Broadcasting Co. - and have done considerable Vitaphone and Phonograph recording, in Camden and New York. In short, in whatever time I have

available from my symphonic work, permissible by my contract, I have played engagements, steady or temporary, occasional or extended, in every branch of our business - in addition to symphonic and other work mentioned - such as grand opera, moving pictures, musical shows, etc. During the summer months, our Philharmonic Orchestra gives concerts nightly at the Lewisohn Stadium of the college of the City of New York, where we play the standard symphonic programs, under the direction of Van Hoogstraaten and Coates, and, in the past, Reiner, Ganz, Molinari, Stock, Monteux, and Sokoloff.

I consider the bassoon a very difficult instrument to learn - due mostly to the reed problem. The attack is difficult, particularly on the lower notes, especially in trying to play very softly. In order to overcome most of the difficulty of respiration in the lower notes, I can only suggest that the student or player desiring a little information on this point should be careful whenever playing long tones, that the notes attack clean - and should never leave a bad attack until repetition has corrected it. The attack should always commence softly with the tongue, first in practicing long tones, then repeating the same notes several times faster and faster. This method should also be applied to the upper tones. The attack on the contra-bassoon, by the way, is much easier than on the bassoon, due to its large tubes and larger reed, giving it a more open tone, though softer in volume than the bassoon.

Of course the main qualification on the bassoon, as on any instrument, is a fine tone, and I can only suggest that tone can be developed also by practicing long tones for a considerable period, softly, then more strongly. I value quality in tone more than volume, although of course there must be a sufficient amount of volume. I think a little vibrato is also not amiss, but this must not be exaggerated, and when playing these sustained notes, they should be practiced at times evenly, and at times with a little vibrato - the vibrato being produced by the throat. The middle Eb-E-F - I always practice these notes without too much pressure to make them sharper. I believe that at all times there should not be too much pressure, when humoring the tones for pitch.

Technique of course is important, and the Etudes of Weissenborn and Milde are the best models for the essential studies in the various phases of technique, such as scales, broken chords, staccato, etc. Due to some of the difficulties of the technical fingering of the bassoon, it is sometimes necessary to take certain notes with varying fingering which can be worked out best by the individual. Also, as certain trills sometimes do not come out very clean, I

would suggest that instruments be ordered with as many available extra trill-keys as possible, such as the middle E-F#, and low Ab-Bb, and D-Eb, etc.

Very fine solos for bassoon are limited, I regret to say, but perhaps some day more good composers will be induced to write fine solos for the instrument, and bassoon playing will yet come into its own. By far the best works are the concerto by Weber and the concerto by Mozart, there are some shorter works, of course, but musically they are not of the highest order. I have played the Adagio of the Weber Concerto repeatedly at the Philharmonic Orchestra's Children's Concerts, under Ernest Schelling, and at other functions - also over the radio.

It is my belief that the bassoon is one of the finest instruments for recording and also for transmission over the radio, as its true tone is practically unimpaired by the recording or transmitting mechanism. It is a pity that composers and arrangers of the lighter music do not feature the bassoon more, as very lovely effects can be obtained with it.

Just a word about reeds: I believe it is to the best interest of bassoon-playing to use a reed of medium strength. There are really no set rules to give about adapting the reeds for the individual player, as each player's embouchure is different.

In conclusion, I would add that, if I were a youngster again, and had all instruments to choose from, I would again select the bassoon - which has given me a very precious opportunity to play in fine orchestras under great maestros.

IDRS member Nora Post conducted an interview with **Alain** and **Robert deGourdon** in Paris in 1982, a year before Robert's death. Originally in Vol. 5, No. 3 (pp. 29-35) of *The Double Reed*, is reprinted below:

**F. LORÉE INTERVIEW WITH  
ALAIN AND ROBERT DE GOURDON  
July 7, 1982 - Paris**

*Nora Post*

For most of us, the firm of F. Lorée needs no introduction. The Lorée oboe is as much a part of oboe history — and our professional lives — as anything could be. Interviewing Alain de Gourdon, the current director of F. Lorée, my admiration for his skills and dedication to a superior product only escalated. While Alain and I were talking after the interview, he commented on an extremely expensive piece of machinery which probably wasn't needed at the time of purchase, but which he felt would be a good investment in the long run. He put it this way: "I'm not making oboes for me; I am thinking about after me. I am making oboes for posterity." My only regret is that posterity is a long way off, and Alain de

Gourdon's version of it sounds too interesting to miss.

**NP:** For me, this interview is an anniversary of sorts. Exactly ten years ago—almost to the day—was when I first walked through the door here. And here we are, a decade later. But let's begin. Could you tell me exactly what your responsibilities are?

**AG:** The biggest part of my work is to control all aspects of oboe production; I also do the final adjustments. I used to do more of the manufacturing myself—drilling the tone holes for instance — but I don't have the time for that now, since I have forty people working for me. There are always problems which need my attention. I also spend a lot of time with customers, and my sister and I spend time with the financial aspects of the business. We must also correspond with many, many people.

**NP:** When did you begin making oboes?

**AG:** 1967. I tried to learn a little of everything, though I did not have a complete apprenticeship. My father was ill in 1967, and for three weeks there was no boss. So I had to accept responsibility immediately. Since every job in making an oboe is specialized, if I really apprenticed, it would have taken twenty five years to learn to do it as fast and as well as the people who do all those jobs.

**NP:** Do you have an official position within the firm?

**AG:** Yes. I am a sort of director. Though really, sometimes I am not sure what I am! If a worker is absent, for instance, I will often do part of his job. I work in three places, too — we have two factories outside Paris. So I must coordinate the activities of all three locations — I spend at least one day a week doing just that.

**NP:** What was your education like?

**AG:** Well, I completed two years of work in accounting before I started to work here in 1967. I learned everything about oboes right here. Since I am thirty-three years old, that means I've been here for fifteen years—a long time!

**NP:** As I was walking in, I heard you practicing. When did you begin the oboe?

**AG:** At twelve. I studied until I was eighteen or nineteen. Then I won my prize at the Versailles Conservatory. I still try to play a little every day, though it's very difficult to play oboe and make oboes. I continue to test all the oboes, but technically I'm not really so good! My technique is definitely not wonderful.

**NP:** Do you find that being able to play the oboe is helpful to you as a maker?

**AG:** Yes, certainly. When I do the final tuning, I must play the oboe myself, in order to be sure of what stays the same and what must change. And before you tune the instrument, you must be sure of