

John Mack in Arizona, December 1998

In mid-1998, after several years of cajoling, I was finally able to convince John Mack to sit down to talk about his musical life, on the record. Prior to this time, he had been remarkably reluctant to meet. Given that, the fact that he didn't respond to my request for help in editing the initial material wasn't entirely surprising. "JM - Arizona, December 1998" was the header I used when I sent him the material you will find on the following pages.

When he was playing in the Cleveland Orchestra, Mr. Mack was typically only available for a session such as this during the days between Christmas and the New Year, when the orchestra was on holiday. He suggested that we meet at The Wigwam Resort outside of Phoenix, as he knew that George Szell had spent time there. (Refer to an article in *The Double Reed*, Volume 25 no. 1, 2002, by Donald Rosenberg, about Szell calling Mack into his office to speak about golf.) Our Wigwam package was for four days and three nights. We arrived a day early, stayed in a hotel near the airport, and spent that evening setting up some ground rules and laying out topics to cover. The next day we took a (long!) cab ride to the resort, checked in, and immediately headed to the golf course. Our pattern for the four days was golf in the morning, lunch, golf in the afternoon, dinner at one of the resort restaurants, and then several hours of chatting before retiring.

As we had an overall plan, there may be a bit of a "scripted" sense to some of what you will read. For example, you will see statements in quotes, such as: "Marcel Tabuteau pressed you down like a spring." These sorts of references reflect statements he made prior to our recorded sessions. Even so, JM (a fond nickname) could not resist changing the topic or line of thought to speak about something he found intriguing in the moment. Because of this, some editing of the conversations has been done for the purpose of clarification, such as removal of repeated concepts, bringing together discussions of similar ideas from different points in our conversations, and the like. Any small repetitions or digressions that remain reflect Mack's active train of thought. Much of the typical JM conversational tone is lost in being transferred from the spoken word to a written transcript, but I have attempted to retain a few of his idiosyncrasies. Some of his favored mannerisms that will be familiar to those who knew him were finishing words ("and so forth and so on," "blah-blah,

blah-blah-blah"), interjections ("OK-fine," "woo-woo"), "signature" sounds (Mmmmmm), the tendency to use full names (e.g. "Marcel Tabuteau"), and some highly evocative imitations of Marcel Tabuteau and George Szell.

Much has changed since these words were first delivered. Laila Storch published her excellent book on Marcel Tabuteau in 2008. Pierre Boulez died in January 2016. I have done my best to be as accurate as possible in the transcription of Mr. Mack's words, the people to whom he referred, the dates he mentioned, and the musical materials discussed within the contemporary time frame. If any errors are to be found, they are the responsibility of this author.

The reader will note that Mack sang examples on numerous occasions. I have left some of these moments in the narrative, as I believe they can be interpreted relatively easily enough if the notated music is consulted. There were many moments where this is less true. In a subsequent article, I will provide audio links to Mack's singing and the relevant notated musical examples so as to have the best possible clarity.

The Interview

James Brody: First of all, thank you for doing this.

John Mack: You're welcome.

JB: You were born in Somerville, New Jersey, 1927, as you put it "the day before Halloween." In speaking about this last night, you mentioned the birth dates of Boulez and Dohnányi.

JM: Boulez was born in 1926 and Dohnányi was born in 1930. Two people close to the same time, who I admire greatly.

JB: You started to play the piano at age six.

JM: Right. This was the same age that my mother discovered that I had absolute pitch. I'm sure her heart must have skipped a beat. She was reading an article in the (now defunct) *New York Herald Tribune* about absolute pitch. Her mother had it, and the article said that absolute pitch often skips a generation. She went to the piano and played [Mack sings C] and said: "Jackie, what's that?" and I said "Middle C." Her mother was raised in a mining town –

Hornitos, in the Sierra Nevadas – with a piano that was a half-tone flat. She played the piano a lot when I was a little bitty kid. If I played notes on the piano while she was in the kitchen, she would sing out the names of the notes but a half step higher because that was what she was raised on.

JB: Is absolute pitch one of those “both a blessing and a curse” sorts of things?

JM: It’s good and bad. It makes it really easy when you take dictation, as I did at Juilliard and Curtis. When I went to Curtis after graduating from Juilliard, Madame Soffray*, the teacher of solfege and ear training, was absolutely furious because I got 100% on the exam – me from lowly Juilliard and here we are at “*The Curtis Institute.*” It did come in handy, but at the same time, while I was in Juilliard we got our come-uppance. I went to summer school several times, starting while I was still in high school. Just by tests, I was able to skip a year-and-a-half of ear training. Later, when I was in Juilliard close to full time, Lou Teicher – of the duo pianist team Ferrante and Teicher – was our ear-training teacher, and we had three “absolute pitchers” in the class. We would sit in the back of the class knocking this stuff off, so he decided to fix our little red wagon. “All right, you absolute pitchers, this is in F major. Take this down.” Then he would play an A major chord. (Laughs) And we would have to transpose everything. That was sort of fun.

Please make this a footnote. See “*” in above paragraph.
(* Laila Storch remembers that Soffray was addressed as “Miss” and not “Madame.”)

JB: While it was helpful in that class, are there drawbacks? Is it especially irritating when somebody plays out of tune?

JM: It would drive somebody out of their mind if they played out of tune whether they had absolute pitch or not. However, just to give you an example: in my studio at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the piano is tuned to 440. There’s a piano in the next studio where a couple of pianists play and teach that is tuned to about 444, and it’s just enough to knock my pitch recognition for a loop. It’s like being a baseball player and somebody throws you a pitch you haven’t seen before. “What is *that?*”

I must tell you, James: every key has it's own sound and color, like mad, as it did for Mozart. In one of his operas – Leinsdorf wrote about this in *The Composer's Advocate* [see page 56] – he used a progression of keys very evocatively. C minor was always tragic, as it was for Beethoven. D major was always bright and sunny, as in Brahms Second or that wonderful Mozart string divertimento with many melodies that would excite you. It sounds like a bright, sunny key to me; always has, always will. E-flat is golden and noble. E is grandiose in a different way, like in Brahms Fourth. F is a tough key. It's a bright key also; I think of the *Pastoral* Symphony. I'll never forget what Pablo Casals said once up in Marlboro. He said [JM imitates his voice], "You must be careful with F NA-too-wral; it is the most difficult note." And I thought, yes, of course it is. Not just for us oboe players because octave F tends to be on the low side, but because a lot of people play the note too high. On any number of occasions when an orchestra plays Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, during the minuet it sounds like they're playing (sings opening, a bit sharp). I'm thinking: "That's not where F is!"

JB: Do you subscribe to the theory that certain sounds can be associated with certain colors?

JM: Scriabin was into that big time. Doesn't sound that way to me. I would say that there is a "color" of a key, but I don't relate that to an *actual* visual color. Keep in mind that pitch recognition, in a way, is in parallel with color recognition. Whether the human race started out where everybody recognized pitch and color or however it got to be the way it is now, there are far fewer people who have absolute pitch than people who see and recognize all the colors and even shades thereof. I remember a wonderful thing in *Life* magazine when I was a kid. It was a test to determine color acuity. They had page after page of little circles of colors and there was always a letter or number embedded in there, and if you couldn't recognize it, that meant that perhaps that particular color or combination was not perceptible to you. Sound is sound waves and color is light waves. I could also understand that maybe people who do associate a certain color with a certain note or a certain key could discriminate that. I don't. I only have recognition of what the key is.

JB: You took up the violin in the fourth grade.

JM: Something like that. Probably age ten.

JB: You mentioned Dorothea Haydock, the woman in charge of all the music in the school system in Somerville. When you were in the sixth grade, your father bought an oboe.

JM: I don't remember exactly when that was. It might even have been earlier. My father commuted to New York five days a week working for the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions. He went past a pawnshop and he saw this unusual instrument – an oboe. He was really fascinated, and was fortunately able to persuade the pawnbroker to sell it to him for a measly ten bucks. It was a Buffet military system. After he saved up a few more pennies, he went to Linx and Long's on 48th Street and bought some gouged and folded cane, some tubes, a mandrel, knives, beeswax, thread, and went right to work.

JB: What about the musical background of your parents? You mentioned that your father went to school at UC Berkeley and played the saxophone.

JM: The C melody saxophone so that he could get into the football games for free. He met my mother there. She was a church choir singer and pianist. She did the most wonderful thing that anyone could have happen to them when they're a little kid. She had a piano repertoire of eight pieces and I could pick the one she would play while I got myself ready for bed. (Sings the opening of the *Turkish March* by Beethoven.) I thought that was so wonderful.

We were fortunate to have community concerts where groups or soloists would come to perform. Benno Rabinof, the violinist, a wonderful player. The Don Cossack Choir. [See YouTube for audio examples.] I guess we probably had six or eight performances at Somerville High School Auditorium in a year. These performers may not have enjoyed it that much, but at least they were happy in some ways because while the audiences didn't know much, they *adored* the performers. I thought it was so wonderful and so exciting to be able to hear some really hotsy-totsy stuff, which you would not hear otherwise in your little town. We wouldn't have been exposed to this level of artistry if we hadn't had these wonderful community concerts.

In the sixth grade, Miss Haydock came to our class with a recording of the instruments of the orchestra. Despite the fact that I was only in the sixth grade, I was already playing violin in her little junior high orchestra. I was

the only one in the class that recognized the oboe and the English horn. She said to me: "Jackie..."

JB: Again, Jackie!?

JM: I was just a little kid – forget it! Don't anybody get any ideas! She said, "How is it you recognize the oboe and the English horn?" I said, "My father plays the oboe." She said, "I would like to see you after class." Her heart must have been beating furiously – gonna have an oboe for *In a Persian Market* or something like that, oboe squawking along. The next time my father came home – I think it was not that night but the following night – I said, "Pop, I wanna play the oboe." As soon as I said that, he pulled it out immediately. I had been forsworn not to *look* at this very private thing, tucked away in the third bureau drawer. He soaked up his miserable homemade reeds. It was like the halt leading the lame. We didn't know anything at all, nobody around who played the oboe, absolutely nothing. He said, "Your right hand goes below, you hold on with your right thumb, your left hand goes above, and I think this key does that," and so forth and so on. So, off I went. It was pitiful, miserable beyond description. But, I was playing the tunes of the day in short order.

JB: When I asked you what some of those tunes were you rolled your eyes at me.

JM: (Pauses, then laughs) Because I couldn't *remember* what they *were*!

JB: I'm recalling tunes from the first Gekeler book, such as "I Dreamt I Dwelt In Marble Halls." Some of these were popular tunes that might have even gone back as far as the late 1800s, from operettas and the like.

JM: Right, whatever was around. It didn't take long before I was playing oboe in whatever ensemble in school.

JB: You mentioned your band director and vibrato.

JM: Claude Shappelle. He was a trumpet player. He was from that part of Pennsylvania where they say "bee-YOU-tee-ful," perhaps Altoona. He demonstrated on his trumpet and used a jaw vibrato. I thought: Mmmmm. I tried that on the oboe and I thought Mmm-MMM ("no"). This does not fly on the oboe; this sounds pretty raunchy. Still does.

JB: So there was a period where you were mostly self-taught. Your parents were both musically savvy and they would help you out.

JM: Right.

JB: What was the turning point when you began to receive more formal training?

JM: My father was from Pacific Grove in the Monterey Peninsula, and we went out one summer to visit. This was following eighth grade. They had a little band camp at the high school run by a very lovely man named Ed Simonson. I was enrolled there and I got to be in a class with maybe seven other oboe players, of which I was absolutely the lowest of the low at the time because I didn't know anything at all. That was very, very helpful.

JB: You mentioned Simonson in another context in our conversations.

JM: Yes. He showed up last year [1998] at Hidden Valley [at JM's summer Master Class] with his wife. Now an elderly, tall, distinguished looking gentleman with silvery hair. I think Bob Gilbert was responsible for his coming. I mentioned Ed's name once and Bob said, "I know Ed Simonson." So I think Bob said something to Ed at some point. "Ed, why don't you go up there and hear John Mack's recital?" You know, this little kid who couldn't play, who learned a few things along the way! (Laughs)

The next thing that happened was that following ninth grade, I went to a band program called Camp Cedars at Cedar Point, Sandusky, Ohio. An elderly Mexican gentleman who was a flute player taught there and I got my lessons from him. At some point he said, "You know, you have something; you should be studying with an oboe player." Well, I would like that fine. He told my father, "Call Bruno Labate," who was about to be in his last year in the New York Philharmonic.

My father called Labate and mentioned this man's name, but Labate didn't exactly understand. He thought that the person who was recommending me to him was the gentleman who conducted the New York Philharmonic at Lewisohn Stadium in their summer concerts, so he agreed to have me play for him. I went to play for him at Chessarini's office. At that time, Chessarini was on Broadway and was Lorée's "exclusive importer." Of course, he wasn't, because they always sent

instruments to Hans Moennig and Marcel Dandois. A few other people got instruments as well, but he was the one who got most of them. I played for Labate at Chessarini's and he agreed to teach me, so I started lessons with him. He would show up after the Friday afternoon concerts in his striped trousers, his polished shoes – spats, even – pearl gray waistcoat and morning coat, and a tie that always had either a giant pearl or diamond stickpin in it. Bruno Labate was 4-11-and-a-half, pear-shaped, and his English was pretty bad. He was also a fiercely talented man. I don't know if it's true or not, but the stories have it that when he was twelve years old he was already playing first oboe in an Italian opera company.

JB: It is great to hear you speak of his capability because it seems to me that Labate has been somewhat under-appreciated in the history of the American oboe world. I've heard people make fun of that picture in the front of the etude book – his height, the way he looks: an easy target.

JM: Right – *but!* There are some records out there. There's a J.C. Bach Sinfonia with a giant oboe solo in the second movement that he recorded with the Philharmonic in 1928 and it is magnificent, captivating, driving oboe playing that will knock your socks off. He made a recording in 1932 with the Philharmonic, which has been re-issued on CD, of *Don Quixote* with Alfred Wallenstein, who was at that time principal cellist of the Philharmonic, with Sir Thomas Beecham conducting. The oboe solo, "Dulcinea," is quite smashing and, although he was playing on a little skinny Lorée oboe from the 1920s, his playing was without doubt *what-so-ever* absolutely *full size*.

The following parenthetical could be a footnote.

(The J.C. Bach Sinfonia [in B-flat, op. 18/2] is available on *The Oboe*, Oboe Classics CC2012. The *Don Quixote* has been reissued on Pristine Audio PASC 410.)

JB: Impressive. I recall our conversation about [contemporary golfer] Phil Mickelson who had a set of golf clubs from the 1960s reconditioned for his use and was amazed that players such as Nicklaus could do as well as they did with them. He said that when he hit the clubs flush, the ball traveled pretty well, but when he was a little off, the ball could go anywhere. The improvement in equipment, both in golf and oboes, has been dramatic.

JM: Sure, absolutely. By the way, this was the year that Bruno Labate and sixteen other people were fired from the Philharmonic. They had brought Artur Rodzinski in from The Cleveland Orchestra to clean house, which he did. He got rid of Michel Piastro, their very well known concertmaster; their first flute player, Amans; Labate, and fourteen other people.

JB: What was that all about?

JM: I have no idea. "New broom sweeps clean" or whatever. Despite the fact that happened to Bruno Labate the year I was studying with him in this little, weensy cubicle in Linx and Long's at 117 W. 48th Street, I never heard a word of complaint, outrage, or disappointment from him; he never said a word about it whatsoever. The following year, Harold Gomberg came to play first oboe in the Philharmonic. That's a long story for later.

JB: Regarding Labate, you had mentioned, among other things, Sellner and Barret #9.

JM: I've read and heard so many things about Labate from people that knew him way back and studied with him. One was that they said that he could pick up any oboe and reed and play well on it. One of the pieces I worked on with him when I was in tenth grade was Sellner Articulation Studies Book Two. (Sings the beginning of the first C Major triplet study.) I think they're absolutely magnificent; I love them. They are really music – but at that time they weren't yet music to me at all. It was just like exercise, or whatever; learning to track. Since each one is either with triplets or sixteenths, there is no "rhythm" other than the rhythm that might be caused by note patterns or articulation patterns. I've come a long way since that time to realize that there's an enormous amount of stuff in there that was totally not apparent to me at the time.

So, Labate would say "Nut" [note] when I would play a wrong note or "Temps" when I would rush, which was frequently. Sometimes there wasn't much more to it than that. He was putting in his time for his five bucks and I was going there for my lessons, to try to learn something, get scolded, and go home and try some more or whatever. I think it was Monday afternoons that we played in orchestra for about an hour, and then I had the first lesson with him after. One of his daughters, who was built somewhat along the lines of him but *much* larger, would come in and say,

"Daddy, I'll see you when you come home," and then reach over and plant this *giant* lipstick kiss all over his face. He had a sort of dark and swarthy complexion. If he *could* have blushed, he *would* have! (Laughs)

At any rate, at one of those lessons, a most amazing, fantastic thing happened. It was in Barret Melody number 9, Allegro ben marcato, in cut time, e minor. (Sings opening.) Well, I must have played it so bad. He said (à la Labate), "Gimme da oboe." Because of his size, when he played the oboe it looked about how an A clarinet would look held by a larger person. He takes the reed out and [tests it] "bip-bip." "A-reed's a little a-weak." He puts the reed back in the oboe and played with great passion, as though it was as wide as the Mississippi. He played four bars and you might as well have been listening to the *Triumphal March* from *Aida*. (Sings an excerpt.) He stopped playing and handed the oboe back to me. I was in shock. I thought, "Oh My God; this is just a page and a line long, just a little thing in Barret and he played it like it was a big, *big* thing – not just a little exercise of any kind whatsoever." I was shaken to the core. I couldn't believe that an etude could be like *that*. He played it with such eloquence and tragedy and sounded big on "a-reed's a little a-weak." That day, that moment marked me severely. It changed my thinking about lots and lots of things right then and there. The potency level was shocking to me. I wasn't able to *do* anything about it yet. I can *now*, but I couldn't then. It was just wonderment to me.

Studying with Labate and Ben Storch was very exciting. I was at least on the fringe of things that were happening, which I hadn't been before. And I was beginning to get some ideas. By this time I already started to think there's something inside me, somewhere. I don't know if I'll ever be able to access it, but there is *something*. I was still a ways away from getting to it.

The scales were taken from my eyes about what "it" could be that I hadn't perceived before and that perception was handed to me on a silver platter. Those four bars [from Labate] just shoved it down my throat. All of a sudden I began to think: oh my goodness, this could be something really wonderful and magnificent. Thoughts like that had not gone much through my mind.

JB: How did you travel to the city?

JM: I walked to the train, took it to Jersey City, walked to the ferryboat, took the ferryboat across, walked to the subway, took that and then walked to 48th Street. That was in tenth grade. The following summer, my mother, yet again in the *Herald Tribune*, read about the National Orchestral Association, the training orchestra of New York. So I went there for the summer. We had three, three-hour rehearsals a week on the stage of Carnegie Hall when it was pristine. During that summer, Léon Barzin was the conductor. He had been the principal viola of the New York Philharmonic, but he really wanted to conduct. He once had a chance to conduct the Philharmonic and he immediately started to correct everybody. They were very unhappy about it, so he left.

JB: You spent a lot of time in transit!

JM: Nothing compared to the following year. After riding the Jersey Central, you got home covered with soot. Oh, man. At any rate, that summer [between tenth and eleventh grade] we did all the symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms, plus overtures, concerti, and this and that. There were seven oboes and one English horn. This is when Marc Lifschey and I first met and became dear friends. Marc was the first of the four firsts and I was the first of the three seconds. We became fast friends and have been ever since. I was so taken by this [NOA] experience, things started to stir inside me. I started to think: this is so wonderful. This music is so wonderful, so magnificent; if you could ever get good enough to do this, why would you rather do any other thing on the face of the earth?

So, the next year, in eleventh grade, I commuted to New York five days a week. I took all my classes in a row, ate a quick lunch at school, took another class, rushed home, gathered up my homework and my oboe and my reeds and this and that, went past the library to drop off the murder mystery that I had read the day before and pick up a new one – they would always have a few for me to take – rush off to the train station in Somerville and start on my homework. Then the local [train] would show up and I would go one stop and get off at Bound Brook, waiting for the express, the Baltimore and Ohio, to come through from Philadelphia. This, of course, happens to be the train that I took to Philadelphia in twelfth grade when I first started studying with Marcel Tabuteau. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday were rehearsals. Wednesday night I would take the subway all the way out to the end of the line to Coney

Island, take the trolley seventeen blocks, walk two blocks, and go upstairs for my lesson with Ben Storch, who I was studying with that year. Ben played first oboe in the WOR Orchestra under Wallenstein. These were the days when every big radio station in New York had its own orchestra. Ben was very helpful, and he could *play*. He had a substantial overbite, so he played very light reeds. He was the one who was later responsible for making the Benwal oboe: that's Ben Storch and Wally Bhosys. Later, he crafted the Gordet oboe; Ben always wanted to find an oboe that would make him sound bigger than he could on his own – transmogrify himself.

I would get home at 12:40 in the morning. But, at that age, it didn't faze me at all. I was a straight A student and somehow or other I was able to do all of this stuff. Commuting, walking that far, to and from the train station in the middle of the night, at a time when you didn't worry or think anything about walking home alone in the middle of the night from the train almost a mile to your house. Just did it.

On Tuesday afternoons, we had a class with Bert Brenner, who was then the second oboe player in the Philharmonic. He later became the English horn player for some time. On Saturday mornings, we had a quintet class followed by an oboe class, both with Harold Gomberg.

I had auditioned for Curtis when I was in the tenth grade while I was studying with Bruno Labate. Labate wrote [Tabuteau] a note and said, "He's been studying with me for five years," and it was five months (chuckles). And I couldn't play yet. I ran out of breath in the middle of a long phrase and Tabuteau rocked back on his heels and roared with laughter. I thought: well, I guess that takes care of *that*. I was hopeful that something that happened to *him* when *he* was a kid would happen to *me*. Tabuteau was from Compiègne. His father was an *horloger* – a watchmaker, clock technician – but also, I think, conducted the local little orchestra. Gillet and his class came through the town, Tabuteau played for him, and the students laughed at him. Gillet said, "Don't laugh." Gillet saw that there was something there, and took him as a student at the Conservatoire. I was hopeful that Tabuteau would see something in me. Well, at that point in time, he didn't.

My father approached Marcel Tabuteau and tried to persuade him to teach me while I was in twelfth grade. Tabuteau said

to my father [in Tabuteau voice], "Tell the boy not to play the oboe." My father, who was no dummy whatsoever, said, "I'm sorry, maestro, you'll have to tell him that yourself because he wouldn't take that from me." It piqued his curiosity. So, therefore, I found myself in twelfth grade going to Philadelphia every other week for a 1:00 PM lesson with Marcel Tabuteau, which was like a trip into outer space. It was absolutely overwhelming the way the man sounded when he played, the stuff he had to say. Incredibly imaginative, terribly demanding, and very demeaning from time to time. If you did some dumb thing he would call you "stu-peed" and give you holy hell. But, when I think back, he did the right thing. He also knew that my train didn't go back until 6:30 that night. So, he often took pity on me. In the wintertime in Philadelphia the streets are awash with slush and snow. Sometimes I would go watch a movie twice or more to kill the time in between. As the year wore on, Tabuteau started to let me stay in his studio with him for the bulk of the afternoon. He taught all sorts of people, some guys showing up in uniform. I know for a fact that Earnie Harrison was one of them. Some of them – not Earnie – were really upset that there was this kid sitting there.

I have to tell the story about what happened one Saturday afternoon. We had these two circular, spiral, wooden piano stools to sit on. That was our seating "accouterments." Bust your butt, you know! As I'm sitting there, he's playing away, he's got a hot reed, he's having a wonderful time, enjoying himself. He looked over at me and saw that I had Xs for eyes like in the old cartoons – I was stunned. He whipped the oboe out of his mouth and said [in Tabuteau voice], "There, you see, young man. I am human. You are human. If I can do it, you can do it, too!" And I thought, Oh, God! Then he goes [in Tabuteau voice, laughing] "Achwhah-hah-hah-hah!" Well, in retrospect, I can tell you, James, without any doubt whatsoever that it took me fifteen years to recover from that. For the thought to ever go through my mind that maybe he *was* human, and maybe I *could* do it, too. I just took it for granted that either he wasn't human or if he was I was just a little jerk from New Jersey and how could I ever think that I could ever aspire to anything like that? Well, he had a way of putting a burr under your saddle. He certainly did it for me and he did it for life. It's still there.

It was becoming quite apparent to me that Tabuteau was in some absolutely totally different world. Marcel Tabuteau

would play a long tone from one to nine and back to one and leave you quaking in your boots because you felt like you had been taken on a boomerang ride: up, out, around, viewing this and that, and then come back and land like a feather in your hand. It was so exciting you can't believe. I've never heard anybody play a long tone like that, ever. When most people play a long tone they turn up the rheostat and then go back. With Tabuteau, a thousand different things were happening. It would absolutely make your head spin.

Tabuteau did mention Labate on a couple of occasions. His famous saying on the topic was that if Bruno Labate had studied with Georges Gillet at the Conservatoire in Paris, he would have been so great that there wouldn't be any oboe player in the world fit to lick his shoe-tops. But then Tabuteau also made sure that you understood that he did not **do** that.

The time with Tabuteau was very exciting. I remember my dear friend Marc Lifschey said, "Oh, John, you're going to be in such awe of this man. When you hear him play, you're not going to be able to see straight. Just try to remember everything he says." When the year was over, I thought: I don't remember anything! (Laughs) But, of course, I *do*. I look back and I could write chapters, if not volumes, on the stuff that he said to me. We went through the early 30 Articulation [Studies] in the Barret, the ones that precede the Big 12. We did melodies, we did this, and we did that, covering a lot of material. Lots of people I know never studied with a Frenchman and they have no idea about how to play French grace notes or anything like that. I got all that from Tabuteau. But this was prior to my long association with him that started a few years later.

JB: You left off study with Storch and took up with Tabuteau in the twelfth grade. Were you still keeping up that incredible travel schedule?

JM: No, as I didn't go to New York that year. I had seriously thought of going to the High School of Music and Art in New York; I almost did. And then something said to me: finish school with the people you have known since you were in kindergarten. Do that, and also do all this other stuff. I guess I didn't play with the National Orchestral Association that year, but the year after that, when I went to Juilliard, I did.

I was studying with Marcel Tabuteau every other Saturday. But, as I said, he frequently allowed me to stay in the studio with him for a whole afternoon of either just practicing – and he played all the time – or working on gouging machines or whatever. And I had a bent for mechanical things like that. My father was very much a do-it-yourselfer, who would say, "Well, if it doesn't work, take it apart, figure out how it works, fix it, put it back together again." I was sort of beginning to get handy with my mitts.

I remember once I showed up for a lesson with Tabuteau and I had a hot reed. Only, I didn't know it was hot, because I didn't play well enough, and my embouchure wasn't developed enough. And he was very impressed by that. I think that's the reason why, some time later, after I graduated from Juilliard and went to Curtis, he invited me to work in the studio with him. Some people called it the "studio slave," and some of it was rather slavish and hard to take. But, I was able to be there with him while he did all this remarkable stuff.

The year after high school, I was going to Juilliard part-time, expecting to be drafted, and I turned 18. Even with flat feet and bad eyes, [the draft board] said "1-A". Five days before my induction into the U.S. Army, a telegram comes from the government informing my parents that my brother, David, who was just a year-and-a-half older than I, had perished in a typhoon in Okinawa while serving in the U.S. Navy. We lost 2,500 boys in that. His body was recovered and is now interred in the Punch Bowl in Waikiki; I've been there several times. After my mother collected herself, she called the draft board in Dunellen, New Jersey, which was the next large community, and they said, "Your son is a sole surviving son." Congress had passed a law within one day after the five Sullivan brothers died in battle. They said, "We want no part of him." So, I was re-classified as 4-A. This meant, all of a sudden, I'm going to be able to stay in school, even though I'm part-time.

I then did what might sound like an audacious thing. I wasn't trying to be pushy – I just wanted to find out what was going on. I went up to Edgar Schenkman, who was the conductor of the Juilliard first orchestra, and I said to him, "Mr. Schenkman, I understand that you're not happy with your oboe players." He said, "Well, whoever told you that told you right. I am not. Why, young man? Do you play the oboe?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Would you like to play for

me?" "Yes, sir." "Would you like to play for me right now?" "Yes, sir." I played for him, and after the concert that was under preparation at that time had been performed, I was the first oboe player of the Juilliard Orchestra at 18 [years old]. I take no credit for anything to do with this other than the fact that maybe I wasn't quite as bad as the others; that's *all*. But, I was beginning to swim a little bit.

Tabuteau told John Minsker, who was the wonderful English horn player of the Philadelphia Orchestra, to teach me my first year in Juilliard. Minsker was a fabulous player. Very, very subtle. John Minsker's playing was so subtle that some people thought it was *bland*. It was not bland *out front*. I heard the man play for many years. I'll never forget when I played Honegger's *King David* with Tabuteau playing first and John Minsker playing English horn in 1952 right after I got back from the Sadler's Wells – I was asked to play second for a couple of weeks. There's a solo passage for English horn in the *King David*, which I had played before in Juilliard. My mother said afterwards, "Oh, Jack. John Minsker must have the most beautiful vibrato I've ever heard on a woodwind instrument." I said, "Sitting next to him, you hear almost *nothing*." Whatever he did, it bloomed in the hall, and it certainly did for all the years I heard him play. It never sounded straight at all. But John Minsker was an unusual person. [He] had lots of problems with the Philadelphia Orchestra. He would stand out on the corner before concerts passing out socialist literature. The management wasn't too happy about that.

He was an iconoclast, but a great, magnificent player. I think one of my favorite stories about John Minsker was when we were playing Bach Festival in Bethlehem, PA. The musicians were virtually always from the Philadelphia Orchestra, and I was fortunate to have played with [Bethlehem Bach] on many occasions – even first oboe for several years. One time, I drove back home to New Jersey and came back early the next morning before rehearsal and there was a chair with John Minsker's English horn on it. You might think: who would do a thing like that? Who would leave their instrument put together on their chair and go home, 40 to 50 miles away, come back the next day and play? I would say to you, John Minsker! There may be others, but he's the only one I know of who would do a thing like that!

I remember when I was hired to play a concert in Reading, PA, with Alexander Hilsberg conducting. The orchestra was

97% Philadelphia Orchestra and 3% retirees from the orchestra. The program was *Roman Carnival Overture*, another piece I can't recall, and the Franck D Minor Symphony. So, Hilsberg says to me, "Chohn, Chohnny Minsker wants to play softball that day. I would like you to play English horn." I said sure and then realized what the program was. So I took the school English horn immediately to Hans Moennig to try to fix it up a little bit. Then I went home to New Jersey and I found one piece of gouged and folded English horn cane. Fortunately, I made a magnificent reed out of it. I went back and played for Hilsberg, got some other things taken care of by Moennig, and off we went up to Reading fairly early on Sunday morning. Morning rehearsal, afternoon concert, go home. To my great amazement, stupefaction, and embarrassment, in playing the rehearsal, I finished the solo (sings *Carnival* English horn solo), and Sol Schoenbach says in a loud voice, "Well, Johnny Minsker can get his farm now, we've got us an English horn player." I thought: woo. Not what I had in mind. I had never thought of myself as an English horn player.

I would have my lesson with Minsker, then every third or fourth lesson, I would have one with Marcel Tabuteau, and if I did some stupid thing, he [Tabuteau] would scold Minsker. Who could blame Minsker for feeling bad about that? He was very resentful of the fact that Tabuteau made him teach me for that year. And yet, I always sent him a Christmas card every year. Many, many years later, I finally got a card from him. He said, "Dear John. I hear broadcasts all the time. The orchestra sounds magnificent and you sound outstandingly stellar in your orchestra. I am very thrilled to have played a part in your development as the artist you are now." I was thrilled out of my mind! Back then, he would never give me the time of day. He felt that Tabuteau was making him teach me, and I wasn't learning enough. If we go have a lesson together with Tabuteau and I crap up, then Tabuteau is going to come down on Minsker instead of me! What could make him less happy than to have anything like that happen? And it did, many times. But, he was a wonderful, attentive, very fine teacher.

My second year in Juilliard, things all of a sudden started to really escalate like mad. Thor Johnson was conducting the first orchestra that year, Schenkman was conducting the second orchestra. And the first oboe desk was John Mack and Ray Still for the first half of the year. We had a lot of oboe players in Juilliard in 1946-47, lots and lots.

My downfall happened halfway through the year when Robert Shaw was going to conduct a concert of works for chorus and orchestra. Thor Johnson sent me off to play first oboe for Shaw. Unfortunately, I fell afoul of a really beautiful piece in D Major by Johannes Brahms for chorus and orchestra called *Nanie*, which has an oboe solo that lasts about 25 bars and ends up on low D-C#-D, sustained. The horns underneath you are tired by that time, their pitch is going up, and you're playing low D-C#-D. Well, my one decent reed cracked two days before the performance, I came up with nothing, and I stank the place up. Thor Johnson came back afterwards and said, "Mr. Mack, I was very upset with your performance and it will be reflected in your duties in the orchestra." So, for the rest of the year, it was Still and Mack.

It took me a long time to square that one, but I did it, years later. In about 1959, I was playing in the New Orleans Symphony, and Thor Johnson was conducting in Fish Creek, Wisconsin. Johnson's father was a Moravian minister. The hotbeds of Moravians are Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he lived when he was a child; Allentown-Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; and Door County, Wisconsin. He led festivals in both Wisconsin and in Winston-Salem. He must have been stuck for an oboe player, because he invited me to come and play. I went on to play that festival for four years. We had players from The Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra – a lot of good people. Robert Marcellus was playing clarinet. I don't remember everything we played, but I remember one specific piece for sure. A lot of years had gone by since [*Nanie* at Juilliard]; twelve, to be exact. My "squaring of the situation" was that we did *Le Tombeau de Couperin* and by this time I could play; I could paddle my own canoe. He gave me three or four bows, and when I came off the stage, he said, "John, my boy, that was magnificent!" And I said, "Thank you, Thor. I hope that makes up for *Nanie*," and walked off. I later asked somebody, "Will he remember that?" They said: "Thor Johnson? It may take him fifteen minutes, but he can access anything he's got." It probably didn't take him any fifteen minutes to get *that* one.

Everything was smooth between him and me for all the years I played there. Incidentally, since I was playing with Bob Marcellus, music *and* golf together, I can't help but believe that when George Szell *did* hire me for Cleveland, he must have asked Bob [in a very good Szell imitation],

"Bob, can this fellow Mack really play?" And Bob would say, "Well, yes, he *can*."

That's a whole different story, and we'll discuss it as a story unto itself – the three times I played for Szell. It was cataclysmic.

JB: You're playing for Tabuteau several times a year and studying at Juilliard.

JM: My last [third] year in Juilliard, Harold Gomberg joined the faculty. We had 31 oboe players in school and he would take four students. Twelve people played for him; I was one of the four he accepted. Besides me, he took Steve Hewitt, Dave Abosch, and the fellow who ended up playing second oboe to him in the Philharmonic for years, Jerry Roth. I had the last lesson and I always got an extra half hour. It was quite an experience to be in the same room with Harold Gomberg, because his playing was overridingly commanding at that point in time. We were doing Grand Etudes in the Barret book. He would pick up the oboe – he played a *lot* – if he ever missed something, he would go back and he *never* missed a second time. I thought this was incredibly impressive.

(Pauses for ten seconds)

At this point, I think I should stop and insert something. Harold Gomberg would pick up your oboe and reed and play on it and sound so much better than you that it would make your heart drop into your stomach and make you feel really bad. And he wouldn't say anything – he would just *do* that. But there are big lessons there, which I learned, and I will explain them to you. On the other hand, Marcel Tabuteau would take your oboe and reed and play on it and make it sound so bad that your heart would drop into your stomach and you would feel really bad. He wouldn't say anything, either, but I can explain exactly what they *should* have done and didn't do. Harold Gomberg should have said, "Look: the reason I can make it sound much better than you do is because of my experience, my more developed embouchure, my blowing, my tonal concepts," so forth and so on. That [playing without explanation] would make you feel so bad. Because you kept thinking: well, if only my oboe was better, if only my reeds were better, I would sound better. Somebody comes along and it's the same oboe, the same reed, and he makes it sound so much better. If he had only said to us, "It's not me; it's not that I'm me, it's

just what I know, what I can do, and if I can do it, you can do it, too." Then, we would all rush home and work really hard. Tabuteau should have said, and didn't, "It sounds bad, but the reason it sounds bad is because I'm not doing [anything] other than playing on it the same way I would if I were playing on my own oboe and a good reed." Of course the thing to be extracted from that is, and what I would tell my students – don't try to make it sound better than it deserves to sound. Try to make the reeds better, make the embouchure better and so forth and so on, and don't put the onus of responsibility on yourself to make it sound better than it deserves. There are enough players who went down the tubes after a number of years because they could not continue to play on their own reeds because they weren't good enough. I am totally convinced about that.

Then we get to the crux of what happened near the end of that year when my mother looked in the *Herald Tribune*, yet again, and saw two things. One was that the Philadelphia Orchestra was about to go on transcontinental tour; two, that they'd had auditions at Curtis and they had accepted this person, that person, and Lou Rosenblatt, oboe, one of my dearest friends on the face of the earth. Tabuteau would not fly. He and Madame Tabuteau – who taught French at Curtis, so all oboe players had to take French – took the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth. Tabuteau couldn't stand the rich sauces on the other boats.

Just a bit about Tabuteau and food. Tabuteau liked wonderful food, but it had to be simple and fine, perhaps with a little bit of this and that but not gloppy. He didn't like gloppy presentation or fancy cooking. *His* cooking was magnificent, but not fancy. His favorite dish was top of the round, browned twice, and shaped something like a flying saucer; plus potatoes, frequently boiled. He was very, very fond of pureed potatoes, which would be mashed potatoes with some milk and some butter and an egg yolk in them, which is absolutely wonderful, especially if you were having leg of lamb or something like that, with the gravy on [makes yummy sound]. But he didn't like fancy food. As a matter of fact, I remember he told me one time that he got the call while he was in France, "Come back immediately!" They needed him right away. He said, "We had to come back on the Ile de France." All the rich foods and the sauces, and so on. He said that he was so choked by that, when they got off the boat he went right to Childs [a restaurant chain known for simple, healthy food] and ordered milk toast. I thought: maybe that happened, maybe

it didn't, but I got the message – simple but fine, no fancy stuff.

So, I thought: if I'm going to play for him before he goes on tour, I have to do it now. So, I called him, and he said, "OK, fine, come over this evening." I sat around in the lobby of the Drake Hotel keeping my reeds wet and wondering what the dingdong is going to happen. When I get home, it's going to be 12:30, 1:00 in the morning, who knows? Finally, the message comes from the desk that I can go up to the room. Tabuteau greets me, Madame Tabuteau greets me. He said, "Play for me the Brahms Violin Concerto solo." No music, just play. I played it for him. "Play it for me on *my* oboe." That makes *two* times. "Go into the bedroom and play it for me on your oboe then my oboe." That makes *four*. "Come back into the living room and play it for me again on your oboe." That makes *five*. I mean, rip your face off! So then he said to me, "Well, what are your plans?" I said, "Well, Mr. Gomberg wants me to go out [audition for an orchestral position]." (I did audition for the New Orleans Symphony for Massimo Freccia. Eventually, I was offered the job.) I said, "I don't think I'm ready," and he [Tabuteau] said something to the effect of "you're telling *me!*" I said, "Well, Maestro, you know I've always wanted to go to Curtis but I understand you've already accepted someone." He said, "You silly boy. You still want to go The Curtis after all these years?" I thought: well, who *wouldn't*? "All right. I will tell Madame Tabuteau to go to the school tomorrow and tell them I have accepted you. They will send you an application; you will have to fill it out. And you will have to tell Mr. Gomberg. If he is unhappy with me about this, I will have nothing to do with you."

Well, I *did* tell Harold Gomberg and he was furious with me. He was certain that this was an underhanded thing I was doing, which was absolutely not true. And he threw me, one of his favorite students, out of all my lessons and classes for the last six weeks of the year, and asked at least one judge to flunk me on my final exam as a personal favor to him. [This person] refused and said, "I'm sorry, Harold, but the boy plays too well; I can't do that." We didn't speak for 31 years after this happened, until the Tabuteau concerts at Curtis in 1979. In retrospect, after *many* years went by, it occurred to me that maybe Harold Gomberg did me a big favor. By throwing me out, he made it possible, one, for me to go to Curtis and study with the person who had taught him; and, two, to be able to stay on good terms with

Marcel Tabuteau. I have no idea if this is true, but it occurred to me this is a possibility. He was not a stupid man.

So, then I went to Curtis. Tabuteau said, "Well, you'll be here one or two years." I ended up being there for three years. One of the reasons was because I got very, very handy at reed making, to such an extent that not only was I making reeds for him for Casals Festivals, I was making reeds for him in the orchestra. My last year in Curtis, which was 1950-51, I made every reed he played on for the first eleven weeks of the season.

I don't want to take too much credit for this. This was his brains and my brawn. He'd come up with a hot gouge. It was so fine, anybody who couldn't make a hot reed on this gouge deserved to be shot. Then, in the eleventh week, some of the reeds were loose on the sides. Tabuteau immediately accused me, as would be his wont, of having tampered with the gouge. So, I said, "Maestro, I wouldn't dream of doing anything like that. In the third week of the season, when things were really going great, I took it upon myself to very carefully select 18 pieces of cane and gouge them, and they are in a cigarette box. (He used to buy Richmond Straight Cut cigarettes, and they came in a little cardboard box, just the right size to put oboe cane in.) There's a label on it, it's dated, and it's in the left rear corner of the top drawer of your desk." By which time he had his coat on, and we were on the way to the studio, immediately! We got there, he pulled the drawer open, and there, in the left rear corner of the top drawer was this little cardboard box, with a label put on by me, with the date on it, this wonderful gouge from machine number two. He said, "Good for you! Tie me six reeds." I tied six reeds for him. Five of them were loose on the sides. There's such a message to oboe players there you cannot believe. Because when I gouged them, the sides were tight. And for the fourth and fifth and sixth and seventh and eighth and ninth and tenth weeks afterwards, the sides were tight. It was only in the eleventh week that some reeds showed up with loose sides. And we went back to the third week, when it was fine, and we got reeds with loose sides. Which means that it was sunspots, or it's this or it's that - who knows?! But Tabuteau was *thrilled*. Back to work! And I thought: Madame Tabuteau has probably been going *crazy* all these eleven weeks. He's been at home all the time!

I never forget saying to him once in a lesson when he was playing on this big sumptuous reed, "Are you going to play the concert on that tonight?" He *laughed* at me. I said, "Why not?" He marched up to me, stuck his face in my face, and spoke to me "man to man," saying, "Mack. If I play out, he asks for more. If I don't play out, he shushes the strings. What would you do if you were in my shoes?" What a thought. However, the man played *full size*.

JB: Earlier, you said that Lifschey supported your studying with Tabuteau.

JM: Oh, he was *thrilled*. I called him when I was ostracized by Gomberg and I had been accepted to Curtis. He said, "Oh, Johnny, how wonderful, you're going to get to go to Curtis!" I said, "I haven't been able to eat for two days, I can't see straight. Harold Gomberg has just dismissed me out of hand." He said, "Well, Johnny, I'm sorry that you have to go through that, but you're absolutely doing the right thing. If anybody has the chance to study with Marcel Tabuteau at The Curtis Institute, you'd be crazy to turn a thing like that down, no matter what." I was so fortunate that when I went to Curtis, Tabuteau immediately invited me to work in the studio for him, which was not a bed of roses. I mean, he would scream and holler at you for anything, as he did to all his students.

JB: Is there something more you want to talk about regarding Gillet or Tabuteau before he came to this country – his teachers, his background?

JM: I have a lot to say about that. Tabuteau came to this country at the age of 18, in 1905. Damrosch would go to Europe and tell these young, hotsy-totsy players that the streets were paved with gold or whatever and they would come over here and play for 35 bucks a week or whatever, which was probably not too bad at that time.

JB: My grandparents came through Ellis Island. The renovated facility is quite spectacular. There are wonderful displays about immigrants, one of which reminds me of your "streets paved with gold" statement. There's a quote from an Italian immigrant: "In Italy, they said the streets in America are paved with gold. When I came to America, I found that not only are the streets not paved with gold, they're not even paved; and they expected *me* to pave them!"

JM: Right! (Laughs)

JB: In a sense, is that like Tabuteau? Did he "pave the streets with gold"?

JM: Well, he ended up doing it, that's for sure. He played English horn for three years and then he got the first oboe job in the Metropolitan Opera. Played there for seven years, under Mahler, and then Toscanini. Toscanini used to really get on Tabuteau some bit. Tabuteau, in a moment of frustration, finally said, "Maestro, with all these [blankety-blanks] around you, why are you always after me?" And Toscanini said, "Because, Tabuteau, from you I can get what I want!" It's a great story; I hope it's true.

Now, I have to go back in time, to something that happened in Juilliard when I was in my first year there. There was a Professor Jacobi who was doing a class for accompanying or conducting and so he needed some musicians. I offered my services. We played the Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* for violin and viola with this little bare bones orchestra. At some point or other during the rehearsal, Professor Jacobi says to me, "Young man, I'd like to speak to you after we're done." When class was over, people were leaving, packing up and so forth; I went over to speak with him. He said, "I want to ask you something. Did you ever study with Marcel Tabuteau?" I said, "Yes, sir, I did." He said, "Aha, I thought so. I want to tell you something about your teacher. I was at the Met when he first came there, and he sounded pretty much like every other French oboe player at that time. But not for long." And I thought: well, of course, how *could* he? Somebody with the raging imagination of Marcel Tabuteau, in a melting pot like the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, where you had musicians from every land, mostly European...

JB: You mentioned a German English horn player.

JM: There was a German English horn player with a very beautiful, dark tone that Tabuteau admired greatly. How could you sit there and play French or German opera, Wagner, Italian or Russian opera and the like with conductors from different lands and be mindless of the fact that this music was all different, and needed to be treated in a fashion that was suitable for the music *itself*? It is only my conjecture that Tabuteau could not sit still with that. A burr had been put under *his* saddle, and so he ended up making the oboe in this country more international, a

more all-encompassing instrument than it had been before. Many people would play the way they had been taught in their native land and be mindless of all these other things.

For example, Marcel Moyse was inflamed by what singers could do that the flute couldn't, and that drove him to try to expand the expressive capabilities of the flute. Therefore, as he told us in Marlboro, when he was playing in the Paris Opera way-way-way-way way back, after rehearsal was over and people left, he would go up on the stage and play arias on the flute and try to be as expressive as the singers he had just heard. As he would readily admit, he never *could* be, but he *tried*. He was very inflamed by that. Tabuteau was inflamed by wanting to expand the capabilities of the oboe. He was so attracted by what string instruments could do with bow speed, pressure, and this and that.

I think that all of us who ever studied with him or people who heard him were all beneficiaries of his crusade to try to make the oboe a less chauvinistic instrument, a less Johnny-one-note type thing. I would certainly want myself to be able to be a fine Mozart player, a fine Bruckner player, a fine Mahler player, a fine Beethoven player, a fine Brahms player, a fine Rimsky-Korsakov player, and play them all in the way that is fitting for their music. And I certainly try to instill that in my students. I think that Tabuteau and Moyse had those qualities in common: driven by outside forces, they were desperately striving to increase the expressive or tonal capabilities of their instruments.

During my last year in Curtis, Tabuteau said to me in the studio, "Mack! I am bored with teaching!" I said, "Maestro, I can't believe you." "Well, believe me or not, I tell you I am bored with teaching!" And I thought: well, I hope that never happens to me. Nor has it, nor would it ever. But, I can understand. In his last days in the orchestra, Tabuteau's playing became rather dispirited compared to what it had always been before. I think the fact that he had had so much to offer — it was so high-octane, he did that for so long — I think it sort of wore him out in a way. The only thing that really revived his spirits completely after that, besides playing with Casals, happened in the last year of his life, in 1965. He passed away early January, 1966. Wayne Rapiere was studying with him in Nice. Tabuteau had always been complaining about how he hated records because they never sounded like him. His

nuance was not there. And it's absolutely true. Wayne Rapier bought him a Sony stereo tape recorder, and Tabuteau was rejuvenated like you couldn't believe. When I saw him, he was like a kid with a new toy. I was on tour with Marlboro, on my way to The Cleveland Orchestra; I had already been hired. We did two concerts in Menton, which is the last, most easterly French town on the Riviera just before Italy, even east of Monaco. Tabuteau was living in Nice, which is west of Monaco, so I went to visit him. Tabuteau was so excited about my playing – which I couldn't really understand at the time, because I didn't feel I was really playing that well – but he hadn't heard me play for twelve years, and lots and lots of stuff had happened during those years. My left arm was black and blue. "Say, Mack! What do you think about that?!" [JM pantomimes Tabuteau hitting him on the arm.] An old man, going on 79, talking about all this stuff that he was doing for this recording. It is great that it is widely available now. I found it so amusing to hear him say [in Tabuteau voice], "My dear young friends, today I'm going to dis-couse articulation." I thought: we never heard this man sound so ameliorative, so friendly. Instead of "My dear young friends," we got: "Stu-peed, for Lord's sake, what's the matter with you?" Screaming and hollering at us. None of which I resent. I know lots of people who do resent it, who would say that they would never forgive him for that. But I think: no. I forgave him for everything many years ago. He did so much to and for me.

JB: Please say more about Tabuteau "live" and hearing his playing on recordings.

JM: Live? Unbelievable. The man could twist your guts like you can't believe. I'll give you an example. I had season tickets to the ten Tuesday night concerts at Carnegie Hall, since I was in tenth grade. I kept them for years. When I couldn't go anymore, my father did, for the rest of his days. I'll never forget the time I was sitting in the front row of the balcony; had a choice seat there. They were doing some Bach transcription by (ahem) Ormandy. [He obliquely suggested that Ormandy did not actually do all the work.] At any rate, the oboe came in and played five notes. And I heard this rustle in the hall. I looked around and everybody had sat up in their chairs. He could *do* that. He could command your attention with a few notes, absolutely like being slapped across the face. He was quite something, a genius in his own way. I don't agree with everything he did by any matter of means. But I will just

tell you that he could *arrest* you; he could arrest your attention in such a fashion that would just stop you *in your tracks*.

His true sound does not come across on recordings. They were just pieces of him. The recordings captured, I would say, perhaps 60% of what he had when you heard him in person. The rest was gone; it just wasn't there. He *hated* to make records, and that was the reason. He heard the playback and thought: that's not what I'm doing. There's a moment now and then. I would say that of the available recordings the one that probably sounds more like Tabuteau and gives you more of an idea of his playing than any other is the Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante*, with Mason Jones playing horn, Sol Schoenbach playing bassoon – with a fast vibrato because he was trying to sound like Walter Guetter who he had replaced; he changed all that later – and Bernard Portnoy playing clarinet. That sounds more like "him" than any other recording I've heard.

But when he got the tape recorder, he was rejuvenated. Several years after he died, my wife and I went to visit Madame Tabuteau after she moved back to Toulon, where they used to live before they moved to Nice. She played the whole recording for me. Madame Tabuteau was really upset when Tabuteau said [in Tabuteau voice]: "I'm going to show you how I prepare for my audition for Saint Peter!" She said, "I don't like that, I don't want that to be in there." I said, "Madame Tabuteau, I've heard your husband say that *so many times*, I don't think you have the right to delete that from this recording. This is your husband speaking." So, she finally decided not to. I was very pleased that she decided to allow that to remain in there.

But, he was always upset about the recordings, and I don't blame him. Recording techniques have advanced incredibly. All I can say is that if they had had the recording capabilities in those days that we have now, people would never say, "What's the big deal about Marcel Tabuteau? You sound a lot better than him." And I say, uh-*unh!* You weren't there; I was *there*. You can't tell me; I can tell you. If you had heard him in person, you would know what we're talking about. He could make a note do the loop-the-loop, play in such a fashion... Believe me, I've never heard an oboe player in my life that could play with such an incredible range of color on the oboe with the same reed as Marcel Tabuteau, by far. As Sol Schoenbach said: when Tabuteau played something, he could make it sound so right

that you couldn't accept it any other way than that. Which, of course, is exactly what I try to do myself. Now, the purpose here is not to talk about *me*, but one of the happiest things I ever hear from my colleagues in The Cleveland Orchestra is, "When you play it, it sounds *right*." And I think: that's what I want, desperately. I want it to sound absolutely right. I don't want it to sound like anybody's playing games, or doing anything wacko. It has to sound right on the money.

I know my teacher did not like to play recitals, didn't like to play chamber music, didn't like to play concerti. He only really felt comfortable and happy when he was sitting in his chair in the orchestra. I remember I was there when he played the Hanson *Pastorale* in the world premiere. He was not happy at all. He didn't like being up there. He was like a fish out of water. Once when I was in Curtis, he performed the Mozart Oboe Quartet for the Women's Committee at a luncheon and never told us about it.

Later, I thought to myself: wait a minute. This is not so hot! If you're a teacher, your students are going to be enlivened by what their teacher does, as much if not more so than by what he says. OK, fine. In that case, I'll play a recital every year, I'll do this, I'll do that, blah-blah-blah, I'll take my chances. I've done it for many, many years. So far, I'm not doing too badly. Students may disagree with me from what they've been told, but I'm relatively persuasive.

JB: Is there a corollary here to when people listen to recordings of great opera performers from the past, such as Caruso? That the recordings don't do them justice?

JM: You *weren't there*. Since you mentioned Caruso, and considering some of the great singers of yesteryear – people who heard them *live* were driven crazy by their singing. We must not dishonor them by saying, "Oh, well, that's not the way it sounds to me when I hear this record." You *weren't there*. Almost everyone who was there is probably gone, but they were there, and they heard it. They heard all these great singers like Galla Curci that took them to tears. And we have to honor that.

JB: You mentioned that Tabuteau "played *all* the time. He demonstrated for his students when the words ran out."

JM: Right, sure. He played a *lot*. His command of the English language was just fine, although some words came out [incorrectly]. Amplifier was "am-PLÉE-fer," splendidly was "SPLAN-dig-lee." And if he couldn't persuade you with his words, he would grab the oboe so fast you can't believe and play it for you. I am one of those, as a teacher, who plays all the time. I know people who don't play for their students, and I ask them, "Why don't you play for them?" And they say, "Well, my teacher didn't play for me." And I say, "So what?" Play for your students.

JB: "Marcel Tabuteau pressed you down like a spring to see how you would respond."

JM: That's right. He would compress you and compress you and compress you. It was almost like [he was trying] to find out what kind of metal you're constructed of. If I press you down flat, do you have the resilience to spring back up? He was like that. He would pursue you. I'll never forget what Earnie Harrison said about the ten lessons he had with Tabuteau when he was in the service, after he had been at the Eastman School. Tabuteau beat the bejeebers out of him. At some point or another when he was looking, I'm sure, very woebegone, Tabuteau comes over to him and throws his arm around his shoulders and says to him, "Young man! If you can't take it from me, how do you expect to be able to take it from a con-dooc-TOR?" And, of course, you have to understand that in those earlier days, conductors could be podium tyrants beyond description, with the right to hire and fire at will, and many of them *did* that, even if only to jolly themselves or to prove to themselves that they had this power. I think Tabuteau was absolutely right about that. He got to me, really bad, on several occasions. All I can tell you is that I am eternally grateful to him for having beat up on me the way he did because no conductor has ever been able to get to me.

The janitor at Curtis was named Bob, and his office was in the basement. He was a lovely African-American man, with one brown eye and one blue eye. He would console us before and after our lessons. He was our touchstone. Often, we were in the throes of misery. Oh, my God: the hangman's waiting! Time to go upstairs for your lesson. I remember one time Larry Thorstenburg came down after his lesson and he was hopping up and down. "He told me my reeds were too short, my reeds were too short!" He actually *told* him something!

I guess one of my finest moments was after I played the D minor fast Ferling. Lou Rosenblatt had the lesson after me, and I'm sitting down at Bob's decompressing (groans) and then Luige ["Loo-Eege," JM's nickname for Rosenblatt] comes bouncing down and says, "Oh, Jack! You must have really done great." And I said, "What?" "Tabuteau was talking about how you played the D minor fast Ferling." "He was?" "Yes! He was all excited." I thought: Hah! How about that?

In my first year in Curtis, Tabuteau was working on a piece for wind class, the name of which I can't recall. At some point in the rehearsal, he took the score of this piece and threw it over his shoulder. "I can't stand this piece, I don't want to do it. Does anybody have any suggestions?" So, my hand went up right away. He wouldn't even look at me. He went through everybody until there was only one hand in the air – it was *mine*. "All right, Mack. What?" And I said, "The *Concertante*." He said, "Ehhh?" And I said, "The Mozart *Sinfonia Concertante* for winds." And he said, "All right. We'll read that next week. And, Mack, because you suggested it, I will let you play the first rehearsal." I thought: the first rehearsal? Over my dead body! Nobody else but me played it for the rest of the term until it got performed. John de Lancie was at the performance, and he came up to me after and asked, "Where are you going next year?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, you're going out; you play like that, you're going out." And I said, "Unh-unh [no]. I'm not ready to go out." But, "playing like that" – it was very exciting.

I had a terrible scene with Tabuteau with that piece. In the cadenza at the end of the first movement (sings first statement): "bee duh duh DUH duh dum, bee duh duh DUH duh dum." He got on my case every time I played that. "Mais non! Stu-peed!" Kept screaming – even to the dress rehearsal, he was screaming at me. And I thought to myself: this is ridiculous. I'm looking at the ceiling, and it's going back and forth like this (waves arms back and forth)! "Play it again!" The bassoon player, Kasow, was playing [the answering phrase] bee uh-*bah-BUM!* Rushing. He was doing some "arty" thing, you know. But *I* was the one who was getting hell from Tabuteau. And then, all of a sudden Tabuteau realized it. "You know, Monsieur Kasow, I like what you are doing, but maybe if you just played it in time it would be OK." So that was the end of that. Then everything was smooth, no more problem. It had not been me, it had been the bassoon player, but that's not the way it appeared to Tabuteau. And if Tabuteau was after you, he

would not stop. That was one time I got it really bad from him. I thought the world was coming to an end, or something like that. All of a sudden, the clouds parted, the skies were blue, we played the piece, and everything was wonderful. Tabuteau never much gave me the time of day as him having any high regard for me as an oboe player until the last time he heard me. Then, everything changed completely.

In any case, at the year's end recitals – the famous recitals at the Curtis Institute of the combined string and wind classes – for some reason or other, I always got the big pieces to play. I got to play the *Concertante*, the Bach Double Concerto my second year to help him prepare himself for playing it in Europe, the Mozart Quintet for Piano and Winds, and lots of other things. One of the happiest things I ever heard was that Alvin Swiney, going through Hans Moennig's papers, came across a note from Moennig saying: "John Mack, Marcel Tabuteau's most talented student."

JB: Working with Tabuteau in the studio: how did this come about?

JM: I was handy with my mitts! He knew that I was sort of capable with stuff like that, so he wanted me to do it. I can tell you stories just so you might have an idea of some of the difficulties of working with that man. He used to bring six oboes back [to Philadelphia] with him every year [from France]. I remember going to Moennig's the day before [Tabuteau] got back, and Moennig saying, "That son-of-a-bitch is going to show up with six oboes, and he's going to think that I'm going to fix them up for him. Well, he's wrong this time!" So, I go back the next day, and there's Tabuteau, saying [in voice], "My dear Moennig, what would I do without you?" And Moennig saying, "Yes, Maestro. Yes, Marcel." (Laughs)

Something happened during the war. Tabuteau was having a great deal of problems with his oboe; it was changeable from day to day. He and Moennig, between them, decided to take a terrible risk. Moennig drilled out the top maybe two or three inches of the bore, replaced it with hard rubber, and re-bored it so that it would *not change*. And Tabuteau got through until after the war on this oboe that Moennig altered. The bore in the top joint is *incredibly* important, especially as it's that small. Most people don't have a clear idea how weensy the bore of the oboe is at the top. It is less than an eighth of an inch in size. It's a

conical bore and there are little things that can happen that can drive you crazy. I remember getting an oboe from Lorée in 1993. I called Alain, and said, "The high register is *flat*. I've made measurements of this, and I think it's too small." He said, "Well, send it to me." I sent it to him, got it back six days later, and the high register was fine. Tabuteau didn't know that much about how all those things worked, but he knew if something wasn't the way it should be.

From my personal standpoint, I realize how important it is for the high register to be in place on the oboe. In order for the high register to be in place, it has to be in place on the instrument. High A, B-flat, and B more or less should be virtually the same as the harmonic fingerings for those notes. And then, the high register has to be in place *with the reed*, which means gouge, shape, and scraping. Anybody who doesn't keep their high register in place is going to be doomed to early "whatever," for sure. I'm not going to bother anybody by mentioning any names of people whose careers started to collapse when they lost their high register. This is absolutely so, as far as I'm concerned. What Moennig did for Tabuteau in this instance was to stabilize the top of the bore of the oboe so that Tabuteau was able to play without having this changeable business from day to day, which can happen on the oboe.

Tabuteau's studio was on the fourth floor, the top floor, of the Ludlow Building on 16th Street, not too far below Market. A lovely building, and so romantic to those of us who were there. I remember once going there in the dead of winter when it was *really* cold. The person we referred to as "Old John" — who was about 93 and operated the elevator — took me up to the fourth floor. I could hear the oboe grinding away, and it's about a quarter of a tone flat. Tabuteau had this door with a frosted pane of glass in it. He had a key, I had a key, Old John had a key, nobody else. I go up and rap on the window. "Who is it?" "Mack." "Come in!" I came in, and there's Tabuteau sitting on this circular wooden stool, playing away like mad. He's got his vicuna coat on, his scarf wrapped around his neck, he's got his hat on, he's playing away, he's got snot coming out of one nostril all the way to the floor, and he says to me [in voice], "Tell that SOB to give us some heat, for Lord's sake!" (Laughs) I mean: the man was driven by demons. It was cold, he was freezing to death, but he's playing away like mad.

I guess I got pretty good at doing things. He did things to challenge me, one of which I'll never forget. Tabuteau was terribly interested in the bells. One time he sent me out in the hall beyond the frosted pane of glass with the door closed to listen to him play on the same oboe with three different bells and come back in and describe them to him afterwards. He could get testy very easily, so easily bored, you can't believe. If you used the same terminology too much, he just - mmm-hmmm. Then, he sent me back out while he changed the order of the bells. I'm thinking: "I'm gonna lose. There's nothing I can do. I'm gonna get killed dead." Which I did.

If I think about my distress and about Tabuteau's incessant search for something, I know he wasn't trying to play games with me. He wanted to get feedback from somebody whose ears he thought had something to offer. He was going to do this: he's going to drive me crazy, maybe I'll drive *him* crazy, he's going to do it anyway (laughs), and I'm the one who is gonna get dumped on, so OK-fine. (Laughs) The man had such drive. Even in his 60s, he would work untiringly, especially on the gouge, because to him the gouge was the Holy Grail. In a way, I have to say, he was right. I remember saying to him one time, "Maestro, if someone gave you twelve pieces of the best cane in the world, what would you do?" He said, "I wouldn't touch it." "Why not?" "I don't have that. I have *this*. (A big container of cane in the middle of the studio floor.) I will work on the gouge until I get something that makes that cane go." That's what he believed, and he strove for that. I can't tell you the countless hours we spent together, working on gouging machines. Me, down on my knees turning the wheel for the grindstone, while he would re-grind something and finish it by hand. Then he would gouge cane, chop the ends off, look at it, and then say [in voice], "Mack! Look at this beautiful gouge!" "Oh, Maestro, it looks really good." He would make a reed out of it, and ten minutes later [in voice], "Son of a bitch!" and go like this (blade smashed against the wall) and then I'm back down on the floor, grinding away again! (Laughs)

He would go and go. I have to tell you this story because it's so sweet, and happened so many times. "Mack! Tell me when it's six o'clock. Madame Tabuteau is waiting for me!" Later: "Maestro, it's six o'clock." "Yes, I'm coming." And, of course, he wouldn't stop. "Maestro, it's 6:30." "Yes, yes; I'm coming." "Maestro, it's 7:00." "Yes. Madame Tabuteau is going to give me hell, and she's right." And he

wouldn't stop. Finally, at 7:45, we would leave. And we would head back to the Drake Hotel, and he would say, "Mack! I want you to come up to have a drink with me!" (Laughs)

JB: Protection!

JM: Right, right! We would get up there, and he would take the key, pound on the door, put the key in and say in a loud voice, "C'est moi. Mack is with me!" (Laughs) Which meant she couldn't give him holy hell while I'm there.

JB: Postponing the inevitable?

JM: He would wait until she would quiet down. She realized how much this meant to him. I remember one time we got back and I made his scotch and soda and mine, but we didn't touch it, because he decided he wanted to play some more. Out comes the oboe, and he's playing away like a mad man. Madame Tabuteau, whom I adored, popped her head out of the kitchenette. As Tabuteau said, "I taught her to boil water!" (Laughs) She says, with this sparkly look, "How he does love that licorice stick." Even though she wanted to scold him, he knew perfectly well that if he could keep me around long enough, that she would calm down. And as soon as she calmed down, I was out of there! (Laughs) Bye bye!

The man was absolutely obsessed. What drive. My father also had remarkable drive. I remember one time in a lesson at the Cleveland Institute many years ago, in a moment of high frustration I said, "I wish I had my father's drive." And my student laughed hysterically. "Are you kidding? Come on!" Tabuteau was driven by demons on his holy search for the hot gouge. I can't find fault with him about that, because when he got a hot one, it was so hot you couldn't believe. He would find a way; keep working until he got a gouge that would make "that drum of cane" work.

JB: Your student laughed. If Marcel Tabuteau was obsessed, what about you?

JM: I'm obsessed in many ways, but not in the same ways as my teacher for any number of reasons. I'm very different from my teacher in many ways – very much so in teaching, articulation, and attitudes towards my students. Tabuteau did *not* help his students with reeds. Tabuteau was against giving up hard-won information easily, because he felt that if he did that, its true value would never be *truly*

appreciated, and he was absolutely right. But, as far as I'm concerned, I don't accept that. I tell them everything I can all the time. Tabuteau's attitude towards his students who might teach [is reflected in something] he said to me once: "The purpose of a teacher should be to teach a student to become their own teacher." I thought: well, OK. I found that so scary, I couldn't see straight. But, then, I've been my own teacher for several decades already. When I studied, performed, and recorded the Britten *Metamorphoses*, I studied them with me! I didn't study them with anybody else. I think he felt that of all the students that Georges Gillet had, he was the one that ended up being a great teacher. So, he would just teach, and figure if one of his students ends up being a great teacher, fine. He didn't care. I want them all to be great teachers. I want them all to grasp everything that they know so seriously and severely that they could be effective teachers and teach their students to teach beyond them as well. And Tabuteau didn't particularly seem to care about that. I find that a great fault of his. I admire him, I adored him in many ways, but as great a teacher as he was, I think he could have done a much better job if he had not been so concerned with preserving himself. Why not share everything you know with your students? I'm not worried that some student of mine is going to challenge me. I don't care. He said to me once that perhaps a student should have a good and a bad teacher just for perspective.

One of Laila's [Storch] favorite Tabuteau stories was when we were in the studio with Tabuteau, and I made so bold as to proffer a musical opinion. At which point Tabuteau, in mock fury, said, "I want it clearly understood that in *this* studio, it is strictly *one way traf-feec!*" *His way*, you know. That didn't bother me. And why shouldn't he feel that way? And yet, at the same time, I think that in this day and age, one should give everything they can to their students, no matter what.

JB: Laila is writing a book about Marcel Tabuteau. [Note: this interview took place well before Storch's book was published.]

JM: Laila is a great researcher. She speaks French well enough to be described by French people as speaking like a French person. As I've said, Madame Tabuteau taught French at Curtis and so all oboe students were expected to study French with her. This had some dangers to it, because if she would say to her husband, "I don't think so-and-so has

a very good ear for the language," then you were in trouble with *him*. Laila is such a wonderful person and she is so devoted. Not that she always got the best treatment from Marcel Tabuteau; she got beat up on a fair amount, too. She was very close to the Tabuteaus – he would send her shopping and so forth and so on – but any time you did anything for Marcel Tabuteau you could be in a certain degree of peril. While he was very devoted to her, he didn't always treat her in a kindly fashion; this happened to be his way.

JB: You have often told a charming story about Tabuteau in the restaurant, applesauce, and coffee.

JM: Right down the street from Tabuteau's studio in the Ludlow building on the corner of 16th and Chestnut, there was a Horn and Hardart [restaurant] where we would go for lunch. They had the best coffee in town, these magnificent grilled cheese sandwiches, and this wonderful applesauce that was cooked enough so that it was getting dark, maybe a little reddish. Tabuteau would always order the same thing [in Tabuteau voice, dramatic]: "Grilled cheese sandwich, applesauce, and coffee!" On occasion, it would get interesting when there would be a new waitress who didn't know what he was saying. I remember one time there was a young lady, probably on her first day at work, and he said: [same food order in very heavy accent]. She said to me, "What would you like?" I said, "I'd like a grilled cheese sandwich, applesauce, and coffee." She walked away and leaned against the wall, looking very distressed. I thought: I have to take care of this. I went over to her and said, "Young lady. This gentleman I'm with. No matter *what* it sounds like, all you have to do is bring him a grilled cheese sandwich, applesauce, and coffee and he will be happy."

I remember another time when a waitress knew who he was. "Hello, Mr. Ta-BOO-toe! I suppose you want the *usual*." He didn't care for that too much. "Yes, yes..." [very disgruntled]. One time we went in there and I guess he'd had some problems with a couple of new waitresses who didn't understand his *patois*. This waitress said, "What would you like, sir?" And he says, magnanimously gesturing to me, "Mack!" So I said, "Well, I think I'd like to have a grilled cheese sandwich, applesauce, and coffee." (To Tabuteau) "And you, sir?" And he said, with a big smile on his face, "Same!" (Chuckles) It was a great combination! People put cheese on apple pie, and this and that and so

forth. A grilled cheese sandwich, especially like they made it at Horn and Hardart's, their wonderful applesauce, and their wonderful coffee – it was a perfect combination. That's what he had all the time. When he found something that was good, why stray? I could have wreaked havoc that day. "Mack! What do you want?" "Well, how about a tuna fish sandwich..." (Laughs)

JB: Anything more about Laila's book?

JM: Laila kept everything in what she calls her "archives." While she was in Curtis she used to write to her mother endlessly about everything. She probably wrote every other day or something like that, and her mom kept it all. When she thinks back to something that happened or perhaps doubts her memory of it, she can go back in time and find out if her memory served her right or not. I think the perfect example of that is something she wrote for the IDRS, "Our Dinner with Toscanini." She went back to see what she'd written to her mother immediately following the incident and found out that some things were rather different than she had remembered them. But that happens to us all. She's a great writer. She's very passionate about all these things, such as the articles she's written about Gillet and Lorée, and the article that she wrote with a lot of help from DeLancie about Marcel Tabuteau's penchant for gambling. I can hardly wait for the book to come out. I hope that she has a chance to make it as complete as she would like to make it.

Here's another little insight into Laila Storch. When we were playing the Casals Festival in Prades, she learned Catalan in order to be able to speak to the natives, which is not something that most people would bother to do.

I got holy hell from Madame Tabuteau because I was spending my evenings in the café in Prades with John Wummer and Fernando Valenti, talking with the natives who spoke French in a very "coarse" fashion, in a way Madame Tabuteau could not *stand*. She was from Blois and when she said "Blois" it sounded like a bubble bursting. She came from "Le jardin de France" [the garden of France] where the most pure French was spoken. She was afraid I would come back speaking like the natives, and she would have been [sotto voce] very unhappy with me. But she was wonderful. I learned an awful lot from her. Her teaching French really was an opportunity for her to share some of her philosophies about things with us, her students.

Tabuteau could be a very thorny and difficult person, but had so much to offer that could thrill you. He was a great teacher in many ways, no question about it, and not a great teacher in some other ways. I think a teacher should help their students in any way they can. It may be possible that there are some teachers who can do a terrific job for their students without telling them everything. But, the oboe is a very difficult instrument and so much is involved – not just the instrument and the reeds and all that, but the embouchure and so forth and so on – it's a very, very difficult subject. I think that one should give everything that they possibly can to their students, because some of them aren't going to make it anyway, and you don't know who *is* going to make it. So: give them everything.

JB: You've told me a several times that you've had dreams about Tabuteau.

JM: Oh, sure! One of the forerunners of that is because of all the time I worked for Tabuteau in his studio – at his invitation – and finally rising into the position of making the reeds he played on for three Casals Festivals and eleven weeks of the last season I was in Curtis. So, he had to tell me lots of stuff. As I said before, Marcel Tabuteau – and I find this a great fault with him – did not help his students with reeds. I thought, that's not fair. They're your *children!* "If your child asks you for bread wilt thou give him a stone?" That's what it says in the Good Book, and it's perfectly right. So, I've been "spilling the beans." He threatened to come back from the grave like an Egyptian curse to haunt me if I so much as showed a piece of gouged cane, or, even worse, a reed to anybody. Well, he died in early January, 1966. He has visited me in dreams at least a half a dozen times since. I am pleased to report that I've always received approbation from him. He's never scolded me whatsoever. I remember one special dream from maybe twenty years ago where I was in front of this orchestra. I suppose we could call it the "St. Peter's Orchestra." I look back there in the oboe section, and there's Marcel Tabuteau and my *father!* I thought: I *like* this! Over all these years, when Tabuteau would say, "Keep this for yourself, never share with anybody. If you do that, maybe some day you might get to play second oboe in the Philadelphia Orchestra."

Nevertheless, at some point in time I decided it's better to spill all the beans, hope that some falls on fertile

territory. Don't play the game of keeping information from anyone so that I'll be better than you, which is what it appeared to me to be.

JB: Wasn't that the way of the world in the days of apprenticeships, when information was very carefully protected?

JM: Maybe so. Laila Storch spoke with some of the tiple [oboe-like instruments] players when we were at the Casals Festival. She went up to one of the players and said, "I'll show you *my* reeds if you'll show me *your* reeds." He said, "I don't show my reeds to *anybody!*" (Laughter!) Ah-HAH!

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JB: What were your first professional experiences as an oboe player?

JM: Well, I suppose it wasn't professional, because I wasn't getting paid. I was in the eleventh grade. I played the "duck" from the Prokofiev *Peter and the Wolf*, sitting in the third row of the center section in Carnegie Hall. Leon Barzin was conducting the National Orchestral Association. He said, "Now, the bird is portrayed by the flute." So, a flute player up in the second balcony played (sings opening of flute solo). Then he said, "And the duck is portrayed by the oboe." So, I whip out my reed, stick it in the oboe and I start playing (sings solo). People around me are looking at me like: Mmm. So, I guess that was my first exposed public performance.

I also performed with the NOA while I was in Juilliard. I don't remember if I played with them all three years I was there, but very possibly so. We were giving concerts in Carnegie Hall, which was very exciting. One of the more exciting moments was when someone was playing the Brahms Second Piano Concerto with us. We rehearsed in the afternoon, went out to eat, and when we came back, Ray Still, who was playing that piece, discovered that someone had come in and removed his oboe from the case. Left the case, took the oboe. We all offered him our instruments; he declined. He said, "Johnny, you play." I thought: woo. This was *big time stuff!* Brahms Second Piano Concerto! But, I had not rehearsed it. There are lots of little ditties for the oboe in there, not to mention the theme from the last movement (sings), which is a real killer. I had a sort of special experience happen to me just as we were about to play. I was thinking about how worried should I be. Then I thought: well, gosh. If you had to deliver an address in Carnegie Hall and you were buck naked, wouldn't do you any good to retreat to the back of the stage. May as well go ahead and let it rip. So I did. I let it rip and I had, I must admit, a grand success, to my great amazement. I hadn't rehearsed the piece. That was very scary.

Even before that happened, during my first year in Juilliard, there had been a quintet at Tanglewood the previous summer. They were all students at Juilliard, with the exception of the oboe player, who was a student at the New England Conservatory. They invited me to join them, and we founded the New York Woodwind Quintet at that time. I

don't remember if we ever got paying jobs, but we played a lot of freebie concerts in libraries and the like and usually rehearsed about four hours every Saturday afternoon. So, I was learning lots of repertoire. We were very open in our rehearsals, criticizing what someone was doing if it didn't seem fitting and proper. As all oboe players know, playing quintets is not the easiest thing in the world. You have to sneak around the low register and not upset the apple cart, whether it is the flute or the clarinet above you, and that can be tough. It was a very illuminating experience learning a lot of the standard repertoire, including the Andraud "red book," Reicha, and Danzi.

In the New Orleans Symphony, the principal winds would give a quintet concert at least once a year, sponsored by the Women's Committee. I think they paid us something or other for it, not much, but we really wanted to play. The first time I played the *Summermusic* was down there in New Orleans in the 1950s. Then I played Casals Festivals with Tabuteau. I talk a lot to my students about the experiences that I had when I was a young pro, or when I was a student before I was a pro.

JB: Do you want to talk a little bit about the Casals Festival in general? You've mentioned the recordings a number of times and that Tabuteau was "putty in the hands of Casals."

JM: At the end of my second year at Curtis [1950], Tabuteau invited me to go with him to play the first Bach Casals Festival. Alexander Schneider was the one who persuaded Casals to come out of his self-imposed exile or retirement for a festival on the 200th anniversary of the death of his dearly beloved J. S. Bach. Tabuteau took Laila Storch along to play second oboe, and took me to play third oboe in the first Brandenburg and assistant to him in everything else, including the Bach Double Concerto with Isaac Stern. So, the low E-flat: that's me. Tuttis: that's all me. Some years after this when I would listen to these Casals recordings again and again and again, and I knew every note that Tabuteau played and I knew every note that I played, I thought: this is very interesting. When Tabuteau plays, his tone sounds like wine, and mine sounds like fruit juice! (Laughs) Not yet fermented! It's been fermented for a long time now, but it was not fermented at that time whatsoever.

At any rate, he invited me to do that. Obviously, he had some regard for me, despite the fact that you would never know it in lessons, whatsoever.

Casals was a mountain. He swept everything along with him. And although my teacher frequently disagreed with his tempi, he could hardly wait to get back to Curtis and do some of those pieces back there, and he *never* could take a different tempo than what Casals had taken. That was how strong *his* [Casals] influence was. It was a *major* learning experience for me to play with Pablo Casals, something I could never possibly forget.

Tabuteau was a real tough cookie, no question about that. Very opinionated, very strong, very accustomed to having his way. But, when Casals would say, "No, no – I want it like this," everybody would do it. And it was like when the flood tide comes: everything goes downstream – cows, chickens, houses, the whole works. That's sort of the way he was.

The first Festival was 1950. Casals was living in the tiny town of Prades in the Pyrenees Orientales, south of Perpignan. Maybe I should interrupt myself for a moment to tell you that Casals was a Catalan. Catalonia couldn't hold itself together as a nation and finally got divvied up by France and Spain. The area where the Catalan live extends from just above Perpignan in France to just below Barcelona in Spain. They still have their own language and national dance, the sardana. I saw it when I first went to Prades. There was a party behind the grand hotel and there was a sardana band. The band was introduced by a man who played a little fife with one hand, and a little tambour drum with the other hand. (Sings a bit of "sardana" music.) And then the dance began. They have four oboe-like instruments that are of main importance. The lead instruments are called "tiple" and they are in the key of F, a fourth above the key of the oboe. Then there are the tenores, which have metal bells on them, pitched in B-flat major if I remember correctly, with a very raucous sound that could take paint off walls *outdoors*. Very, very loud. The reed was short and the top of the instrument was flat, so they would press their mouth directly against the instrument while they played, sort of like the pirouette on a shawm. I remember many, many years later my wife and I made a trip that included Barcelona. We stayed at a hotel down in the old part of town by the cathedral, and we had no sooner got into our room when it started up outside: the sardana,

their national dance. We went outside into the cathedral plaza, and were fascinated by the experience. The dancers formed circles, as few as four, as many as fifteen. There were at least seven circles of people dancing a multi-stepped dance that they must have learned since they were young, because there were kids as little as five and people into their 90s dancing. They were from the poorest to the richest. This dance was their common connection. The women would all pile up their handbags in front of the band, because that was sacred territory. No one would defile anything that was sitting in front of the band. I remember there were brass instruments, also. It was an incredibly lively sounding thing. Casals had written a sardana in A minor which we played back there, and which I played, many years later, up in Marlboro. Somebody said, "You play that with such spirit!" And I said, "I can't help myself! Casals wrote it, my teacher played it, and it's just in my ear." That was very exciting.

There were many famous Catalan artists: Picasso, Monsterrat Caballe, Gaudi who built that incredible futuristic church in Barcelona, the Sagrada Familia. We heard a lot about Catalans when the Olympics were in Barcelona. Though they will never likely manage to become one nation again, they will never abandon their culture.

JB: A strong, deep, rich culture; very artistic. And Casals had his roots there?

JM: Casals was at the most cultured end of that continuum. The man could speak, I think, eight languages. I remember when I first went there, I became very close friends immediately with John Wummer, who was the first flute player of the NY Philharmonic, and Fernando Valenti, the harpsichordist, who always looked at least eight years older than he was. When I first met him, he was about 23, and he already had grey hair.

I remember Madame Tabuteau had coached me on what to say to Casals, in French, when I met him. We got there before the Festival started, and John Wummer said, "Come on, Jack! Let's go meet Casals." Casals was living in a gatehouse for some large estate. So, we went upstairs and met him, and I said my coached phrase. "Monsieur Casals, enchanté de fer votre é connaissance." And he said (slightly deprecating), "Ahhh! How lovely. You speak French!" (Laughs) Well, that was the end of *that*! Basically, he spoke English in the rehearsals.

I played the Festivals of 1950, 1951, and 1953, which all involved orchestra. After the first Festival, which was a *Bach Casals Festival*, Casals decided that he really did like it out in the sunshine [he had "retired"], so from there on, it was a *Casals Festival*. The second Festival was in Perpignan, a large city down at sea level in the south of France. We played in the courtyard of a 14th-century castle. Other than Casals himself, the two pieces that inflamed the audience most were both G Major concerti by Mozart. One was Stern, playing the Third Violin Concerto, and the other was John Wummer, playing the Flute Concerto.

After that [year], they went back to Prades. The next year they had a chamber music festival, in which I was not involved. And then they had orchestra again in 1953, and I was involved again. It was very exciting times.

Recordings were made through a project funded by Columbia Records. Goddard Lieberman, a fine man and a pretty good amateur clarinet player, was a big artistic force at Columbia, and pretty much told them, "You have to do this." Many years later, Columbia was taken over by a bunch of clerks, where the bottom line was the only thing that counted, but at that time it was an artistic venture.

I remember one little vignette about Tabuteau and a soprano, whose name I won't mention. She was just a Swiss housewife at the time who became quite well known later. They recorded *Liebster Jesu* from Cantata 32. Tabuteau was an old hand at recording. He kept his lines, he never blurted out, he never disappeared, he was always in sight, played with lovely shadings, never did anything grotesque. She was totally new to recording. She would knock the microphone off sometimes, disappear sometimes, so they never did release that, unfortunately. It was a real lesson to me to hear the playback, to hear what the difference was between someone as experienced in this medium as Tabuteau compared to someone who was new to it. I'm sure she took care of all of that later, because she became a very, very famous person.

A break happened for me in 1951. I guess this is my true entry into the profession. I had just graduated from Curtis and gotten married. I had no job for the next year. The Sadler's Wells Ballet Orchestra got some French French horn players and it was not going well, so they hired two well-known American horn players, husband and wife, Weldon

Wilbur – also known as the Wichita Flash – and his wife Kathleen. Both of them had played with several touring groups including Sadler's Wells. They told me, "John, their oboe player is asking for double scale. They're never going to give him that. Here's the name and address of the personnel manager." I wrote him an *impassioned* letter, the substance of which was that you may be making a mistake if you hire anyone before you have an opportunity to hear me play. I got a letter back in record time. "I will not hire anyone until I hear you play." When we came back from France my father picked us up at Idlewild, now JFK, Airport. We drove into Manhattan and stopped for a while so I could practice in the back seat. Then we went to this man's apartment and I must have really looked like a wreck because one of my tear ducts had blocked up. My eye was virtually closed – it looked like I had been punched real bad in the eye. So, I played for the personnel manager. His wife said, "You poor thing, look at you! You need some food. Let me give you something to eat." So the audition stopped, I was fed, then I played some more.

Then, I went down to Brevard, where I had gone to teach when I was 19, to play the festival. My Juilliard roommate, John Gosling, who was our first trumpet player at age 18, had been invited to go down to Brevard, to Transylvania Music Camp, to teach and play. He gets down there, finds out that this gal who was supposed to play oboe had taken ill and he immediately recommended me.

Lo and behold, a week after we got down there, a contract comes in the mail from Sadler's Wells for a six-month tour of the US and Canada. Somebody who I had gone to Juilliard with and had graduated the same year I left was Steve Hewitt, and he was in the orchestra. We roomed together for the whole tour. I remember we were on a street corner in Portland, Oregon, waiting for the bus to take us to the hall, and somebody walked up to him and said, "Hey, Steve! You and Johnny are still rooming together. How is this possible, what with you being crazy and all?" And Steve says, "Well, its very simple. Johnny goes his way and I go his." We got along just fine, and we're still dear friends. Later, when I was in New Orleans, Steve had been playing first oboe in Dallas, and their conductor, Walter Hendl, was driving the orchestra crazy. Half the woodwinds resigned at the end of the year, Steve among them. He got a job working in some chemistry lab or something. Some time during that next year, I called him up and said, "Stevie! Come to New Orleans, play with me again." So he came to New

Orleans. At the same time, I was twisting Lou Rosenblatt's arm; he was playing English horn in Houston at the time. I called him "Louige" because he's from south Philly and he's got a great Italian accent, not to be believed. So, he came. We were the oboe section in New Orleans.

Some time later there was an audition for assistant principal in the Philadelphia Orchestra. Lou was practicing like mad but he did not want me to know about this. Not that I would have gone for it, I just don't know. But he went and he got it. John Minsker, who had become rather dispirited about playing in the orchestra, left four weeks into the season, and Lou Rosenblatt was all of a sudden the English horn player. One of his first, most exciting, ventures was when David Oistrach came and recorded the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the orchestra. They had some time left over in the session. So Ormandy says, "OK, let's do one take of *Swan of Tuonela*." One take, that was it, boom.

JB: That turned out well.

JM: Turned out well is right. I think he probably recorded it at least two more times, but that first time he was certainly thrown into the cauldron. A wonderful, wonderful person. Lou Rosenblatt is the salt of the earth. We started Curtis at the same time. Lou came from a sort of rough background, yet he is as civilized a person as you could possibly find. Somewhere in the second semester of our first year, he came up to me and said, "I want to apologize to you." "Whatever for?" "I hated your guts." "You what? How come?" "You had been studying in New York, and New Yorkers were so pushy and I thought that maybe you were pushy..." and so forth and so on. And I said, "Well, you must have changed your mind," and he said, "Yes, I changed my mind. I found out you weren't that way." From that moment we've been dear friends; it's been a *long, long* time.

JB: Let's finish up with Sadler's Wells.

JM: We rehearsed in New York then we went up to Quebec to start the season. We're rehearsing with the dancers and there were these spotlights, absolutely blinding. I said to John Lanchberry, one of the conductors, "You have to do something about the lights; I can't see." He said, "No, Johnny, we'll have to do something about the oboe player because the lights are going to stay on." Which is when I made a brilliant discovery. If you don't want the lights to

bother you, don't look at them. Just don't ever look at them! We have something similar in The Cleveland Orchestra. There are lights on the side that bother some of the string players, and they complain. Don't look at them! If you don't look at them, they won't bother you.

We travelled mostly by train. That was exciting. Washing your nylon shirt out in the little men's room at the end of the car; who gets the upper, who gets the lower, so forth and so on. We had two clarinet players who were both Russian, and up in years a little bit. Alex Propochev was the first clarinet player. He made his own reeds and he used a wooden mouthpiece he had fashioned. However, every now and then because of the weather or something like that, the wooden mouthpiece wouldn't work, so then he would use his Chedeville mouthpiece and Van Doren reeds until the other one would work. I remember the two of us sitting in a little cubbyhole on some train going across the country; I'm making oboe reeds and he's making clarinet reeds. He had this knife with not a very big blade and somehow or other he was able to make a continuous stroke down the cane. I was absolutely amazed. He had two reed cutting machines at home that he showed me some time afterwards when we were in New York.

We were playing all over the place. Every time we would get to a big city like San Francisco, Los Angeles, or Chicago, they would add players and we would use a larger orchestration. Then we would have two oboes and English horn instead of a first oboe and a second oboe that would double English horn, and other parts would have to be written in here and there and so forth and so on. It was so exciting to meet some of these people. I'll never forget meeting Merrill Remington, the principal oboe in the San Francisco Symphony; he played English horn with us one night. We were doing the Gilbert and Sullivan ballet *Pineapple Poll*. So he's playing "budda-budda-budda-budda bup bup bum" (sixteenth at about mm = 140). (With surprise) I said, "Mr. Remington, are you double-tonguing?" "Yeah, sure. Pierre Monteaux, our conductor for years, insisted on all the notes being played the way they were in the score, which included the second movement of *La Mer* and all that stuff with fast triplets, so you had to do it." I said, "Is it tough?" He said, "You could teach yourself in a week." I never spent the week! Having been reassured that it wasn't so hard, I just went ahead and did it. Every now and then for something special I might have to bear down and practice a little bit to make sure it's nice and even,

for example with *Bartered Bride* or Mozart *Jupiter* or something like that. I would say this, also: *nobody* ever asks a flute player if they're double-tonguing. *Nobody* asks a brass player because they might get poked in the *snoot*. If you're an oboe player and you play something fast, then everybody comes up and asks: are you single-tonguing or double-tonguing? I remember some years ago playing the Mozart Quartet on a chamber music series in Merkin Hall in New York and my dearly beloved former student Elaine Douvas was there. She said afterwards, "John, it was so wonderful. Were you single-tonguing or double-tonguing?" I said, "Could you tell?" "No, I couldn't tell." "In that case, I was single-tonguing." (Chuckles)

All flute players have to be able to double- and single-tongue like mad, because of pieces like the St. Saens *Carnival of the Animals* or Rossini *William Tell*. I remember Sol Schoenbach said to me back in the 1960s in Marlboro, "John, all the bassoon players back then had to be able to double-tongue. However could they play the bass line with the cellos in the Mozart operas?" Budda-budda-budda-budda – that's the way it was written. The cellos were not having to play down-bow only staccato, they're using up and down bows. Mozart expected the bassoon players to play in keeping with that, and the bassoon players must have known right away that if they couldn't do that, they were going to be in *big* trouble. So, they learned to do this. Over the years, I've heard so many mixed messages about it. Oh, no: you can't do that on the oboe. Who says? If I can play the *Bartered Bride Overture* for you right under your nose and you can't tell if I'm double-tonguing, then that's good enough proof.

I remember Moe Sharp, our great first flute player for about 50 years, told me something in his hotel room one night after a concert when we were winding down. He said, "John, I have a confession. I can't single-tongue past 104." I said, "Moe, your secret is safe with me. No one would ever know, no one's ever questioned you about it. You make it sound fine and that's it!"

The world has to catch up with the oboe players at some point in time and say: you can't just play two and two [play two slurred/two articulated in passages of notated articulated sixteenths]. People don't settle for that anymore. They want complete accuracy. So, everybody has to do it. I thought it would be so awful to say, "Well, Maestro, I'm so glad you enjoy my playing, my intonation,

my tone, my phrasing, my this and that, but I think I might just have to give my job up because I can't single-tongue *that fast*. This doesn't make any sense *what so ever*. You figure out a way to do what you need to do, and that's *it*. Nothing wrong with that.

JB: So, Sadler's Wells was great, playing, meeting people, traveling. What next?

JM: Sadler's Wells was a six-month tour. Near the end of the tour, I think we were coming into Albany. We were the last train in as a train strike had just begun. So I called home to speak to my wife and my mother. My mother said, "Oh, Jack! Alexander Hilsberg has been calling. He's been made the new music director of the New Orleans Philharmonic. He wants you to be his principal oboe player." I thought: oh wow! It was a twenty-week season and the orchestra got paid next to nothing. I *also* got paid next to nothing – I'm reluctant to tell you how much – but I was probably the second highest paid player in the orchestra after the concertmaster. It was *not much*. Eventually the season went to twenty-six weeks, which is about as far as it went while I was there. Alexander Hilsberg had been the concertmaster under Stokowski and Ormandy for something like twenty-five years. He was also the associate conductor of the orchestra and even as concertmaster it must have driven Ormandy crazy because Hilsberg was so popular in Philly that he would get more applause when *he* came out than Ormandy did when *he* came out! Any number of people said: "I think Mr. Ormandy probably helped secure that position [New Orleans] for him." Get him *out of town!*

A wonderful and most exciting thing about this was that I was playing for someone who had been listening to my teacher play for twenty-five years. Oh, man – that was really tough. He was really fond of me, but at the same time he knew how far away I was from *that* [Tabuteau's performance level] at that time. He was very supportive, but he was also very demanding if something didn't come out to his satisfaction. But that was a wonderful experience. He was skimming the cream off the Curtis Institute – we had so many wonderful players. Gil Johnson went there as first trumpet the same year I did. He later went on to be principal trumpet in Philly for years until he decided he was going to retire to Florida and teach and fish. Norman Carroll, Bill DePasquale, and Anshel Brusilov were each our concertmaster for a while. I mean, hotsy-totsy people!

I was in New Orleans from 1952-1963. Eleven years. I can't believe I've been playing professionally that *long*. I'm very thankful that I can still play. Not *golf*, as you well know! With the oboe I can still play and I can teach like mad, because I keep learning new stuff.

I should step back to say that after my first professional year, which was 1951-52, playing with Sadler's Wells Ballet, I was called by the Philadelphia Orchestra to play second oboe to Marcel Tabuteau. In those days, Tabuteau played the first fifteen weeks of the thirty-week season with John de Lancie assisting him, and de Lancie would play the second fifteen weeks without an assistant. Five weeks into the second half of the year, de Lancie took ill and was out for the rest of the year. So, Tabuteau had to go back and play everything. Just after I got back from touring with Sadler's Wells - I love to tell this story - I got on the bus to go into New York to go see Wally Bhosys and see what's happening. We were in Dunellen and all of a sudden, I realized somebody is trying to cut the bus off. I looked out the front window, and - oh, my God - it's my *mother*! (Chuckles) So, I rushed to the front of the bus, "Let me off!" I got off and said, "Mom, what's happening?" She said, "The Philadelphia Orchestra called and they want you there *right now*." So I dashed off to Philadelphia to play first oboe in *La Forza del Destino*. In the rehearsal they never even got to the last act. (Chuckles) And I thought: what am I *doing*? The conductor is screaming at me, "Due battute!" which, of course, means "in two," and I didn't know what the hell else he was saying. Nick Lanutti, from south Philadelphia, was playing English horn, and he says (in Italian accent), "It's all-a right-a, boy; you're doing-a fine." (Laughs)

At any rate, I didn't complete the three weeks that I could have done there because I had a commitment to Nicki Harsanyi and the Princeton Symphony. They were giving their first concert and I was to play the Cimarosa Concerto with them. Tabuteau said, "You silly boy! Don't you realize that if you do this, you never share your knowledge about reeds you learn from me, some day you might get to play second oboe in the Philadelphia Orchestra?!" I said, "Maestro, I'm sorry. I made this commitment; I'm going to keep it." He was very upset with me.

There were several times I got to play with Tabuteau in the Philadelphia Orchestra. Once, after I had left Curtis, we

did the first act of *Walkyrie* with Astrid Varnay and Jussi Björling, rehearsing for the May Festival in Ann Arbor. I'm sitting next to my teacher, who is at this time 64 or 65. He was like a little kid, practically hopping up and down in his chair, remembering the days when he played in the Metropolitan Opera.

I got to play first oboe in the Philadelphia Orchestra in the Dell when John de Lancie had his heart attack on tour in 1959. Of course he didn't play the summer season, so Jimmy Caldwell played the first half and I played the second half. Then the next year, de Lancie played the first half, and I played the second half. I remember when I went for my very first rehearsal and we were doing something like *School for Scandal Overture* by Barber. It dawned on me: it was *so easy*. Suppose you're going to be on TV. They have all the camera angles set and all you have to do is stand on this X – everything else is taken care of. Well, everything in that orchestra was *in place*! It was so easy! You didn't have to think: who am I going to go with? It was *there*! If you're a hot enough group like that, lots and lots of things have been taken care of already.

A number of our players in New Orleans were very fine; some moved on to other jobs. Norman Carroll left to be concertmaster in Minneapolis. Anshel Brusilow went to the Philadelphia Orchestra, and when he left, Norman Carroll took that job. Our first clarinet player, Paul Shaller, left for the Detroit Symphony, where he was principal clarinet and personnel manager for many years. In a city of 500,000, we played one concert a week. That's all the audience we had. Therefore, we had (sotto voce) *too many rehearsals*. You get antsy after awhile and you start playing games just to amuse yourself because you were beginning to get a little saturated with this stuff, which was not good. I finally did one thing of which I'm very glad. It may sound self-serving, but I don't see it that way at all. I consider it to have been a great learning experience. I memorized the Brahms symphonies. I would close the part. People in the section would say, "Oh, please don't do that!" The solos are no problem. The material in the tuttis is a bit different one time to the next; sometimes you have one bar later before you come in, and that was tough. What I learned from that was that playing from memory, everything *sounded different*. You were no longer using a part of your brain to visually process printed material, and so things *sounded different*.

I'm going to go back to a prior experience while I was in Juilliard. I was practicing in a very interesting fashion. I wasn't practicing to play anything for anyone except myself. I was working hard on the Gillet and Loyon etudes, really tough stuff. The position I put myself in by doing this was that there was only one person around to decide whether what I was doing was good enough or not, and that was *me*! Remember: Tabuteau said that one of the things a teacher should try to do is to teach their students to become their own teachers some day.

The New Orleans summer was very hot. All summer I practiced and I practiced and I practiced. A very interesting thing happened one of those summers when my father came to visit. He asked, "What are you working on?" I said, "Gillet and Loyon." "Well, play some for me." I played three Gillet etudes for him. In a row. My father said, "Good, keep it up." And that's all he said! (Laughs) It never even crossed my mind – my father passed away in 1986 – until *long* afterwards, that his heart was probably *pounding* like mad. He's thinking, "Oh, my God, listen to this! The kid's going to make it!" He never let on. Just, "Good. Keep it up."

I want to cast back once more to an experience in Juilliard. We had finished the school season. I was 19 years old. I was sitting in my little shared apartment, sweating out my Local 802 card, which the union did not want to give me. (Marc Lifschey's father, Eli, came to my rescue. He went down and argued with them for a half an hour. Finally the union steward said, "Alright, Eli; I'll take it up with the board again," which meant that I was in.) However, I'm sitting in this room feeling very sorry for myself, and I'm practicing the Sellner Articulation Studies. At some point or another, all of a sudden a couple of glorious notes came out and I thought, "What was *that*?" I went back and I tried to recapture it and I couldn't replicate it – I just couldn't do it. But it made something in my mind change. Therefore, I decided to be inquisitive. I would play something and I would play it two different ways and consider: was one of these better than the other? Not even to worry yet at that point in time "why," but just which one seems better. So I went into a serious investigative stage of trying things. If you had four notes slurred and four notes slurred and eight notes slurred, well, what can we do? Can we make a "bound" of four notes, another "bound" of four notes, and a giant leap of eight notes? I thought: sure can, and that really sounds good. It

sounds like there's a real reason for the articulation being there.

I tried *all kinds* of things. I went through this sort of surreal experience. This may sound kind of nutty but it wasn't nutty to me at all. It's like if you've been in a room a number of times and you look at the wall one day and you realize: "Oh my gosh; there's a door there." Open the door, there's a corridor. You walk down the corridor, and there are rooms on each side. One room you peek in, and there's a family having dinner. You peek in some other room there's somebody watching TV, and so forth and so on. This stuff [experimenting] began to happen and I thought: this is so amazing! All this was in me somewhere already, but I had not been able to access it yet. All of a sudden, I started to access it. That and my summer experiences in New Orleans practicing for myself only and nobody else in the room – those things really got me going big time.

JB: I imagine that could be overwhelming.

JM: Overwhelming, yet it makes you want to feed on it like you can't believe. It could be daunting, but I wasn't daunted by it. Fortunately for me, I just plowed on. I had such a wonderful time. Even now if I'm at Oboe Camp or a similar situation, I'll play the first bar of the first Sellner Articulation Study (sings from C Major Triplet #1) for the students two ways and then ask for a show of hands of which way they prefer. (Sings the first bar two ways: first with emphasis on beats 1 and 3, second with emphasis leading to beats 2 and 4.) Usually, it's 60/40 in favor of the second way. Of course the explanation for this is psychological. The home key, the tonic, is *like home*, and dominant is away. Some people are only really happiest when they are in their own domicile, the tonic. Other people just go back to their domicile to charge up their batteries for their next foray into what they do. So they're both totally legitimate. That was one of the things that occurred to me: I never even *thought* about a thing like that. What *else* can we do? If you're playing triplets (sings from Sellner C Major Triplet Exercise #11, measure 1), then the difference between playing that and playing (sings from Sellner B-flat Major Triplet Exercise #7, measure 1) where the notes are all adjacent and there are no leaps involved – totally different! Cannot play them the same way and have them sound right. That's one of my big personal crusades. I want things to sound *right*, and to be as non-closed-minded as possible. There are probably people

who think that I'm very closed-minded, but if I *am* closed-minded, it's only after all of these explorations that led me to believe this and that and that and this for good reason.

I think I was very fortunate as a kid in Somerville, New Jersey, that I had a Raleigh bike with three speeds or gears. Now, bikes have far more gears, but we had three! So, first gear is like (makes a grinding, "working" sound) chromatic travel. Second gear is like diatonic travel. Third gear is like intervals, where you're going from one note to another; you're bounding, you're not going into something that touches it, you're skipping notes to get where you're going. So it is a totally different kind of travel. When a horn plays (sings "hunting" arpeggiated figure) it has a certain sound about it that's revolving. It's not gliding – it's going around and around and touching different places.

So that stuff really started to burn in my brain. At age 19, I thought: "Oh man, this is so exciting." I just kept *looking* for things. I remember the first [Sellner Articulation Study] in C Major in sixteenths. The first and third bar contain the same notes, but in the first bar it's two-and-two articulation and in the third bar it's three-and-one. So I thought: let me try to play the third bar and make it sound as much like the first bar as possible. And I realized: well, that doesn't really sound so hot! Now, let me try to exaggerate the difference between (sings first measure) and then (sings third measure). I thought: *that* really does sound much better. What you're doing is playing something that the articulation may *mean*. For us, as woodwind players, very frequently our articulations are a product of what bowings were at one time. So a string player plays (sings pattern of three slurred/one articulated sixteenths from Sellner C Major sixteenths #5, measure 5). That's a down bow [for the first three notes], then you've got a fast, short up bow. (Sings as dotted eighth/sixteenth rhythm.) To take that into *our* playing, you can see that in the *Eroica*, you play (sings from opening of the third movement). It's a rotary feeling, especially in Beethoven in fast threes.

Regarding the *meaning* of articulation... Someone who has viewed most of what Handel ever wrote told me once that they had never seen two-and-two [slur two tongue two] articulation in his music. *Mozart loved* two-and-two articulation and he used it *all* the time. Many years later,

another composer came along with a six-letter name starting with "M," Gustav Mahler. In the Adagio of his Tenth Symphony, which is one of the most moving things that was ever written, he writes two-and-two articulation and it rips your heart out. I think to *myself*: if he had used *any* other articulation it would not have had that degree of potency, or that degree of communication. *Why* does it communicate to us the way it does? I have no idea. As a teacher, and as a player, I think the most important thing to know is that it *does*. And if somebody who can't play can figure it out and write it down, that would be fine with me! (Chuckles) I figure the most important thing is to *know*.

Are you familiar with the name "Piaget"? The Swiss educator whose work with children was so mind-boggling? After three years, two months and two weeks, they don't understand something; ten days later, they do. I read that there are multiple stages of the learning process in the average human being, the final and seventh one coming at (drops his voice) *age 28*. What this means to us is this: somebody told you a thousand times, you didn't understand; all of a sudden, one day you understand. When you *do* understand, you can't figure out why you didn't understand *before*, but now you *do*. So all that means is that part of you wasn't ready to be able to move to the next level. The same thing happened to me when I was a student, and I now see it happening to *my* students. They can work really hard, progress may seem slow, and all of a sudden: boop! I've always been fascinated by that because we're all trying to learn. We all feel that we *have* to learn. Even though our days are numbered, we feel constrained to try to learn more and understand more, which I think must be a natural human trait.

This, of course, does not pertain to geniuses: they get it really fast. That's what I always thought about Casals. Everybody else had to learn and the good Lord just dumped it on his brainpan like "boom," there it was! He just *knew*! It goes *this* way, not *that* way...

JB: Should we go back to New Orleans?

JM: There were several other things I wanted to mention. A wonderful thing we had in New Orleans was that we played fourteen children's concerts a season, and they were broadcast live into every classroom in the state. The principal players got to play a solo every year. I remember

once it was my turn and I was playing the last movement of the Strauss Concerto, which I thought I knew pretty well. At some point or other I spoke in tongues for a moment before I got back on. I had the music in front of me but I wasn't watching it. When I "spoke in tongues," I heard [makes the sound of stifled laughter] from behind me – that was Norman Carroll. When we got done, I said, "Norman, what is so funny about that?" He said, "Jackson..." We all had nicknames. I called him "Normand," with a "d." He said, "Let me tell you something right now. If you're going to play something from memory, practice it from memory, don't take the music with you; play from memory all the time. If you're *not* prepared to play it from memory..." Solfege means a lot to me in that regard, because if I couldn't solfege the Strauss Concerto completely and totally accurately a *tempo*, I would have been pretty worried, more worried than I would be otherwise to play a daunting piece like that. Norman was right. If you're going to play from the music, play from the music, practice from the music, look at the music and don't look away. Just do it that way. That was a big lesson to me. He had done so much solo playing that I figured he was more knowledgeable on the subject than I.

JB: You had some great colleagues there, a very good conductor – somebody who had heard your teacher for a long time – great soloists and plenty of time to work on your own skills. Sounds as though you made the very best of the opportunity.

JM: I practiced single-tonguing, since my tongue was never fast, for at least a half an hour every day. And there was another thing. You would get so juiced for your one concert a week that you had all the adrenaline helping you do almost anything whatsoever. I remember when I went to the National Symphony, our concerts were Tuesday and Wednesday nights, frequently a Thursday afternoon repeat at the university, often a Thursday night concert at the University of Maryland in College Park, and on some occasions *both* afternoon and evening on Thursday. Which meant that within a space of fifty hours, you would play the same program four times. I thought: can I *do* this? Well, I found out it was a piece of cake. Thanks to my teacher, "Play the way you think, not the way you feel." Understand what you're doing, practice, try this try that, make up your mind about what you believe at the time, and let that be the bulwark of your playing. So I had no problem with that at all. At first, I was really, really scared, but as soon as I got there and did it, I thought:

what's to be scared of? You know how you think it should go. I tell my students, if you don't want to be nervous, here is what to do. First, know exactly what you intend to do. Second, know you can do it. Then, there's no reason to be nervous. I also say to them: not being sure about how you think it should go can make you easily as nervous as whether you can do it or not. Indecision is not what you want to have in your mind when you're playing on a high level. Decision, completely and totally, no funny business, don't play games. That doesn't mean you won't change your mind from time to time.

In the years that I was in the New Orleans Symphony – which was for quite a while quite a long time ago – we would have wonderful artists perform with us – Serkin, Rubenstein, Millstein, Stern, Heifitz. They would be on a very tight schedule. They would show up, usually play one rehearsal, play the concert, then leave for their next engagement. They always played beautifully and always played exactly the same way at the concert as they did at the rehearsal. This was a clear message to me that they really understood exactly what they believed, at least at that point in time, as to how something should go. They didn't say, "Well, I think I'll try it this way; I'll turn it upside down and backwards and see how it goes." Oh, no. All the fine artists I can remember were absolutely not like that whatsoever.

I have a story that has to do with *me* and how *I* changed. I would say that Tabuteau was sort of "upbeat happy." He would sometimes want to make an upbeat out of something that maybe wasn't an upbeat. Casals caught up with him in the Minuet from the First Brandenburg, where Tabuteau wanted to play (sings opening, emphasizes third beat of fourth bar as if an "upbeat"). (As Casals): "No, no, no! Is not an upbeat! It is the resolution of the long appoggiatura!" Tabuteau never did *that* again.

The first statement of the first theme in the Beethoven Violin Concerto is in the oboes, with the first oboe on top (sings). The *second* theme also starts with the oboe (sings). I had been playing it that way (as sung) like most everybody, sort of like a hairpin (sings to demonstrate). All of a sudden some years ago I thought: hey, wait a minute! The theme starts on *one*! You wouldn't play (sings measures 3 and 4, emphasizing downbeat of measure 4) you would play (sings without that emphasis). I thought about this and I practiced it. I'm going to play it like this

(sings again). I would go to the high D but not so demonstratively as I would have done before (sings) and then the next two bars match (sings). To give you an idea of what our orchestra is like, three members of the orchestra came up to me and said, "You played that theme differently than I've ever heard you play it before." I said, "Yes, I did. Did you *like* it?" And they all said, "Yes!" I never discussed it with them, nor did they ask me what are you doing, why are you doing it? I thought, well, OK. I remember that my teacher – who was, as I said before, slightly "upbeat happy" – always said: if the theme starts on the downbeat, *that* takes precedence.

As you can tell from what I've said already, I think that most magnificent players are totally convinced about how they think things should go and they don't change their minds capriciously. Here's another example of something that happened with me that was really quite remarkable. Ever since I was a kid, I was told that the first solo in the second movement of Brahms First Symphony was played as separate notes. Then, I found out from somebody that those notes were slurred in Brahms' own score. So I thought: OK. In that case, I'm going to play them slurred. The next time we were doing this was with Loren Maazel conducting, and I played (sings opening of passage, slurred) and all these heads whipped around, as if to say, "What are you *doing*?" I went up to Maazel at intermission and said, "Maestro, I found out that these notes are slurred in Brahms' own score, so I thought maybe I should play them that way." He said, "Oh, John, it sounds lovely; whatever you want to do." I thought: well, hmmm; no. I would like to do what *Brahms* wanted me to do.

One more thing about New Orleans: I have to tell you about the summer Pops and the Opera. We played seven or eight operas a year, two performances each. Many singers came from the Met. To work with these great singers, to always have one rehearsal with them in the room with us, either sitting between us and the conductor or standing behind us, was remarkable. I had the *incredible* experience of having the great Lisa Della Casa stand right behind me for a rehearsal for a Mozart opera, and I thought: oh my God, I can't believe this. It was so warm and so classical at the same time. People think that "classical" has to be dry. Uh-unh. I remember a conversation with Rudy Serkin at Marlboro once after a rehearsal of one of the piano and wind quintets. I said, "Rudy, can I ask you a question?" "Of course, John," rubbing his hands, looking professorial and

apologetic, this great, great musician. I said, "I hear people play Classical music and they sound 'classical' but they sound dry. There are other people who play Classical music and it doesn't sound 'classical' and it doesn't sound dry. When you play, it sounds 'classical' and it doesn't sound dry." And he said, "Well, first of all, I try to be very accurate." That's all he said. (Chuckles) He left me to twist in the wind and try to figure that out. The main, paramount thing is: first of all, whatever happens afterward, you first of all do that [be very accurate]. It was a big lesson and I'm eternally grateful to him for that.

The opera was a wonderful experience. You had to play softly enough not to drown out the singers but loud enough so that they could get their cues from you. You have to walk a relatively narrow tightrope from a dynamic standpoint. When you get in that room with them for the rehearsal before the dress rehearsal, where they're just singing with you and the conductor, you get so buoyed up by the freedom in the singers that it really just sweeps you along, and you frequently find yourself playing in a less fettered fashion than you ordinarily might. That was not lost on me; I thought that was just absolutely fantastic.

Now, the New Orleans Pops. At some point or another, the people who were supporting it were sick and tired of losing money, so they backed out. The musicians took it over and formed something called the Crescent City Concerts Association. We would do everything – literally. Whoever conducted got paid two shares for the week, the rest got paid one share. It was basically three, three-hour rehearsals and two performances; a lot of hard work. And, of course, the people we were playing with, some of them were very, very fine musicians, but as this was a Pops setting they were not all trained in the orchestral fashion. So somebody would play something in a sixteen-bar phrase; the pitch would start here and end up *there* [much higher]. I could not *do* that! I had been trained to *stay*. It was a real challenge.

I remember a cute story around our monetary issues at that time. I said something to one of my students years ago about how I had just bought another oboe and they said something like, "Oh, moneybags." I said, "*Excuse me!* Let me tell you about the Summer Pops in New Orleans. I used to ride on the truck to go get the guys from the HOD, the House of Detention. The coveralls had 'H' on one knee and

'D' on the other. Slightly strange people. We would go to a warehouse to get the tables and chairs and take them down to the municipal auditorium and set them up and so forth and so on. I worked in the ticket office, usually for four hours twice a week helping out. And I played. I also went door to door asking for contributions. And it gets really, *really* hot down there. I want to tell you about one week specifically. After the three, three-hour rehearsals and two performances, my share for the week was ten dollars and twenty-eight cents. I took that money and I used it to buy food." At which point the student pulled their horns all the way back in. "Sorry!" (Chuckles)

That's the way it was. It was important that we *do* something. Nobody else was going to do it for us, so we had to do it. It was the same way with the New Orleans Philharmonic when their management folded and the musicians took it over and it became the Louisiana Philharmonic. Since no government money in this country other than a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts or something goes to help somebody out, we're on our own. I read a really interesting article recently about Britain, how immoral it is that they don't support the arts, that Covent Garden may be shut down for the next year due to lack of funds. Whereas in France, which most English people would consider to be a rather unruly place, *they* support the arts like *mad*. They support the arts in such a fashion that people who want to hear something can afford to do so. Our country doesn't do that. This article mentioned "elitism," as in that this is "elite." Well, of *course* it's *elite*! You can't have a great orchestra or a great string quartet or whatever unless they're all really fine and terribly dedicated and not afraid of any amount of any hard work to *do something fine*.

JB: In 1963, you went to the National Symphony.

JM: Harold "Buddy" Wright was a dear friend of mine in Curtis. I remember every Thursday night after we had our orchestra rehearsal with Alexander Hilsberg, Buddy and I would go to a bowling alley on Chestnut and bowl ten lines, one after the other. Afterwards, we would go to MacShea's Bar and Grill on 16th Street, directly across from where Tabuteau's studio was, hoist a couple of beers, then I would walk him to the train station because he was going home to where his folks lived in Wayne, which was on what is called the Main Line, west of town, and I would go back to my apartment. Harold Wright played in Houston and

Dallas, then got the principal job in the National Symphony. I heard they had an opening for first oboe, so I called him. He said, "No, Jack, don't come; stay where you are." He didn't think the situation was good enough and didn't want me to come. A couple of years later, I called him again because there was another opening, and he said, "OK, come now." So I went up and auditioned for the conductor, Howard Mitchell. I got up at dawn and practiced, then went over to Constitution Hall to play for him. I played and I played and I played. He said, "Oh, my goodness. I haven't heard *Tombeau de Couperin* played like that since Lifschey was here." Blah-blah blah-blah-blah and so forth and so on. He said, "Is that enough?" I said, "No! It's *not* enough. I've practiced an awful lot of stuff and I want to play some *more* for you." "All right, OK; play whatever you want." So I played a whole bunch of stuff, and he said, "Is *that* enough now?" And I said, "Well, I guess so."

I spent two years there. It was pretty tough. In New Orleans, we played at about 442. The Philadelphia Orchestra, in the days of Stokowski, used to play a little under 440. When Ormandy got there, it gradually went up-up-up-up-up. The string players would always want it to be a little higher, because it sounds more brilliant and so forth and so on. The two years I was in the National Symphony, it was probably closer to 443 and there was *nothing* I could *do* about it whatsoever other than do whatever I could to *maintain* it. When I went to The Cleveland Orchestra two years later, they played 440, though the pitch did rise a bit during concerts. The brass players would get tired. They were not of the caliber throughout the sections as they are now. And the pitch would go up sometimes. That really started to change during the Maazel era, and it is completely and totally taken care of now. When the Cleveland Orchestra plays a concert or a rehearsal, we start at 440 and we finish at 440. If you're an oboe player, and you have to play your low notes, you have no more problem at the end than you did at the beginning, whatsoever, which is really wonderful.

Which brings me to another subject: how people are affected by their environment. If, for instance, a viola player auditions for our orchestra and gets a job, he or she will adopt our ways and do what we *do*. They won't think about it, they'll just do what we *do*. If they went to another orchestra and they started at 442 and ended up at 444, they would do *that*. They would then add to casting in stone the

habits of *that* orchestra. I can't tell you how grateful I am to be in a situation where it is like it is in Cleveland in that regard. Many orchestras are *not that way*. I remember what Antal Dorati, who conducted us in about 1982, said. At that time, I think Dohnányi had already been selected as our new music director. It just so happens that Dorati was distantly related to him. Dorati told us in rehearsal (imitating his voice), "He's a fine man, one of the greatest intellects I've ever run into in my entire life. I have to tell you something about this orchestra. This orchestra is not like any other orchestra near here. No, no: I take that back. This orchestra is not like *any* other orchestra that I know of. When I was a child and we played chamber music in my home, I was taught to play Mozart like Mozart and Beethoven like Beethoven and Brahms like Brahms. Most orchestras play everything *their way*. But you in Cleveland play Mozart like Mozart, Brahms like Brahms, and Beethoven like Beethoven." And I thought: well, why wouldn't you want to do that? Every orchestra has its own artistic profile, which can be narrowly drawn, like ours, or broadly drawn, like many others. There may be opposing factions where some people want to do *this* and others want to do it *that way*. We've been very fortunate in my orchestra, if I may so bold as to say a thing like that. The audition process, which I'm going to talk about later, is what makes it possible for you to extend your artistic profile. In many orchestras they have a terrible time trying to make up their mind who to pick for a job. We don't have that problem in Cleveland. There's only one vote, anyway – from the music director. Nevertheless, we are usually of a mind about who we think is the proper person for our orchestra and as soon as we get them in there, we coach them in our ways. Our former associate concertmaster, Martin Challifour, is now concertmaster of the L. A. Philharmonic. When he joined The Cleveland Orchestra, there was a luncheon where four new members of the orchestra were introduced. A writer for the local paper asked them all some questions, and Challifour was asked, "When you come into a new orchestra like this, how do you know what to do?" He said, "Well, very simple. You learn about the deportment of the orchestra by witnessing it, and you learn about their phrasing habits by listening to the solo players." I thought that was very, very well spoken.

JB: Let's go back to the National Symphony. A good move because of more playing and higher profile?

JM: Not only that, James, but the fact that New Orleans was sort of insular – pretty far away from everything. We would only hear the other orchestras through occasional broadcasts or this and that and so forth and so on. The Philadelphia Orchestra played five concerts in Washington, DC, every year. For the two years I was there, I heard at least nine of the ten concerts. And you were nearer to things: nearer to New York, Philadelphia.

JB: In your first year, Perlman came to play. You mentioned to me that “there were labor strikes in the orchestra; a 19-year-old violinist on crutches played Tchaikovsky; thank you Lord for sending us another real one.”

JM: Everything you said is right. We started the season with a two-week strike, and then later we had a four-week strike. Gus Keller was my second oboe player. He was German and had been through the worst of the war. He was in the Wermacht and had probably killed who knows how many Americans. He also got shot up himself a bunch of times. After the war, he was working in a Polish silver mine, and he was assigned to clean the commandant’s quarters. The commandant happened to be a Jewish cellist. Gus finished cleaning the place and was sitting in the room playing the piano with tears streaming down his face. The commandant showed up and said, “You’re a musician! I’m a cellist! Let’s play together!” As a result of this, the commandant saw to it that Gus Keller got out of that situation and sent him back to his home in Berlin. He was to find out that his wife and one of his children were still alive. One other child had been lost in a bombing raid. He gathered his family and went to Rio de Janeiro – just left Europe immediately – and then started learning English and this and that and so on and so forth.

He played second oboe to me that one year. During the strike, I would go over to his house and we would play all the way through the Telemann *Canonic Sonatas*. We amused ourselves in that way. When the strike was finally over and we went back to work, we had different soloists than originally scheduled because the soloists who were supposed to play had different commitments by this time. So this young kid comes out on crutches and plays the Tchaikovsky Concerto. I thought: Oh my God. Thank you, dear Lord, for sending us Another Real One. I discussed this with him just a few years ago when he was playing with us. He pretended he remembered. I thought: maybe you do, maybe you don’t. How many times has he played that piece? It was likely not

a special thing for him, but it was very, very special for us.

But the big thing that happened to me was that in the summer between my leaving New Orleans and my going into the National Symphony [1963], I went to Marlboro. At which point all kinds of things happened. All these wonderful musicians were there, they could hear you play for the first time, and they might think, "Oh! Well, he can *play!*" I remember that the Guarneri Quartet was just forming. They were going to play their opening concert in Avery Fischer Hall and they invited me to be their guest artist for the Mozart Quartet. Which I did. (*Sotto voce*) *Got a lovely review.* The critic wrote that there were so many oboe players out front you couldn't believe and their big subject of discussion at intermission was how to find a way to dip John Mack's reeds in poison.

JB: In the *review*?

JM: Yup. It was wonderful. This was – again! – in the *Herald Tribune*, before it went defunct. Jay Harrison was one of the reviewers; he had been an oboe player, so he had personal interest in this. Afterwards, I went to the Green Room and a young lady came up to me and said, "Where have you been hiding yourself?" And I said, "Ma'am, I've not been hiding myself. I've been out in the open but happened to be in New Orleans, *not* in the Big Apple." You know, you see those *New Yorker* maps: there's Manhattan and environs and then there's nothing until you get to the west coast. (Chuckles) This idea that if it's in New York, that's it; which is, of course, not exactly true.

Things began to happen very quickly. As soon as I went to Marlboro: bing, bing, bing. I told you I played half of the Dell Season two years in Philadelphia. During that time I was offered a very prestigious job teaching at a university. I said to them: thank you for your kind offer, but I don't even have a degree. I have a diploma from Juilliard and a diploma from Curtis. They said: that doesn't make any difference. We know how you play, we know about your reputation. I didn't take the offer. I'd rather end up as I have, for many years playing and teaching both on a high level, with an orchestra and at the Cleveland Institute of Music. I like the live ammo, I really do! Not like the admiral, sitting behind his steel desk while wanting to be at sea!

Marlboro just changed everything. All of a sudden, as if by magic, everybody knew who I was. There were all kinds of remarkable people there, including Serkin, Moyse, Schneider, Jaimie Laredo, Leslie Parnas, Myron Bloom, Buddy Wright. It was a very hot time. In the five years I was there full time, I was privileged to perform the Mozart and Beethoven piano and wind quintets with Serkin twice. What an education *that* was. My goodness, it was absolutely thrilling. Larry Combs had played bass clarinet in the New Orleans Symphony. Then he went in the service, and when he came back he ended up back there as first clarinet, about the time I left. I mentioned Larry to Tony Checchia up in Marlboro. Tony was a bassoon student at Curtis when I was there and one of the two guys who had been running Marlboro for many years. He's the husband of one of our most prodigious female singers, Benita Valente. "Tony; this guy's terrific. You have to invite him to Marlboro!" He said, "Well, *why* Jack?" "Because I *said* so!" Then I called Larry and said, "You've got to come to Marlboro." He asked why and I said, "Because I *said* so!" (Laughter) "You come here and you'll see." So he went to Marlboro and bing-bing-bing. The next thing you know, he's playing first in Montreal. The next thing you know, he's the first clarinet player in the Chicago Symphony, just like that. A place like Marlboro can do that, because all of a sudden people who didn't know about you find out about you. You come from the hinterlands, they didn't even know you existed, all of a sudden you're there amongst them, and: *wooo!*

Auditions for George Szell

I want to talk about the three occasions I played for George Szell before I got to Cleveland. In 1953, at the Casals Festival in Prades, sitting out in front of the Levitas Café, having an aperitif before lunch, John Wummer leans over – he was very tall, had lungs down to his knees – reaches over and grabs my arm with his bony hand and says, "Jack! Guess who's coming to town? George Szell." "George Szell?" "Yes; he wants to hear you play." "Oh, come on. George Szell wants to hear *me* play?" Marc Lifschey had been his first oboe player for just a couple of years or so at that time [Lifschey was hired in 1950], so I thought: well, he's full of prune water and canal juice; this is ridiculous. Next morning at rehearsal, I look out front and there is George Szell. Now, George Szell and Pablo Casals were very different in many ways. The only association that they'd had professionally that I knew of was that Casals had made a recording many years ago with the Czech

Philharmonic of the Dvorak Concerto and Szell was the conductor. I see George Szell out there and I think: what does he know that I don't know?! At intermission, Szell waited until Casals went backstage to smoke his pipe ("mah peep, mah peep") then marched up on the stage, right up to Tabuteau, and greeted him in French. "So wonderful to hear you play again, blah-blah blah-blah-blah." Tabuteau: "Yes, yes, thank you. Mack, come here, I want you to meet Dr. Szell." So I go over and George Szell says to me, "Mr. Mack, I've heard about you. I'd like very much for you to play for me. Could you play for me tomorrow afternoon?" I said, "Here?" "Yes, here." "Sure, what time?" "1:30."

The next day, my lovely teacher takes my two best reeds from me for himself, leaving me to twist in the wind. I suppose maybe he thought it was character building – I didn't exactly look at it that way. At any rate, I showed up at 1:30, and unfortunately I couldn't play for him on the stage, which had some good sonic qualities, because they were painting it. So I had to play for him in the back of this abbey, St. Michel de Cuxa, which was celebrating its 1000th anniversary that year. The floor in the abbey was gravel. So, I had to play for him on this gravel floor, where your tone sounded about the size of the head of a pin. "Play Tchaikovsky Four. Play Brahms Second. Play Brahms First. Play the solo from the Trio of the Scherzo from Beethoven's Ninth." [Sings an excerpt.] Fortunately I had played that piece with Koussevitzky in Juilliard and I was rather familiar with it. His car was outside. My wife was sitting in the car with his wife, chatting until he's done. After thirty-five minutes, he said, "Thank you very much; I've heard what I want to." He turned on his heel, the gravel went "crunch-crunch," and he left. And, of course, knowing Szell as well as I knew him later, that was just "futures" for him. He came all the way down to Prades just to hear some promising young oboe player; just check up on him and see how things are. That's it.

We leap forward to 1959. I get a call from Marc Lifschey. He says, "Johnny, I'm going to the Met next year." I said, "You *what*?" "My father was having some problem with his leg and they discovered it's because he has a serious heart condition, so I'm going to go to New York. So, start practicing, dear friend, because I want you to get to play for this job." "Have you told George Szell you're leaving?" "No; I haven't got my nerve up yet."

At this audition, I was the first one to play for George Szell on the stage. I was staying with Marc and his wife. I played for the man for one hour and twenty minutes straight. Other people said their audition lasted for ten, fifteen minutes. He kept sending the librarian back. "Bring this, bring that." I went through all this stuff with this man standing in front of me, conducting me, on the stage of Severance Hall. Unfortunately, the last piece that they brought out was the Bartok *Concerto for Orchestra*, which I did not know at all at that time. I had never played it and am not sure I had ever heard it. He asked me to play from the fourth movement [sings the solo passage from the beginning of the movement]. I thought: what the hell is this? The meter numbers in the manuscript had an odd appearance; fives looking like sixes and the like. Besides, my brains were mush already. So, while he seemed to be pretty happy with everything, he was not too happy with that [Bartok].

So, I signed a contract with them. *They* didn't sign it. In other words, they held me in their hip pocket while they heard whomever else they were going to hear. I don't know everyone else who played. I do know the last person who played was Al Genovese who was on tour with the St. Louis Symphony at that time. They engaged him. Interestingly enough, to give you an idea of how George Szell's reasoning worked, the contract that I signed – which did not get used – was for three years with the option on the third year. Obviously, whatever contract he gave to Al was not that because he let Al go after one year, brought Marc back, and fixed up something with the Met so that Al took the Met job. So that was that. I remember I got back down to New Orleans and who was the soloist that week but Rudy Serkin. He said, "Oh, John, you got the job, didn't you?" I said, "Well, I don't know; I signed a contract..." "Who else is there? No, no; of course, you'll get the job." Well, I *didn't* get the job.

Third time. In December, 1964, Marc Lifschey got fired from the Cleveland Orchestra by George Szell. This was later reported to me by people who were there. They were doing the slow movement of the Prokofiev Fifth Symphony. If Marc thought that somebody was playing out of tune, he would sometimes go in the other direction and rip your ear off. So, George Szell said to him, "Marc, when are you going to start playing in tune around here?" And Marc said, "If you don't like it, get yourself another boy." Many years later, our bass clarinet player, Al Zetzer, who is long gone, told

me that the next thing spoken after that by George Szell was, "You may go upstairs to the office and secure your release."

In early February, 1965, Marc Lifschey is my houseguest in Arlington, where I'm playing in the National Symphony. I had a big party for him with every oboe player in town there as well as the first cellist, a good friend of his who he had known from when he was in the National Symphony, which is where Marc played before he went to Cleveland. I have a glorious picture of that evening somewhere. The very next day, we're having breakfast in this beat-up old house we bought, and the phone rings. "Hello, Mr. Mack, this is George Szell. How are you?" "I'm fine, Dr. Szell, and yourself?" "Fine, thank you. I would like you to play for me again. Could you play for me next Tuesday afternoon at 1:30 at the Carnegie Chamber Hall?" "Yes, sir, I'm sure I can do that." "Good."

I went up there to play and Marc went with me. "Johnny, good luck. I'll be waiting for you at La Scala. Come back down here, tell me what happened, we'll have lunch." This time, I only played for a half hour. The first thing Szell said was, "Mr. Mack, would you please play a slow, D Major scale up and down two octaves?" I got done, and he said [in Szell voice], "How very curious. Although I find your high A quite satisfactory on the way down, I find it *decidedly flat on the way up!*" I had to play my high As on the high side for at least two-and-a-half years after I joined the orchestra before he finally cooled down about that. Took a long time to make the payoffs. So, I was offered the job.

JB: You and Lifschey were such great friends, and he's supporting you to go into the position he just left!

JM: Oh, sure! He said, "Look, Johnny, I think you're wonderful. I think you're ready for a job like this. I would rather have you there than anybody else I know. It's not my job anymore."

There was a love/hate relationship there. George Szell would press him. Marc would often tell me — we used to get together at least once a year for all those years since we were kids. "I just want to be left alone. I want to be the arbiter of my artistic output." And, of course, Szell wouldn't allow that. I would say something above and beyond that. When he pressed Marc, Marc probably did better than if he *had* been left alone. But he wanted to be left alone.

Leave me alone, let me play. But [Szell] couldn't always leave a fine player alone.

Sometimes Marc would do the most outlandish, prima donna-ish things. There was a recording session once where Marc was unhappy about something. In full view of everyone, he packed his oboe, put it in his case, and got up and left. And, of course, many people in the orchestra thought: I wish I had the nerve to do a thing like that! And then there is the wonderful story I heard which I assume is true. With a few minutes left on a recording session, George Szell says, "Marc! Wouldn't you like to try that solo one more time?" And Marc says, "I'm sorry, I can't — my reed is broken." [Makes sound of a reed being broken.]

JB: Two very willful people...

JM: Oh, sure! Absolutely! And the difference between me and George Szell, and Marc Lifschey vis à vis George Szell, is that I found myself in an unwritten, unspoken agreement with him to do whatever he could to get me to play better or know more or anything whatsoever. I would gladly accept that, would never fight that. I was not *interested* in fighting it. I was interested in learning more and getting to be a better player, and anything he could do for me was fine. We spent a lot of time together and we got along *just fine*.

Then came a tough situation — the orchestra manager. I was rehearsing quintets with the guys in the National Symphony up at Kenny Pasmanik's house in Washington, DC northwest, and the phone rings. "John, it's for you." It was A. Beverly Barksdale, the manager of the Cleveland Orchestra. "We're going to offer you this job. It will be [this much money] per week for three years, a three-year contract with our option on the third year." I said to him, "Mr. Barksdale, that is not good enough." "I know the money isn't good enough; maybe we can do something about that." "Forget about that. I want a three-year contract." "But that's tantamount to automatic tenure." "I know that." He said, "Dr. Szell is in the hospital." (He was having prostate surgery at that time.) I said, "I hate for you to have to take a thing like that to him right now." I'm almost *embarrassed* to have a story like this be made public in any way whatsoever, but it did happen. I said, "I'm sure that George Szell and I can make musical peace between us. I played for him three times, and if I ever play for him again I want it to be in the Cleveland Orchestra. If he

hires me, I will be one of the happiest people on the face of the earth. If he doesn't, if he decides not to do that, I'll keep working for my next opportunity. I'm sorry, Mr. Barksdale, but that's it."

Three days later, I got a phone call. "Dr. Szell has agreed to your terms." I thought: well, OK. That's a little payback for the audition in the south of France, and an hour and twenty minutes with him standing in front of me and this and that and so forth and so on. So I thought: he is now forced to put up with me and I'm forced to try to please him. It worked out *great!* It just absolutely worked out great. I'll never forget the end of my first year. We were in Des Moines, Iowa, on our way to the west coast on a four-week tour. Where was I? I was up in his room, playing the Bartok *Concerto for Orchestra* for him for half an hour. We got done, I'm packing up to leave, and he said, "John. (He started calling me John in the spring.) I wish I'd had you twenty years ago." I thought to myself: twenty years ago?! I was just figuring out one end of the oboe from the other; you didn't want me twenty years ago!

There's something I didn't tell you before, James. When Tabuteau said, "I'll have Madame Tabuteau go to the school [Curtis] tomorrow and tell them I've accepted you. They'll send you an application and you'll fill it out and send it back in." [On the application, there was a question that read] "What is your highest artistic aspiration?" And I said - I know it sounds sort of highfalutin', but I said it and I meant it totally, earnestly, at the time - I said I would like to be the principal oboe player of a great orchestra and have it be better than it would have been had I not been in it. They asked: what is your highest *aspiration?* So, I answered that. I wanted to play in a great orchestra and contribute to it. Well, it sorta worked out that way, I guess.

George Szell was a tough cookie and terribly demanding; picky, picky, picky, picky, picky. But not any of it was for personal aggrandizement on his part *what so ever*. He wanted to have things fine, as fine as he could possibly make them as he saw fit, and he studied really hard. He was not capricious in any way whatsoever. He did change his mind from time to time. In the five years I was there with him, we did the *Song of the Earth* twice, the Schubert *Great C Major Symphony* twice, and repeated several other pieces. Every time we did something the second time, it struck me: it's moved up. He had thought that maybe there's a better

way to do this than what had been considered before. I loved it. I thought it was really wonderful and so exciting. You were on the point of the sword *all the time*. But you also felt that you were really doing something very worthwhile.

He was *so* dedicated. There's no way that you could be more dedicated than *he* was. So, what's to resent? Although many people *did*. I remember one of our viola players said, "Oh, John. It's not *him*, it's *us*." And I said, "Ha-ha! Uhn-uhn." He's the one who's plugging us in to the 220 line – and we're doing what we're doing with *him*, not the way we'd be doing it if it was Joe Blow [on the podium]. I admired him greatly. The man was so brilliant. He could also romance board members who didn't know a damn thing and be jovial with them, clap them on the back, and so forth and so on (laughs). But not with the musicians in the orchestra.

JB: I've heard you talk about how in The Cleveland Orchestra "everyone is pulling in the same direction."

JM: In The Cleveland Orchestra with George Szell, not only was everybody pulling in the same direction, they were pulling in *exactly* the same direction, with the same oar strokes. Everything was absolutely *in place*; incredibly, fantastically in place. He said once that Cleveland Orchestra rehearsals take over where other orchestras finish performing. He expected you to play quasi-concert quality *all the time*, which was *tough*. I remember saying to him once, "Dr. Szell, this is our only chance to try things." [In Szell voice] "Yes, John, I realize that. However..." And that was the end of the discussion!

I also have to tell you that my dear friend Marc Lifschey used to complain bitterly to me for years about George Szell's double standard, that people got treated differently. I wasn't in the orchestra for fifteen minutes. I got back from a Marlboro tour and moved to Cleveland. I arrived at midnight on Saturday, and the first rehearsal was Monday morning at 10:00. First program: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *Four Essays for Orchestra* by Tadeusz Baird, and Tchaikovsky Fourth Symphony. We will make an examination of our new oboe player starting *now*. So, we're playing along and we get to the second movement [of *Tombeau*] and Harvey McGuire, our English horn player, had some problems. And George said [in voice]: "*Hahr-vey!*" And Harvey McGuire *talked back* to him! And Szell left him alone. And I thought: Oh! OK, I get it! He needs certain people because

of the instruments they play. And therefore he may test the waters now and then, but if he finds out that if he goes past a certain point he's going to get a diminishing return, he will then leave them alone. If, however, he thinks that he can get *more* from you, he would never stop.

JB: Please relate the story about Szell and "the house sauce."

JM: That was really wonderful. This is about the trio of the minuet of the Haydn *Miracle* Symphony. Oboe players sometimes refer to this solo as "How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?" because it goes [sings the excerpt, which bears resemblance to the aforementioned tune]. I practiced this *like mad*. I thought: I'm going to make this a "George Szell performance" for sure. First rehearsal, we play it, we get through the first phrase to the double bar. He stops. [In Szell voice] "No, John; we're not going to use the house sauce on *this* one." Like, he'd come up with a brighter idea! And I thought: it's so wonderful! Because when I played that, he must have felt like he was looking at himself in the mirror when he shaved or something – is it *me*? However! I think he said, "We're going to find a way to do this, John, with a little more poesy than usual," or something like that. He would change things after giving them serious thought. I'll never forget what Bob Marcellus said one time. "I can imagine George Szell sitting down after lunch and opening the score to the Beethoven Fifth and looking at it differently than he ever had before." Have I been doing the right thing? Why did he notate the opening that way? [Sings opening.] It *means* something or he wouldn't have written it that way!

I have to tell you one of my favorite stories, about the time when he pronounced his epitaph in front of the orchestra. I can't even remember what we were playing. He said, "First violins. I want this phrase to sound completely spontaneous; however, as a result of meticulous planning!" And I just burst out laughing! He turned and looked at me, and then he realized what he said, and he went (imitates Szell guttural laugh). (Lots of laughing.) It's a great story and it really happened – I'm not making any of this up!

I should tell you another story about George Szell, Marc Lifschey, and the third movement solo in Brahms Second. Marc was sometimes on the point of the sword with reeds. When Ernie Serpentine – his brother played second clarinet

in the Philadelphia Orchestra – was his second oboe player, he was helping with reeds. So, Marc was playing the solo (sings Brahms Second Symphony, third movement solo, misses the first low D). Szell: "Marc! Marc! The low D!" So Marc went into his prima donna stage, saying, "Well, you know, I'm trying to do something beautiful. If you want somebody to honk the notes, get somebody to honk the notes." And Szell says: "No, no, Marc. Do what you're doing. But when you come to the low D: *honk it!*" Conductors don't like missing notes. Marc is the one who told me this; he thought it was a really great story. And he was absolutely unabashed about how he would go into his "I'm trying to do something beautiful" routine.

By the way, when The Cleveland Orchestra got a new truck, and it said on the side "The Cleveland Orchestra, George Szell," Szell said, "Get my name off that truck!" Which is in exact opposition to the truck of the Philadelphia Orchestra, which said: "Philadelphia Orchestra, EUGENE ORMANDY!"

Several years ago, Georg Solti conducted The Cleveland Orchestra for the very first and, as it turned out, sadly, the last time. He was perhaps 84 at the time. A bunch of my students came to me and said, "Can you get us back to meet him?" I said, "I'll try; I've never met the man myself." I went back Saturday night at the intermission to see if he would be willing to meet my students, which he was most gracious about. I knocked on the door. "Come in. Ah, the magnificent oboe player! You're marvelous! How long have you been here?" "32 years. I had five years with George Szell..." He said, "No, no, no! No, no, no! *Ten years!* One year with George Szell counts for *two years!*" And I thought: the man knows what he's talking about.

Colleagues in the Cleveland Orchestra

JM: Over the years, we've had colleagues in the orchestra who were great players and they didn't get along. While this made things sort of difficult at times, they played very well together. I would just tell you that right now, all the principal winds get along with each other really great. Therefore, as a result of that, we're giving a quintet concert at the Institute on the 13th of January [1999]. We're going to play the *Six Bagatelles* of Ligeti; *Summertime*; the Hindemith Quintet; the Madeline Dring Trio for flute, oboe, and piano; and the Poulenc Trio for oboe, bassoon, and piano. We're doing this because we want to,

and we *all get along!* Please believe me, there are many orchestras where lots of key players *don't get along*. Even though we may have some differences about this and that and so on, we *do* get along and we all honor each other; we all admire each other.

JB: You had specifically mentioned Moe Sharp.

JM: Very unusual man. He was hired by Adela Prentiss Hughes, who was, in a way, the "mother" or founder of The Cleveland Orchestra; a very powerful figure. She hired Moe Sharp after interviewing him – never even heard him play. Fresh out of Curtis with incredible technique and control. He virtually never missed anything *whatsoever*. I had seventeen years with him before he hung it up. I must tell you that we never tuned *anything*. His idea of where the notes belonged and my idea where the notes belonged coincided totally; we never had to "try" anything. It was really wonderful! I hardly ever find myself trying anything with my current colleagues. We seem to be eye-to-eye enough on stuff. We may discuss something, but it's not this constant: well, let's try this together, blah-blah blah-blah-blah, spend all kinds of time doing this, because it's *not necessary*.

JB: Robert Marcellus.

JM: Great player, and a great colleague with *great* moral courage. He was diabetic since he was 21 or thereabouts. He hated dental work but eventually had to have almost every tooth in his mouth removed. At the end of that time he was having a lot of problems playing the throat tones in tune. But not when the concert came. He'd screw up his courage and just make it happen. It was very, very impressive. I know he's got lots of fans. "I don't like this person or that person; I like Bob Marcellus." Well, there's room in the world for people as different as Bob Marcellus was from, say, Frank Cohen. As different as they are, they are unquestionably world-class clarinet players; that's all there is to it. When I hear factional things from students: "Well, I don't like this," I say, "Take it easy, and remember: *that* player isn't with us any more. We have *this* great player."

Conductors

JB: I know before asking that this is unfair. Any comments about conductors, including more about Szell and your current maestro?

JM: It's hard when you talk about conductors. What are they supposed to do? Get up and do everything from memory? How much is that supposed to mean? I know some critics would always find fault with anybody if they ever used the music whatsoever. [Mack and I had just had a laugh over the perhaps apocryphal story about Sir Thomas Beecham, who, when asked why he used a score in performance, said, "Because I can actually read music."] Franz Welser-Möst is pretty hot stuff, and he *always* uses a score. I remember what Dame Myra Hess said one time when she spoke to the audience before playing a recital. She said, "If I play without the music, you will enjoy this recital. If I play *from* the music, I will *also* enjoy this recital." [Chuckles]

George Szell was magnificent. Of course there are lots of other really great people. Bernard Haitink is wonderful. Christoph von Dohnányi is *hot stuff*.

JB: I know you like "The Boss."

JM: I certainly do like The Boss, *just fine*. I'm not always in agreement with him, but he is one of those people who is always searching. Last year we did the *Eroica* and he made the valiant attempt to play the first movement at Beethoven's tempo, which is 60 to the bar. (Sings a portion.) Of course, he knows you have to slow down at some places, but he tried. On the first half of that program we were doing two pieces by Charles Ives. One was *Central Park in the Dark* and the other was a reconstructed piano concerto that Ives worked on for forty years. David Gray Porter, this great Ives scholar, put it together, and it was played by a wonderful pianist who was very dedicated to Ives, Alan Feinberg. Bernard Holland, a critic from *The New York Times*, wrote a review. [Mack quoted from his memory of the article, which captured the gist of Holland's writing. A portion of the actual text of the review, published on October 6, 1998, follows.]

"One came to Cleveland to hear Ives but came away deeply impressed by other matters. After intermission, Christoph von Dohnányi and his orchestra played the Beethoven *Eroica* Symphony, a piece so familiar that one braced for yet another performance of it. How wrong to do so. Beautifully planned, with each phrase and dynamic conscious of every

other phrase, it was played by The Cleveland with that strange combination of force and fastidiousness that only a few important orchestras possess.

"The musicians had already played the *Eroica* on Thursday and Friday evenings and were scheduled for yet a fourth run-through the following afternoon. Yet rarely does one hear informed intensity like this. It was a musical power that extended to each backbench string player and then reached out to touch everyone seated in this agreeably shabby and soon to be restored hall.

"There is a moral force to such playing that we in New York seldom experience, and it was felt on both sides of the footlights. Maybe New Yorkers have too much going for their own good, and maybe Cleveland, with somewhat fewer outlets, better channels its spiritual energies – in this case through a magnificent orchestra, splendidly led. I hope the citizens of Cleveland recognize how lucky they are."

[<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/06/arts/music-review-grit-and-hard-winters-in-rediscovered-ives.html?ref=alanfeinberg>]

The management was so thrilled by that review that they reprinted it five weeks in a row! (Chuckles heartily.) I already knew from what he had written in the past that Bernard Holland was a great fan of our orchestra. But, we are different. We care, and we care simultaneously, and it's not something you find very much.

I will do whatever Dohnányi asks me to do. I may discuss something with him or argue with him or something like that but it's clearly understood between us: I will do what he wants me to do.

JB: I know you also have great affection for Pierre Boulez.

JM: Aha. Pierre Boulez is a singular figure. He was an iconoclast as a child. As a young man he was murder. He didn't have any respect for his teachers; he gained his respect for them much later. He studied with Messiaen, called him a pile of whatever, you know, but yet went on to espouse his music and the composers of the Second School: Schoenberg, Webern, Berg. Meanwhile, he was also composing. The man is brilliant. Somehow or other his compositions have not really spoken to us deeply. However, he is the man that Diogenes was looking for: the absolute honest man.

I'll never forget an intermission interview at The Cleveland Orchestra when the interviewer said: "Mr. Boulez, I'm going to ask you a very personal question. You must be without a doubt one of the most eligible bachelors in the world. How is it that you never married?" And Boulez said, "Well, that *is* a very personal question," and that was *that!* Pierre Boulez is a monk to music – no question about *that*.

A brilliant man and a magnificent musician. He conducts with his bare hands, and is clear like you can't believe. I will now try to describe to you some of his magnificent qualities. He does not have to have you look at him directly to know what he's doing. His gestures are magnanimous, and you can know by his gestures and [through] your peripheral vision exactly what he wants. Plus, he doesn't do wacko things.

JB: What would qualify as a "wacko thing"?

JM: All of a sudden crazy subdivisions or something like that. Everything is totally clear, clear, clear all the time. He also understands rubato, and I say that because Tabuteau complained bitterly that Stokowski and Ormandy didn't understand what rubato was. Tabuteau said rubato means that you keep the framework and make it possible to have freedom *within* the framework. *They* [Stokowski and Ormandy] would *change* the *framework*. I played two concerts with Stokowski when I was in New Orleans, and he would just stop the world to do something "artsy." My instant parallel is that you can dance up and down all you want and not feel bad, but if the earth moves *underneath* you – hmmm, not nice. Stokie was like that, Ormandy to a certain extent was like that; they would just move everything. Boulez does not do that. The framework is always clear, you know what to do, and you feel *so free*. I said to Pierre some years ago during a recording session, "I've never been able to achieve the quality of tone in the 9/8 section of the *Firebird* as I am able to do when you are conducting." And he said, "But, yes." As in: of course. I thought: hmmm. He knows stuff we don't know. And he also knows that he can give you a degree of liberation that can make you feel like you can do something without him even saying anything.

I have to tell you a cute story about the first clarinet player of the New York Philharmonic, Stanley Drucker. Stanley Drucker and I played with Léon Barzin when we were kids. He was 14, I was 16. He would "dry practice." He

would go into a closet when his family was asleep, turn on the light, and practice without making any sound. Fierce. In the early 1970s, during the time that Boulez was the music director of the Philharmonic, everyone was making jokes about him and this and that and so forth and so on. They had nicknames for him like "The French Correction" and "The Twentieth-Century Limited." One day around this time, Stanley called me. We're chatting about this and that, and he started in on Boulez, laying on the nicknames. I thought: it's time for me to do something. So I said, "Stanley! I want you to tell me. What is it like for you in the orchestra when he's conducting and you have a solo to play?" About 15 seconds of silence goes by. Then he says, in a sort of contrite fashion, "I guess easier than with anybody else." I said, "Now you've got it." He rolls the red carpet out for you and makes you feel *so wonderful*. He does rubato the right way. He gives the framework, and the *framework* gives you freedom within it, and it makes you feel so great, you can't believe. He makes it so easy to play.

The music-making is so lucid and yet powerful and affecting. It always communicates to the listener *like mad*. Certainly it's been that way with us. We've made some magnificent recordings with him, and we have some more to do this year. I've always just been thrilled to see him show up because he is so brilliant you can't believe but so genuine at the same time. He never belittles anybody, yet he's very demanding about what he wants – always in a nice fashion – and it always *sounds good*. Boulez has conducted us on many occasions over the years, and I think that Dohnányi and Boulez have come to reach a very interesting rapprochement between them. Dohnányi does not feel threatened to have Boulez on the podium at all. I guess we're sort of sad that he's the principal guest conductor in Chicago instead of us, but that's what it is.

We played one concert with Leonard Bernstein. Shortly after George Szell passed away, he came to Cleveland and did the Mahler Second Symphony, the *Resurrection*. He was a great genius. But, I thought I would not want to play for this man on a regular basis because he was, to my estimation – I could probably be dead wrong and I'm sure many people would argue with me horrendously about this – it seemed to me that he was about 50% genius and 50% charlatan. He seemed to be acting all the time. He was speaking to you in French, German, Italian, Yiddish, whatever, and being cute.

Yet he had immense power, no question about it. I thought: for a steady fare, I'm sorry.

I'm sure you've heard me say this, but I don't think I've said it here. When people ask me to tell them about The Cleveland Orchestra, I say: it is orthodox but zippy, and *non-wacko*. We don't like wacko. This has stayed with us over the years. If somebody shows up and does wacko stuff – and we've had some of that this year already – the orchestra does not like it at all. You can't imagine the hubbub in the locker room.

These people are brilliant or they wouldn't be able to do what they do. I'm not denying their brilliance; I'm talking about matters of taste. If they're brilliant and their taste is a little strange, we just don't like it. It's so amazing how unified the orchestra is in their feeling about such things. Somebody might show up and be bizarre, and they may even incite the audience to riot, and the orchestra would just be saying: hmmm. That's not to mention any more names.

The orchestra was pretty doggone good before George Szell showed up. But he moved things up a few notches. Many people in the orchestra were so affected by this. They thought: yes, this is great, let's try and be like that. And, we *are*. Loren Maazel is brilliant beyond description, but he could be odd. Now we have Dohnányi and he is *not odd*. He's persistent, he rubs the orchestra raw about intonation and stuff like that, but it just heightens our awareness of trying to make things as fine as we can. As any number of people have said, the orchestra sounds its best when Dohnányi is conducting it. Second best, Boulez. Third best, Jahja Ling, because he knows us so well and he's so into our ways. He's an exceedingly honest music-maker and he's done some wonderful things with us.

Touring/recording

JB: Let's cover a few miscellaneous items before turning to teaching. You've been touring and recording for many years. The touring part can be taxing: traveling a long distance and then performing a concert. Is there anything that you can say about how you had to prepare for this?

JM: Of course! James, as you well know, I always have something to say. When you go on the road to play concerts, you've played all of the material before, and it has been rehearsed like mad. The music director wants to make sure – whether it was Dohnányi or Maazel or Szell – that the orchestra puts its best foot forward and knocks their socks off if possible, which it usually does with us. And they care a lot about it, so the onus and responsibility is on you all the time. *You must be fine all the time.* This is what we expect from you. I don't find that to be any real hardship at all.

When we play a concert, the audience is there, maybe the microphones are on. Everybody is going to hear what you do. Therefore, you cannot afford to not be fearless. You must be able to say: whatever I do, I'm going to have to do it good enough that when it goes out there, people will hear it, whether near or far, whether they're in the hall or if it is electronically communicated later. You have to do that. I love it. I'm very much in favor of that. Maybe at one point in my life I wasn't feeling that way, but I certainly feel that way now. Just bring 'em on. Let's have a ball.

The other part you asked about, recording. Recordings can be a very strange thing. We record frequently in the Masonic Auditorium, which is a venue that the Cleveland Orchestra played in from around 1919 to 1931. But, for us, it's a big barn. I remember having a discussion with Dohnányi several years ago. I said, "Boss, the Masonic Auditorium *stinks.*" "Oh, it sounds quite good there, the records sound good." "Maybe so, maybe they do. But when you're sitting there trying to play, and it doesn't sound like you..." It's not just *there*. Same thing goes for the Salzburg Grand Festspielhaus. You sit there and play, all your colleagues sound like themselves, and you sound like somebody else from somewhere else.

I tell myself: if all these other people feel pretty good about it, then just calm down and be yourself, play your best, and don't worry about it. Do the best you can.

JB: You've played in so many places around the world. Where are the great [performance] halls?

JM: Well, I'll tell you! Carnegie Hall is magnificent, but it's not what it was at one time when I was a child. They changed it. I didn't know anything then. James, I knew *nothing* then! All I knew was that the hall was so magnificent that you can't believe. I did play in it many times later, and I thought (sotto voce) it's not the same! It's just not the same.

Everybody thinks that Symphony Hall in Boston is wonderful. Well, yes and no. Everybody wants to build a hall like that. They call it "shoebox." I can tell you: if you're in the back of the hall, you can hear everything fine, but it's sort of dullish and golden. You have to get very, very close to the stage for it to sound *brilliant*. Brilliance will not be heard if you're any further back than a certain amount of the hall. So, I may not have the same regard for Symphony Hall in Boston as many other people do. It's also been a hall where you feel that if things are working right, you feel that you can play very quietly and be heard, very loudly and be heard, and anything in between. For that, it's a really great hall.

I think one of the great halls of the world is the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires. It's a *gigantic* hall. It seats something like 2,500 people. There are so many rows and tiers of boxes, even one that's below your own [performer] level. They have these giant hanging lamps with fringe shades. It's a *great hall*! You play in it, and you think to yourself: this is *not possible*! It's not possible that you could play in a hall that big and sound wonderful. But it does!

There's only one decent hall in Paris. All the big ones, all the famous ones: the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the scene of many famous things; and then the Théâtre du Châtelet, scene of many famous first performances and maybe riots or whatever. They have a new hall, in what they call the Cité de la musique, the "City of Music." We played there a couple of years ago and did a program with Pierre Boulez, where he spoke to the audience (in French). And since I did study with Madame Tabuteau, it was heartwarming

to me to hear him say in French "how close this great orchestra is to my heart." So I thought: well, OK, and the same to you, buddy! That was wonderful.

JB: Embroidered samplers.

JM: In the past, if you had a wonderful message that you would like to have as a keepsake, people used to make embroidered samplers and put them on their walls. My father had great words of advice for me; he was a font of life information from an early age. He would say things like: "Son, don't forget: deserters are still shot." In other words, he was very high on duty. "Son, there's only one way to prepare yourself for the watermelon eating contest, which is to eat lots of watermelon." His sonny-boy puts an addendum to that, which is: "But *not* on the day of the contest!"

A former student made a sampler for the wall of my studio at the Institute of one of my father's greatest sayings. She didn't get the wording exactly correct, but the meaning is the same. "Son, do not take 'no' for an answer from inanimate objects." If you're going to play an instrument like the oboe, and you have to deal with reeds, it's a very good way to think. I think that all oboe players should be able to adjust their instruments, put new pads in if they have to, do some tuning, and so forth and so on, and learn to be fearless about this. I remember what Pat Nott said to me about when she was a student of Marcel Dandois at the Cincinnati Conservatory. He made her – from the first day! – take a piece of cigarette paper and a screwdriver and adjust her oboe. She said she was scared out of her mind, couldn't see straight, didn't know what to do. After a while, when you learn what to do, you think: this is nothing! You're taking care of yourself.

My father had lots and lots of life advice that was wonderful and absolutely apropos and worthy of a lifetime of support and recognition. I guess that was his way of putting burrs under my saddle. I remember once saying to my father, an ordained Presbyterian minister, "There are some things about the Christian ethic that really bother me badly." He said, "Like what?" "Well, it says 'love thy enemy.'" "Yes, you do that." "But, Pop, the next line says: 'thereby shalt thou heap burning coals on their head.' That doesn't sound so hot!" "Well, that is a problem." Then I said, "Well, how about 'turning the other cheek?' Somebody hits you, *smites* you, should you turn the other cheek?" He

said, "Absolutely." "Suppose they smite you on the *other* cheek?" "In that case, you let 'em have it!" You did your job; if they decide not to honor you for that, then give it to them!

Berio

I had to learn *Chemin IV* in four weeks for the American premiere. This is the second version of *Sequenza VII*, which was written for oboe, three solo violins, three solo violas, three solo celli, and two solo basses. The music did not arrive until after the first two weeks had passed. So, I practiced from the original *like mad*. Every day for two weeks, I got up at 6:00 in the morning and practiced two solid hours before I had breakfast. It was tough, but I was making progress. Then, the parts arrived. They were not written *anything* like *Sequenza VII*; it was written in *meters*. Therefore, we had some problems. One big problem was that, as [Berio] said to me, "I can't hear some of the multiphonics." I said, "Of course you can't. When it's oboe alone, there's no interference. You can hear the multiphonics because nobody else is playing. But with [all the other instruments], you can't. The multiphonics you wrote will not work under these circumstances." So I said to him, "Mr. Berio, would you mind if I found multiphonics that you could hear that are similar to what you asked for?" I did that and he was very pleased. I also said to him, "Mr. Berio, in the original, you have 1.7 seconds to play these seventeen notes. However, in this version, you only have 1.4 seconds to play the 17 notes." And he said, "Sorry about that." Like: tough.

JB: When you have worked with a living composer, do they typically find a way to accommodate performance issues?

JM: Mostly, they do. Berio did not. "Sorry about that," said he. But it went quite well. I've had many students who have played *Sequenza*, even before I did, many since, and hopefully many to come. It's a very fascinating piece. But, composers – hmm mmm...

Beethoven

JM: There's a famous joke. *La Bohème* starts (sings opening), and some wag said that Puccini received his inspiration for the opening theme by hearing an Italian orchestra attempt to play Beethoven's *Fifth*. (Chuckles)

JB: Could work for Beethoven's Seventh, too.

JM: When I was in New Orleans, our assistant conductor, Jimmy Yestadt, asked me to come over. "I have these recordings of Beethoven symphonies by Van Karajan; they're really fantastic." So I went over to his house and we listened to the Seventh. All of a sudden I realized that in the first movement they were playing (sings: DEEM-duh-dum, DEEM-duh-dum, evenly; 2/4 instead of 6/8). They weren't playing triplets, they were playing two eighths. (Sings more.)

JB: Or dotted eighth, sixteenth, quarter. Are there many recordings like that?

JM: Of course there are. I think the main problem starts on the third page of the oboe part where in a very declamatory way, the orchestra and the woodwinds are answering each other (sings: buh-dum-BEEM) and all of a sudden you find yourself (sings: buh-dum-bum, as duple rhythm) instead of (buh-dum-BEEM, as a triplet). It's a very difficult rhythm to sustain.

I also have something to say about the second movement of Beethoven Seventh. It's very clearly written by Beethoven to be (sings: Bee, bum bum BUM bum). It's so clearly written, but many orchestras and many conductors don't do it *that way*. And then, there's a little twist at the very end of the movement, when Beethoven all of a sudden writes for about 14 bars, for the woodwinds (sings: beam, bum bum beam bum). In other words, two eighths instead of having staccatos under a slur; and then right after, the oboe plays like before (sings). Did Beethoven know what he was doing? Well, hell yes he did! Beethoven knew what he was doing *in spades*. Beethoven was fantastic. You have to *honor* him! You have to accept what he wrote down, because he knew what he was doing. Whether he was deaf or not is beside the point. The man knew what he was doing, he knew exactly what he wanted, and that was it.

Sol Schoenbach and more Tabuteau

JB: Sol Schoenbach: "Everything I know I learned from somebody else."

JM: This was during a wide-ranging interview with him. He talked about having been one of the early proponents of the German bassoon and that he persuaded Lenny Sharrow to

change. It swept the country and lots of the world, even France to a certain extent. Sol Schoenbach was playing first bassoon in the CBS Symphony when he was sixteen years old. Then, all of a sudden, he finds himself at age 22 playing principal bassoon in the Philadelphia Orchestra, following the wonderful Walter Guetter. By the way, Guetter happened to be a cousin of Hans Moennig, our premier woodwind repairman in this country for so many years. I asked him about [his Philadelphia experiences] one time, and he said, "John! The air was filled with electricity. Stokowski was like 'Hmmm!' (intense grunt) all the time, and we had all these great artists. We had Tabuteau and Kincaid and Torello, the principal bass player, and all these other people who were really hot stuff. We were just running scared *all the time*." There are a couple of interviews with him in the IDRS. Hopefully, many people who read this will know [of] them and have accessed them. I even read one to the Oboe Camp once, I thought it was so wonderful.

I remember that in one interview Sol was talking about the fact that the French oboe players played with a sort of narrow tone, which was a nice way to put it. He thought that Tabuteau may have been influenced by the German bassoon; that it was one of the reasons [Tabuteau felt] the oboe had to have a heavier, weightier, and more significant kind of quality to fit in that circumstance. I'm not so sure that's what happened, but that was his read on it. He was very, very observant. Sol sat behind Tabuteau in the orchestra, never studied with him, and was not familiar with all the terminology that all of his students were familiar with. However, one thing he picked up from Tabuteau was the keeping of the line, playing over the bar line without stubbing one's toe and so forth and so on. He said - I'm trying not to misquote him, "The French have a certain kind of logic." I thought: well, yes; *some* do! Pierre Boulez, of course, being one example. There were times when I thought that Tabuteau's reasoning was unreasonable and his logic was illogical and his method was unmethodical. But there was stuff *there*! [Schoenbach] said in his article: "Tabuteau felt that there was a certain necessary logic to certain things, especially Beethoven." Well, I think Beethoven is a perfect example of a composer where once you understand exactly the shape of something, then it's fine and it's *always* fine. Then, the interviewer asked: "How about William Kincaid?" - their great first flute player. "Well, he was terrific and very much along the same lines as Tabuteau." He also mentioned Ralph

McLane, the great clarinet player. [Schoenbach] said that at one point in time McLane said to him, "You know, I see you moving your mouth for the separate notes. This will make it impossible for you to have a genuine line of articulation." Which is maybe a hard thing to understand. My understanding of that is that what he was telling him is that you are not going to be able to have a genuine line through mixed articulations if you start moving your face around. [Schoenbach] was very greatly influenced by that.

This reminds me of something Tabuteau said to me when I was in twelfth grade. He looked up at me and said, "At least you don't move your jaw when you articulate." And I thought: you mean I'm doing something *good*? I had no idea. Of course I understand very well now what that is.

Schoenbach also said, "I have never had an original idea in my life. I listen to other people play. If I heard something I liked, I would adopt it. If I heard something I didn't like, I didn't pay any attention to it." He was a fine player and a very, very bright man. I was a little surprised by this statement, because I've had an awful lot of original ideas myself over the years. I don't know where they come from, but they show up all the time. He did a great service to music. He left the Philadelphia Orchestra at a fairly young age to head up the Music School Settlement because he thought it was a really important thing to do; he led the program for many years. Very fine man.

Teaching and pedagogy

JB: "Two wrongs and two rights."

JM: That was something that came to me a couple of years ago, an example of an original thought that dropped from heaven on high into my brainpan. I was thinking about students who don't have the best embouchure and they can maybe find a way to make a reed that will go with their "not best" embouchure and not sound too bad. But that's not going to be long lasting. So, I came up with this little thought that "two wrongs may make a right, but two rights make a better right." So, therefore, I try to persuade students to adjust their embouchure so that it is one that goes with a good reed and not with a bad reed. One of the reasons this crops up is because so many young players, if they're really talented, will do anything to find a way to sound OK, even on crummy reeds. Therefore they can put

themselves in a vicious circle where they learn to play on insufficient reeds, which is not good. They then have to make reeds like that in order to play. Unless somebody can come along and hoist them up out of that, that can make themselves be trusted by the student, then the student could have a governor put on their development.

JB: You said to me the other night: "Teaching is tough." It is clearly one of your great passions. It doesn't seem to be self-serving for you in any way.

JM: Yes, teaching is tough. It *could* be self-serving if you tried to make everybody be like you. I don't do that at all. I just try to let students know what they have to be able to do, no matter what. And I try to help them in every way. I do not try to make them like carbon copies of their teacher whatsoever.

I came up with this many years ago. It may sound strange, but it is not to me. One of my fondest hopes is that Mozart will be alive and well 400 years from now. In order for this to happen, we need three things. We need for the earth not to destroy itself. There's not that much we can do about that; perhaps hope and pray, something like that, because the brethren of mankind seem to dislike each other to an inordinate degree and are ready to fight and die for some picayune thing. We need the world to survive.

Then, we need talent. That's no problem because wonderful talent comes from every corner of the earth in an unending, steady stream. Then, the other thing that we need is the passing on of knowledge and taste. That's the one I can do something about. So I feel very passionate about that. I also feel that if I'm going to do what I think I *should* do as a teacher, I have to try to persuade my students to think the same way; think beyond their own time. I don't think Tabuteau thought about past his own time that much. I know that of all the students that Georges Gillet had in the Conservatoire between 1881 and 1918 – and some of them were quite fine players – the one that emerged as the leading teacher was Marcel Tabuteau. And I think Tabuteau took a lot of things for granted. He might have thought: maybe one of my students will end up being a great teacher. That's it. I didn't see him to be overly concerned about that particular issue.

However, I am very concerned about it. When you do something like the Oboe Camp, all those people are there

and you don't know what's going to happen to them. You don't know who is going to rise up and be something special, maybe have the knack, ability, and the desire to teach. Because we need teaching desperately: primary school teachers, music teachers, teachers to help their students solve problems in such a fashion that they may, hopefully, in their turn, carry this forward.

JB: In one of our discussions about technique you said: "Embouchure goes under technical matters."

JM: Sure does.

JB: Then you said: "Before I talk about embouchure, I would like to talk about fingers and stance."

JM: The reason I say that is because I don't necessarily do things the way my teacher did. In some ways, yes, some ways not at all. There were only three physical things that my teacher ever would discuss with his students. One was hand position and how they used their fingers. Another was general stance – such as you don't have your elbows against your body or whatever. The third was about the embouchure.

Regarding finger action, Tabuteau was very specific about picking your fingers up and putting them down and not going "diddly-diddly" or something "cutesy poo" or whatever, or raising them up and slapping them down. He didn't want anything like that. He wanted it to be natural.

In order to go into the subject of the embouchure as thoroughly as I would like to, I would have to say lots of things, so I'm just going to pile in. In this day and age, if you wish to be competitive, you have to be able to sound good, and play in tune with fine phrasing and rhythm, among other things. Then you have to be able to play loud and sound good and play soft with clarity. This is a very difficult thing, and one that I think is *totally* subject to reasonability. If you want to be able to play loud and sound good, and if you want to be able to play soft with clarity, certain things need to be in place. I'll start with the reed. You need a reed that holds itself up to pitch, with no intention to rise. The reed has to have all the necessary depth without any intention to fall. That's for sure. The high register must be in place on your oboe and on your reeds, or you're going to be in *big trouble*. The embouchure has to be the "instrument" that makes it possible for you to play loud and sound good, and play soft

with clarity at the same time. This means that the embouchure has to have changeability in it greater than the reed, because you're playing *on* the reed. The reed's a reed – that's it.

Being my mother's son – who was at times the queen of the sweeping generalization – I end up doing that. But I'm also my father's son: always looking for the exceptions. At any rate, I would say that a successful embouchure is going to be unequal between top and bottom. Most oboe players orient to the lower lip. Many wonderful oboe players orient to the upper lip. It's a significant minority, but there's nothing *wrong* with that. If that's the way you're built, if that's the way your face works, that's OK-fine. Nevertheless, certain things are still truths; *that* I believe. If you want to sound good, the reed must not be free flowing in your mouth. You must have more purchase on the reed from one side or the other.

In my class right now, the majority of my students orient to the lower lip, except one, and he's one of my best students. Elaine Douvas plays on her upper lip, and she's no small potatoes. By the way, I should tell you that I made her change while she was a student and she was suffering big time. I realized: no, this is *wrong* for her, absolutely wrong. So I said, "OK. Forget it. Go back to doing what you do. I was trying to make you be like the majority, and you're not *in* the majority, so *forget* that." Elaine is very, very careful in her teaching to see to it that she never tries to make somebody do her orientation if it's not best for them.

The embouchure is incredible and does so many different things. It is like Venetian blinds, allowing how much of the light or sound source to come through.

Tabuteau was from the old school where your chin is supposed to be down, like when you whistle. He considered that very important. I remember playing for him when I was in the twelfth grade. He reached over and stroked my chin down so that I could feel where it is, what I was doing with it.

Most young oboe players working on their own want to get as much meat against the reed as possible, thinking it gives more control. It doesn't, but it *seems* like it. [Chin down] certainly does help your endurance if you can do that, because having it down and having the corners of your mouth

coming in – like, “Katie, bar the door!” – and holding against things are probably the two things that help most oboe players have endurance. I consider that the corners of the mouth make it possible for you to keep your embouchure in place and to be able to play for hours and hours as we have to do sometimes. We have to play long, protracted things sometimes. Bach wrote pieces that can rip your face off, but you can do it. Endurance can be a big problem for oboe players, but it doesn't *have* to be.

The other duties of the embouchure are a bit complicated. For instance, when you're playing loud and you want to sound good – we're assuming you have a decent reed – then the purpose of the embouchure is to screen out the noxious elements so you can *play* loud and sound good. And when you play soft, it's exactly the opposite thing. Same reed, same oboe player, different way of holding the reed. If you're going to coerce the reed towards more silence, you're going to have more flesh on the reed. If you have more flesh on the reed, you're not going to be able to have distinction. So, therefore, I try to explain to my students that when you're going to play really soft and you want distinction, you *must* see to it that both tips of the reed, top and bottom, are clear beyond your lips on the inside or you will not be able to do that. It will not be possible. I don't try to make a formula up for anybody or everybody, because they're all different. But, if they're not able to do that, I will hound them. You have to be able to *do* this, play with delicacy and strength.

With many embouchure issues, the solution can really be a strong application of common sense; nothing esoteric at all. It's a terribly challenging subject, James, but we all have to deal with it. It's not always easy; sometimes it's difficult even to *talk* about this. The student might say: but wait a minute, that's *my* embouchure. That's the way I hold the reed. And I say: that's your way, OK-fine. But, do you have anything against having a *better* way than that for the future?

JB: Circular breathing.

JM: I have some complaints about circular breathing. It can sound so unnatural. It can also save your life from time to time. But there are some people who do it all the time and give you a sense when you hear them play that they're never going to take a breath. We are human beings, after all. Oskar Moravetz, the Canadian composer, was born a few miles

away from where Gustav Mahler was born and he's generally referred to as "Canada's greatest composer." He wrote a Sonata for oboe and piano that's rather difficult which I have played many, many times. He was in Cleveland some years ago. He wrote a piece, a tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr., and Steve Gaber, our principal cellist, played it. There was a reception afterwards, and I said to him, "Oskar, that first cello entrance just drove me crazy." He said, "What are you talking about, John?" "In this long, orchestral introduction, the cello comes in and plays for four-and-a-half minutes, and the *bow never leaves the string*. As a wind player, I find that very, very hard to take; that there was no breathing in the whole thing." And he said, "But, John, the cello can do that." And I thought: that is not a fit answer.

I'll never forget something that Pierre Boulez said once when there was a series of lectures at the Cleveland Institute of Music, perhaps eight years ago. The subject of this series of lectures was the creative process. [Boulez] was talking about one of his pieces where he was using instruments that had a decaying tone rate, where he had very carefully arranged events to happen where they would all decay at the same time. This is pretty clever; he's a smart man. He said: "Whereas the winds, who are sustaining instruments..." And I thought: oh! Is *that* what we are? Yes, the winds can sustain. And he tossed that off as if everyone should know that the winds are sustaining instruments. Well, yes; we are. But [with circular breathing] we play forever without interrupting the flow to breathe. That's not too happy, because it's not natural. A singer wouldn't and *can't* do that. So if somebody can get up and play the Strauss Concerto and circular breathe and never have a breath taken, it's tough for the listener to take. I didn't get anywhere with Oscar Moravetz about that. "No, no, John; the cello can *do* that." So *what*?

It reminds me of something that happened in Marlboro once when we were doing some giant Bach aria. I determined to play this whole passage in one breath, and I did. Afterwards, Rudy Serkin came back, gave me this giant big hug. He said, "John, that was beautiful playing, but please don't ever do that to me again. My lungs were aching." And I thought: *right*. It seems to me, as my teacher said, we should learn from singers, because the singers have to breathe. Listen to them and see which ones do it best, and how artfully they do it so that you're never resentful about the fact that they take a breath. Or, as Moyse would

say, "Don't be rude!" When you have to breathe, just give the impression: "Excuse me so much, I would like to take a little air now, thank you!" If you do it right, they will forgive you. If you finish the previous phrase in such a fashion as to suggest ongoingness, and then you take up the following phrase in such a fashion as not to sound intrusive, then you'll probably be able to do that without having people being upset about it. This is something *all* singers have to do. Flute players have to work on this a lot because of all the wind instruments, the flute is the one that *usually* runs out of air faster than the others. Not always! The oboe is the one that can seem to play forever on one breath.

We need to listen to singers and string players. About the up bow, down bow, and all matters of inflection. I mentioned earlier about how interested Tabuteau was about the ability of string players to play towards the bridge or on the fingerboard and this and that. How are you going to be able to imitate that on the oboe? Well, he did pretty well, finding his way to be able to do things like that, which were shocking and above and beyond what you had ever heard anybody else ever do on the oboe. As far as I was concerned, as mightily impressed as I was – and I was – it was in the back of my mind that maybe I could do that some day. Probably not, but maybe – who knows. I'm pretty close. I may have passed him up in some ways, but in many other ways I'll never touch him. I'll never touch what he could do. He could rip your guts out. I may be able to impress you, but I can't rip your guts out, at least not to my knowledge.

JB: What do you consider to be key skills and tools?
Scales, solfege, method books, orchestral excerpts,
repertoire – preferred amounts, specific designs?

JM: Students have to learn to read music. That's a far greater task than can easily be explained. For instance, think back to the Sellner articulation exercises. I could play one for you like an eighth grader, like a twelfth grader, like somebody in college, and like me. Each one would be at a slightly different level even though [the music] is printed the same way. It's what you learn about what's going on with music that makes that possible. I'll never forget something that happened at the Bach Festival in Bethlehem once. Tabuteau was just about to pack up and go outside for a cigarette – that's before he gave up smoking – and Ifor Jones, the conductor, says, "Mr.

Tabuteau, please come back. This was originally written for violin but I would like it to be played on the oboe." So, Tabuteau hauls the oboe back out, puts the reed in, and sight-reads this thing. He played it as though he had played it twenty times before. That's a result of accumulated knowledge. If you look at the page, you see note groupings, you see the articulations, right away you see what the suggested harmonies are, and you just ride along on top of it.

But it takes a lot of *doing* to get to a point like that. I remember what one of my students said when I was trying to explain something in Barret. "In the Barret book, *this* diminuendo means *this* this time, but it doesn't mean the same thing *this other* time. This articulation means *this* here, but it doesn't mean that in many other cases." So, the student said, in a moment of high frustration, "Mr. Mack, am I ever gonna understand what all this stuff means?" I said, "Well, by the time we finish with the Barret book, yes, you will understand all this stuff. I will see to it." That's my job. I already know what many of those things are and how this works *this* way but not *that* way, and I try to teach that to my students in such a fashion that they will truly understand well enough to be able to *play* it, demonstrate it, and *teach* it. So if one of their students says, "Am I ever going to understand all of this?" the answer is, "I will see to it that you do."

One of the reasons I have my students transpose a lot of stuff is not just so they can transpose but that they should gain a freedom of being able to feel at home in a key; to be able to play in a key, noodle in a key, and if they get lost, find their way back somehow or other. One of the things I'm trying to achieve with my students is what I refer to as a degree of liberation, and a certain degree of liberation and freedom comes from being able to play something from memory. Anyone could sing their Barret melody for you in any key whatsoever if you just started them off, because the pattern is sufficiently embedded in their brains that they could do that, but they're probably not going to get paid to sing. So I think it's very good for them. I also think of highly developed jazz players who have become so acquainted with the instrument that a thought can pass through their mind and come out instantly from the instrument. Lots of classical musicians can't do that. They're wedded to the page, and the fact that they have to use part of their brainpower to process the printed material is going to diminish them somewhat.

I have a very favorite story about brainpower. Many years ago at Marlboro, Joe Turner, Pat Grignet Nott, and I were working very hard on the big Beethoven Trio, opus 87. Rudy Serkin really wanted us to play it, as it had not been performed there previously. Some oboe players – who shall remain nameless – would say, “Well, you can’t get more than halfway through the slow movement and that’s it.” One day, Pat said, “Let’s rehearse with a metronome today.” So, we did. Very interesting. We discovered that we all had the same human tendency to want to rush or slow down simultaneously. This made me think: well, maybe it’s not all bad, if it’s a common human trait to do that. Pat said, “Let’s do it again tomorrow,” and the most *shocking* thing happened. *The intonation improved*. My first thought: how is that possible? My second thought: the obvious answer is because one source of anxiety – ensemble and tempo – had been eliminated; we could bring our cerebral powers to bear on other things and were not as diluted as we were before by being concerned about them.

Again, I want my students to have liberation. I feel that when you find the shape for a phrase that really stands the test of time and rings the bell, it will always sound good that way and if you play it a hundred times it will always sound good if it follows that track. Therefore, you are liberated to play because you can trust yourself that you are not going to stray, and that to me is real liberation. Real liberation is not playing it this way this time and playing it some other way another time. To me, that’s a severe mark of the fact that you don’t know what you believe about how it should go. Tabuteau used to say, “Think before you play, and when you play, don’t think.” But then he went on in great detail to explain what he meant by that. Don’t play the way you feel; you might feel bad. Play the way you *think*. Think beautifully, artistically, musically, and let that be the bulwark of your playing. Let that be the thing you can build your house on. House on stone, not sand. Then, when you come to play, you can feel totally liberated because you can just go and play your heart out, but you won’t stray.

Students come to me with a wide variety of backgrounds. It may not matter what kind of training you’ve had. It might be that you got some ill advice when you were a kid. Perhaps that teacher never had access to higher levels of understanding. But they weren’t trying to confuse you; they were trying to help you as best they could. Therefore,

never be resentful of what any teacher ever told you, even if they were upside down and backwards, because they were undoubtedly trying to help you and not mess you up.

When somebody plays for me, whether it's one of my own students, somebody who's coming to audition, or somebody who comes for a single lesson, I'm watching and listening, listening and watching, remembering back to when I was in New Orleans many years ago and I had seventh- and eighth-grade kids as students and I had to teach them rudiments from the ground up. I find it very amusing that people who can *play* will show up to play for me and every time they put the high octave key down they get off the low octave key. Which makes no sense. The mechanism has been built to take care of that for a hundred years plus already. Any time you push down the high octave key, it closes the low octave key. Then I also run into others who *always* put down the low octave with the high octave, whether it's needed or not. I tell them: no, no. Go back, study this all again, straighten yourself out. The brain is your computer. Put the other material in there. Understand that if you're going to go from an octave G to an octave A, or whatever, and come back down, don't *leave the low octave key!* I see this a lot!

I'm a great believer in playing the orthodox fingerings for things, most of which are in the George Gillet fingering chart from 1906. We have new fingerings for some of the really high notes to make them better in tune. I insist that my students learn the orthodox fingerings and be able to deal with them. If they find themselves in some unusual situation where they have to fudge something, OK. But don't make fudging the ground you stand on.

There's a passage in the complete version of *Daphnis* where you play: high F#, E and then D#, G# (sings). Well, then you have to go from F# to one finger of E, grab it on the right side to go to D# on the left hand side and then come down to right hand G#. Sort of complicated, but it easily can be done. And it's *much* more easily done if you already are accustomed to the correct fingerings.

We have to find a way to be able to pass from one note seamlessly to another one. As my teacher would say: an interval is not true unless both notes are true, that the intention of moving is there, and the connection between the notes is present. Otherwise, it's not a real, complete

interval. I totally agree with this. Something has to be *between* the notes.

I was interviewed in 1985 by Rebecca Fisher, a brilliant woman who does the early morning stuff on WCLV, our "good music" station in Cleveland – Cleveland Orchestra broadcasts and so forth and so on. Her hubby is the head of the audio department at the Institute. We're down in the basement, yakking, getting ready. She had a cold, I had a cold; we're waiting for our voices to "come up" a little bit before we commenced. She said, "I want to ask you about your teacher. I'm going to ask you about *your* teaching, I'm going to ask you what's the same, what's different. I'm going to ask you about predestination, because I've heard that you use this term." "Yes, I certainly do." During the interview, she says, "John, please tell us about predestination." (Pause) I'm going to prove to you how brilliant this woman is. I said, "Well, look. In the Funeral March of the *Eroica*, in the second of the oboe solo passages, you go from a B-flat to an E-flat (sings) before the famous scale. As far as I'm concerned, the B-flat has to sound like it yearns to go up. It yearns to go up a perfect fourth – no more, no less – and *does*. And it has to be that way." This woman, in her brilliance, says, "Oh, you mean as if to say that the choices have already been made and it's your job to justify them." And I thought: ohhh, yeah. Exactly so. The choices have been made, and your job is to make it sound like that is the only way it can possibly be. It's not an *accident*. That B-flat has got to go to E-flat; it's not going to an E-natural or an F or a G. Beethoven, in his infinite wisdom, decided that. Therefore, we have to make it sound absolutely right. In order to do that, we have to do everything we can to play the B-flat to the E-flat.

Tabuteau used to teach us sometimes to play a passage on one note. The purpose of that was to find a way to keep the line intact. He was very much wanting to do that. During my last year in Curtis I was in his studio with him and he was playing away like a madman, as usual. And he did something cutesy-poo. Perfumey. He was very good at that; oh, he could *do* that, mm-*hmmm*. He did this thing, then he stopped, pulled the oboe out of his mouth and said to me (I'm quoting him verbatim): "Mack: disregard what you just heard me do. I was *wrong*. Don't ever forget your first rule of music making: *keep your lines*." I thought he was saying, "Do as I preach, don't do as I do," but I was wrong. I

thought it was so marvelous. "Disregard what you heard me do. I was *wrong*."

So, as far as perfume is concerned, I have something to say to my own students on the subject. If perfume must be used, it must be the very finest and most *sparingly* applied. I've heard so many people that do all the dippy-doodles and all this other stuff, and I think: *come on!* That doesn't sound genuine.

Rudolf Serkin is one of my permanent, all-time heroes. Not that you would want to hear the man play Chopin; no, that was for Rubenstein. But Beethoven: *hmmmm*. Or as he pronounced it: Bay-taw-vun. I remember hearing him play several Beethoven sonatas in Carnegie Hall many years ago, and I thought Beethoven would have been thrilled out of his *mind*. Serkin was very much like George Szell, in a certain fashion: very much concerned about forward propulsion, getting where you're going. I remember one of the last times I saw him, he was really up in years and was playing a pension fund concert with The Cleveland Orchestra. The man had been built like an ox, but by this time he was quite frail. I went backstage to speak with him and I said, "You have been such a hero to me, musically, for so long." He said, "I have? Would you tell me why?" "Rudy, if I tell you, it's going to sound silly, but it means everything to me. You carry the mail, you get where you're going, you smell the flowers but you don't stop to smell them." And he gave me a big embrace. He knew perfectly well what I was talking about. Get where you're going. Part of the music is an ongoing thing. When I hear people play stuff and they stop to wallow in something or other, it just drives me crazy, because it sounds so dishonest, like dereliction of duty or something like that. You could never say that about *that* man. He was like Atlas, who could carry the world on his shoulders. He could play Brahms without ever being narrow. There aren't many pianists who can play Brahms and sound convincingly broad and able to carry the whole thing all the time.

I once had a long conversation with my dear friend David Zauder, who was our personnel manager for many years, about the fact that people will go to play an audition and all they know is the solo passages. They have no idea as to how things go. Our concertmaster, Bill Preucil, just made a fantastic teaching CD of first violin audition material for Summit Records. He said: "If you're going to play the Mendelssohn *Midsummer's Night Dream*, go listen to

Mendelssohn, find out what Mendelssohn's music sounds like. Because if you do, then when you play his music, anybody who hears you will know that you know how Mendelssohn's music goes." If you don't, you just practice the notes. Some element will be missing when people hear you.

JB: How do you make choices as to what the student will study at a given time?

JM: I make my choices pretty much according to the individual. I try to make sure that certain things get taken care of with everyone, at the same time realizing that everyone is different. Up-ness and down-ness, so upper notes sound above lower notes (sings, as in Nielsen *Romanze* opening). If you want to be competitive on the audition circuit some day, it's not enough only that your rhythm be fine, that your intonation be fine, that your tone is fine, and this and that and so forth and so on. Not to leave out the most important thing: that music means something to you and that it is conveyed.

I was just talking about this with somebody recently, and they said, "Well, I think in the first round, defense is the most important thing." As in, don't "offend." Let people fall by the wayside before you advance because they can't keep everything in place or whatever and you can and therefore you're going to get advanced. But once you get advanced, you're going to have to show them right away how much you care about the music, how much it means to you, and that you have distinct viewpoints. Even if your viewpoint is not the same as theirs, they will still be impressed by the fact that you have a viewpoint and that you espouse it. I think that's very true.

Auditions are very strange things. You have to understand that every different place you play an audition they may have totally different ideas about what they like and what they don't like. I remember students of mine [saying], "I didn't get very far with them, but I figured that what they were looking for was something different than what I do." Well, that's a very nice way to think about it. Not to be too upset about the fact they didn't fall at your feet, you know; that maybe they're looking for something that's different from what you do. After all, every orchestra is different; as I said earlier, every orchestra has its own "artistic profile."

JB: What would you consider to be your "teaching profile"?

JM: I have to say as a preface that everyone teaches differently and I teach my way.

There are constant, ongoing principles, things I believe in like mad to which I try to persuade my students. When a new student comes to the Institute of Music, I have a speech for them. I say: "Look. You're here for every right reason. You were accepted because you're intelligent, talented, capable, and anxious to do this. There is no guarantee that you're going to get employment afterwards. However, there are going to be jobs out there and somebody is going to get them. They will probably go to the person who wants it more than other people and has the necessary ingredients." Then I tell them, "Across the street is the Historical Society. When you graduate from the Institute, you have my permission, if they'll let you, to go up on the roof with your battery-operated bullhorn and tell all the passersby that John Mack is full of prune water and canal juice and is not a good oboe teacher. But, *until then*, I expect you to bust your butt to do whatever I ask you to do, even if you disagree with me. And in your darkest hour of despair, console yourself with this thought: if you can please John Mack, it's probably not going to *hurt* you." I also add, "I'm not asking for any life loyalty oath to me. I'm not asking you to believe what I believe. I'm only asking you to be able to *do* this, because in the real world you're frequently going to be called upon to do something in some fashion that's maybe not to your satisfaction, but that's your profession. So you have to be able to do it, and not only *do* it, but do it well and make it sound like you *like* it."

With all these things in mind, I just try to do everything I can for them in every possible way. They're the flock, I'm the shepherd. I'm supposed to get them from this meadow to the one up there somehow or other. I must say, it's very thrilling to me that sometimes students who have had a lot of problems will come back five years later and play for me and sound terrific when I thought all was lost at some point or other. (Sotto voce) No, it wasn't. It was *not* lost. It was *in* there. I remember one former student said, "Mr. Mack, I'm not playing so hot now, but I have not forgotten what you told me. I'm working like mad. I hope some day I'll be able to show you that it was worth all your time and effort with me." And then to see it happen – that's very gratifying.

I try to do what I think is the right thing to do. That's for damn sure. I absolutely try to do what I think is the right thing with anyone I ever work with, whether it's a 14-year-old from the youth orchestra who comes for a lesson, with my own students, or former students, or whatever. If it's a former student, I always try to make it a little bit more like, as they say in diplomatic circles, a frank exchange of views. Although, always with the understanding that *my* viewpoint is a little more important than *theirs*!

JB: I am so impressed by the way you work at JMOC. A 14-year-old will get up there and then a 44-year-old will step up, and they are treated in the same fashion.

JM: I never beat up on anyone. When somebody plays at Oboe Camp and I'm up there with them, it's not *just them*. I am trying to get messages across to *everyone* in attendance. The person that's up there is a vehicle to do that.

Joe Robinson was the one that created JMOC, "Juh-MOC" as you have named it. He had been to Wildacres with the Charlotte Oratorio Society a couple of times, and he thought it was a truly remarkable place. He inaugurated the first John Mack Oboe Camp in 1976; it was only about four days long. His reasoning was: "To make John Mack's pedagogy available to more people than could have access to it in Cleveland." And I thought, well, that sounds good to me. I want to reach people. I want to share the stuff that I've learned over the years, which is immense. I've been so fortunate to be in such good company with so many people, and to be able to learn from great artists, and so forth and so on. I care passionately about all this stuff. You never know where there's going to be a little piece of fertile territory, that something you drop on them is going to take root and grow and become something.

I'm not looking for kudos for myself – I'm absolutely not doing that. I'm trying to share this wonderful stuff I've been able to learn. You know the old story about the teacher who says to little Johnny, "Will you stand up and explain to the class the difference between ignorance and apathy?" And he gets up and says, "I don't know and I don't care." (Chuckles) But ignorance is not stupidity. Stupidity means you can't learn something. Ignorance means you haven't learned it yet. That's all. You haven't had access to it. Doesn't mean you can't learn it. So, I guess what I'm trying to do is just pass on as much as I can of what

I've been so fortunate to learn. I'll take some credit for having put a lot of stuff together and coming to understand things. But it's *not* self-serving. We don't go [to JMOC] to celebrate me. We go there to celebrate music, and the oboe happens to be our favorite instrument. It's not like that's some special, lofty thing above other things. I remember what my teacher said: "The oboe is like the hammer in the hands of a carpenter. It is your chosen tool to make music." Not to deify it: (funny voice) "Oh, I play the oboe!" Oh, come on! It's not really that. That's the instrument that speaks to you most strongly, the one you want to play because you resonate to that somehow or the other. But it's really about music making, not about the glorification of this particular instrument.

Attendance usually consists of around 58 participants and maybe one or two dozen auditors. People often come back multiple times or years later. There are two reasons for somebody who's attended in the past or who's out doing stuff to go there, as far as I'm concerned. One is to learn more, because *I'm* learning more all the time. The other thing is to see how I teach. Because many of these people are teaching, and they may get some new ideas about things they could do as a teacher from seeing me teach. I'm up there *all day*, practically.

JB: I don't know how you do it.

JM: I dunno, either. At the Cleveland Institute of Music I teach on Mondays from ten to four, and then I conduct sectionals with the woodwinds and brass separately, then together from 4:15 to 6:15. I never get tired from the teaching. Six straight hours of teaching doesn't bother me at all. I've had people say: "You had better teach this person the first hour, because by the third hour you're going to be wasted." I'm *never* "wasted" around teaching. Every student who comes through the door, you have no idea what's going to happen. Can they do something they couldn't do before? Is there something that needs to be corralled back in?

I've heard horror stories about teachers who give the same lesson to everybody all day. How could you do a thing like that? As a teacher, I feel one of my main roles is to be a counter puncher. I look to see what's happening, what directions they're going in, try to deflect them perhaps onto a better path or something like that without bruising

them, but to keep them anxious to try a new path. I *have* to do that.

I had a tough teacher. He used to scream and holler at us, call us "stupide" all the time. And I'm thrilled that I studied with him because – as I said before – he put a burr under my saddle for a *lifetime*. I suppose in some way I would like to do the same things for my students. But I can't do it *that* way. I just can't call them stupid and stuff like that. It worked pretty well for him; it doesn't work for me. Alice Chalifoux was our great harp teacher [at CIM] for many years, and her students were so wonderful. I kept asking them to tell me about Alice's teaching. They would say, "Ummmm [no answer]." So after a couple of years of this, I happened to be walking out of the school with Alice. She was 80 by that time. I said, "Alice, dear!" "Oh, John, dear!" I gave her a kiss and said, "Alice, I have to ask you a question." "What's that, John, dear?" "Look: I'm getting nowhere with your students. They will not tell me about your teaching. I want to know more about it because you're such a wonderful teacher, so demanding you can't believe, and yet they all adore you." She told me, "Well, John, I let them know exactly what's expected of them and I let them know that I'm on their side." And that worked great for her. Absolutely amazing.

Everybody teaches differently. I could never teach the way I used to. I can think of some teachers – mentioning no names or even initials – one week they'll tell me so-and-so is really hot stuff and the next week he's a piece of junk and I'm going to have to let him go. Come on! That's not your *job*. Your job is to help build them and support them and find things to do to make them stronger and worthier and so forth and so on.

For me, it's a life-long commitment. When I take a student into the Institute, it is a commitment on both of our parts. They want to be there, I want them to be there, we're going to work very, very hard, and we're probably gonna be in touch with each other for many years to come, or basically for as long as I'm around. I'm on the phone – hmmmmmm – an awful lot of the time. People call me and call me and call me – I'm having a problem with this, what do you think I should do? At times, I am a surrogate parent. The students feel they should be able to trust me if they have a problem, that they can call me and I won't beat them over the head or whatever. And it happens a fair amount. I think it goes along with the territory, right? It's not

just: OK, I'll see you for your lesson on Friday and that's it. Unh-uh. It's much more involved than that. I call it a sacred duty.