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By

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BETTY JOHNSON, MIDWEST PIONEER OF THE BASSOON: HER LIFE AND LEGACY

A DOCUMENT APPROVED FOR THE
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to my first bassoon teacher, Betty Johnson. What a blessing it was to learn from you and spend time with you during my early years as a bassoonist.

The first thing anyone told me about you was that you were considered the Grandmother of the Bassoon. After learning more about your life, that title makes perfect sense and is deserved. I'm sure you are too humble to figure out why I decided to tell your story. It is because your story is worth being told.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This labor of love would not have been possible without the unending help and support of many people. I began this project by contacting Betty's daughter, Joan Straach. She instantly invited me to her home, welcomed me into the family, provided many hours of information-filled interviews, and gave me a comfortable place to stay for many nights while I conducted research. The remembrances and memories she shared brought up old memories and forgotten emotions. Joan offered everything she had: pictures, old letters, programs, and more. The family's information was invaluable to the preservation of Betty's life and legacy; it outlined a story and added dimension to my research.

Johnson's former bassoon students, colleagues, and friends whom I contacted for this study responded with enthusiasm and a desire to help in any way they possibly could. They consistently answered my questions with excitement and added unexpected details, thrilled for the opportunity to share memories about a beloved teacher, friend and colleague. Pictures, programs, lesson notes, recordings, and more sources to contact were readily offered. The lesson notes provided essential clues to Johnson's pedagogy and reed-making technique over time. They have been enthusiastic, responding to emails and phone calls full of follow-up questions and requests for last minute details. I could not tell the story of Betty Johnson without looking at her life through their eyes. Their dedication to Johnson and this project was evident in our correspondence, another testament to Johnson's positive influence on their lives. To all 39 of my research informants - Thank you for your energy and enthusiasm from the bottom of my heart.

Warmest gratitude also goes to the administration and faculty at Oklahoma City University, who provided me with background information about Betty's employment and former students. I must also thank the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Artistic Director Joel Levine, and the Kerr Foundation for providing me with the invaluable unpublished manuscript about the history of the Oklahoma Symphony, and details regarding the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and Betty's involvement with that organization. Warmest thanks to Terry Dolan from the ReeDuAl Company for sending records, pictures and information about your product. I appreciate that you dug through old boxes of archival material to find information for me.

I would like to express sincere thanks to my outstanding and dedicated Doctoral Committee: Dr. Eugene Enrico, Professor Rodney Ackmann, Dr. Suzanne Tirk, Dr. Jennifer Saltzstein, and Dr. Bruce Hoagland, as well as former members, Professor Carl Rath and Dr. Kenneth Stephenson. Your support, patience, encouragement, and advice through this process, along with tireless efforts to provide excellent feedback and suggestions have been a huge factor in my ability to write this document. Thanks go to my amazing editor Nancy Cohen, who not only helped me tell Betty's story in a concise manner, but also provided support and encouragement throughout the finishing process. I am so lucky to have my wonderful parents Jane and Alex Resnick nearby and able to help in numerous capacities: supporting me when I wanted to quit writing, running errands to help me finish, and most importantly giving me the opportunity as a seventh grader to begin private lessons with Betty Johnson. Thank you for taking me to lessons, youth orchestra rehearsals, and providing wonderful examples of fine human beings that I may recognize those qualities in others. I also want to thank my first band director,

Teri Wyatt, for asking Betty to teach me, and my high school junior English teacher, Colleen Mallory, for being hard on me and teaching me how to write. Finally, I would like to thank my super-human husband Dusty Henson, who has supported and cheered me on through this entire journey of discovery. I could not have done any of this without you.

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ABSTRACT

Betty Johnson's career in bassoon performance and education spanned six decades. She began her tenure as a charter member of the Oklahoma Symphony Federal Orchestra in 1937 as a talented teenager with minimal formal training and retired as an influential member of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic who had shaped the professional careers of many bassoonists. One of the first women playing principal in a major symphony, she was heard internationally through radio broadcasts of the Oklahoma Symphony, and developed a reputation as the premier teacher of bassoon in the Midwest. Participation in summer festivals increased her national exposure as she was the principal bassoonist for the Peninsula Music Festival (Fish Creek, WI) for 27 years and performed in other summer festivals with colleagues from across the country. She and music educator Art Johnson agreed when they married in 1939 to spend their lives building a strong base for music education in Oklahoma, a promise that they carried out. Betty Johnson's techniques often stemmed from the belief that the bassoon was an extension of the voice, therefore being a natural process, harmonious with the body. Playing the bassoon was a simple process when approached properly. Johnson understood how to present bassoon pedagogy to her students in an effective manner.

When Johnson died in early 2000, she left a large network of students and colleagues who admire her and attribute their successes to her guidance. Despite her broad body of work, accessibility, and outstanding, even legendary, reputation in the field, no thorough study or collection of her life's work has been compiled. Interviews with colleagues, students, and friends combined with research of the available primary sources, newspaper articles, and historical documents, have resulted in a comprehensive narrative of her life, personality, career, and celebrity. The overwhelming conclusion is

that beyond the broad group of fans who admired her playing, teaching, pedagogy, reed-making talent, and character, Johnson influenced those who crossed her path in memorable ways. Most of those interviewed attribute their professional success to the guidance she provided through bassoon lessons. Colleagues learned from her model of performance as well as attitude, technical approach, and acumen, and have based their careers on the examples that she set for them.

KEYWORDS: Bassoon, Music Pedagogy; Orchestral Development; Reed-making

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Betty Sullivan Johnson (1919-2000) was a prominent orchestral musician and educator, an important figure in the development of bassoon instruction as well as the general musical culture in Oklahoma, whose reach and influence eventually stretched nation-wide and beyond. A largely self-taught bassoonist when she began her musical career with the Oklahoma City Symphony at its inception in 1937 as an 18-year old, Johnson became one of the first women in the USA to play principal in a major symphony orchestra. She became a trail-blazer for professional female bassoonists, and notably for women performers on any instrument. Johnson not only taught others, she had a seat at the table, influencing the development of orchestras and shaped the music culture in Oklahoma and beyond. Over fifty-two years, she performed as a member of the Oklahoma City Symphony and subsequently the Philharmonic.[1] This professional affiliation complemented a long career as a music instructor, thirty-eight years of which were spent as a faculty member at Oklahoma City University (OCU).[2] Highly respected as a performer, Johnson was honored with compositions dedicated to her. She became close friends with her OCU colleague and composer, Dr. Ray Luke. Oklahoma Symphony Conductor Dr. Guy Fraser Harrison commissioned Luke's *Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra* for Johnson, which she performed at its world premiere in

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1 "Johnson, Bassoonist, Dies at 80," *Daily Oklahoman,* January 25,2000.http://newsok.com/johnson-bassoonist-dies-at-80/article/2683955. (accessed April 19, 2014).

2 Ibid.

1965.[3] There were other solo appearances, and additional honors. According to the records of the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, Johnson taught at Quartz Mountain every year but one from 1977, its inaugural year, until 1997, only missing 1990. Her students have gone on to perform in prestigious positions and teach throughout the country. It is important to note that Johnson's musical development was quintessentially her own. For many years, she was reported to be the only person within hundreds of miles who knew how to make reeds.[4] Despite the talented, dedicated bassoon students that she taught and fostered, widespread admiration in the community of bassoonists around the country, and years of service to the development of music in her home community, Johnson's life and work remains undocumented in terms of a thorough study. Instead, those who wish to reflect on her talents or know her better must rely on a scatter-shot approach, piecing together stories and findings in their own research. It seems fitting that as a former student of Betty Johnson who now holds Professor Johnson's post at OCU and has access to her descendants, friends, colleagues, and students, I should conduct the research. Much of this information and the remaining artifacts should be gathered before more time passes as Johnson's older intimates are part of a transitory generation. Few remain who can provide foundational information.

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3 "Betty Johnson," *Daily Oklahoman*. January 26, 2000, http://newsok.com/betty-johnson/article/2683968. (accessed April 19, 2014).

4 "Bassoon Players Are Indebted to Reed-Makers, a Woman," *Daily Oklahoman,* November, 20, 1942, https://familysearch.org/photos/stories/2854169 (accessed April 19, 2014).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to collect biographical information and artifacts that substantiate and support an examination of how Betty Johnson influenced the musical community through her teaching and performance. It answers the question of how Betty Johnson, a mostly self-trained bassoonist from Oklahoma City, with a keen talent as a performer and later a musical pedagogic, came to shape the musical direction of the Oklahoma music community and leave a lasting legacy in the bassoon community nation-wide.

Bassoon pedagogy, reed-making, teaching philosophy, and the growth of the musical community in Oklahoma that blossomed through her dedication will be explored. Her performance career, musical accomplishments and national reputation as one of the country's premier bassoonists will be discussed. Johnson's story serves as a source of knowledge, as well as an inspirational force. This study will fill a gap in music history as it helps to preserve and document her noteworthy professional life that began in the waning days of the Great Depression and continued through the austerity of World War II until her death in 2000. As a result of her background and even inconsistent musical training, Johnson's actions as a teacher and performer have inspired her students and musicians around the country who had the privilege of working with her. This study will show that her approach changed and structured music education. This study will take the anecdotal based on structured, open-ended interviews with informants with intimate knowledge of her career and apply it to an understanding of her approach to teaching and performance to better understand the heritage that Betty Johnson left for the music world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Published and substantive archival material that considers the history and contributions of Betty Johnson is limited. There are no published books, analytical or even in-depth magazine articles, or documentation in the peer-reviewed annals of education or music research or Oklahoma history that focus on her career or set it in context of her career. Instead, the preponderance of articles about and reports of her accomplishments, especially performance related, appear in newspapers, and particularly the Oklahoma City daily newspaper, *Daily Oklahoman,* or personal archives. While newspapers, and radio, were the primary source of all news and community reports during most of her career, little is published in newspapers elsewhere; she is of local interest. It is in interviews with those who studied or worked with her that another dimension unfolds in which Johnson is acknowledged as a well-known musician who grew to be admired for her sound and expression among the bassoon community. Some of this is evidenced in reports of the Bassoon Bash, a large gathering of bassoonists after her death to celebrate her life. Through her long career and that of the many students she influenced over 52 years, her reputation spread, much of it documented in personal recollection in structured interviews with former colleagues, students, and friends that adds depth where formal documentation is lacking.

Questions about Johnson's position titles and pay scale at the universities were explored as was her salary at the orchestra. Employment records that old are minimal and those that were located serve only to confirm facts that are well-known. Generally, there are no records of employment. As examples, Central State University did not use electronic records until after she retired and the paper records no longer exist. Much of

Johnson's career was in the pre-internet age. An electronic search at The University of Oklahoma ou.edu website produced a few items, mostly meeting notes about paying her as an instructor of bassoon; in other words, non-illustrative materials. This also made it difficult to structure a comparison with other music faculty to explore simple questions such as the amount that faculty received for their services. So, interviews and personal documents become major source materials for this type of question. Similar research at the Oklahoma Symphony produced no results.

Death often brings out reminiscences that provide both significant anecdotes from intimates and clues to other informants. A few online articles of remembrance posted after her death in 2000 led to research clues. The Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute archives provided some details about her time there, along with programs that include her name and a short biographical sketch. Similar material from other events filled in an outline of Johnson's life.

The lack of information reinforces the need for a consolidated record of Betty Johnson's life to be established. Fortunately, friends, family, and colleagues willingly participated in interviews and provided other primary source material. In addition to her own files, provided by family, which include programs, awards and photographs, the most exciting source is 31 poignant handwritten letters between newly-wed 19 year-old Betty Sullivan Johnson, and her 28-year old husband Art Johnson during the summer of 1939 while he worked in Michigan and she remained in Oklahoma. These letters, provided by Johnson's daughter, Joan Straach, include a wealth of information about Johnson's life and the early days of the then-emerging Oklahoma Symphony. These letters highlight her dual trials as a rising orchestral performer who still studied under

more experienced colleagues as well as a young wife and friend. However private throughout her life, Johnson can be seen as building a social life and career as a teacher as well as a performer. To measure her influence on others and examine her pedagogy, 39 people were interviewed. These informants, colleagues, and former students, volunteered teaching materials provided by Johnson for her students, recordings of lessons and recitals, photographs, programs from performances, and reed-making tools constructed by Johnson herself, for inclusion in this study as well as strong impressions. They mix their professional reflections with an examination of her personality and character and lay the groundwork for an understanding of how Johnson and her musician husband Arthur Johnson purposefully influenced the development of a music culture in Oklahoma City. Some biographical material was provided by Joan Straach on behalf of the Sullivan and Johnson family or confirmed by her. A diary, mentioned in the conversations, was not made available as it could no longer be located. There are also no letters from Art to Betty that were made available by the family. The Straach family has provided dates for the photographs where known.

Indirectly related sources set the background and filled the need for descriptive and narrative portions of this research as they help to preserve a record of the environment in which Johnson worked. Articles, interviews, and books about the history and role of women in the orchestra, as well as program notes and writings about Ray Luke and his *Bassoon Concerto* written for Betty Johnson were readily found. Joel Levine, the Music Director for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, and the Kerr Foundation provided an unpublished manuscript that describes the history of the Oklahoma Symphony/Philharmonic and its role in the community, along with resources

regarding Johnson's solo appearances with the orchestra. Numerous articles about Dr. Guy Fraser Harrison and his service to the Oklahoma Music Community were also of great value as background reading material that provided an overview of the times. According to Straach, Johnson was a close friend to Harrison and his family.

Interviews with informants, people who knew Johnson well as her students or academic or orchestral colleagues filled out her history. Each potential interviewee contacted about this research responded with enthusiasm and a willingness to assist in documenting Johnson's life and to reflect on her contributions to the musical world. For example, Sandra Flesher, an oboist and former colleague in the Oklahoma City Symphony, responded positively on Johnson's love of music, her comments underscore the enthusiasm with which many students recall her:

> While playing in the old Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra and/or the new Oklahoma City Philharmonic, sitting in her presence was a total joy because it was like having a free lesson every phrase she played. Her phrasing was always with a magic turn of genius and her bassoon tone was heavenly. Her depth of heart gave her the ability to make the music speak! Such an artist and lovely person was indeed a pleasure to be in such close proximity to… Even when she was undergoing chemo, she had the strength and dignity to play with her baldness out in the open. Looking even more beautiful.[5]

INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

The interview questions used in this study were reviewed and accepted by the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board, which approved the use of informants as subjects of this research (see Appendix A). Interviewees were identified in many ways and approached via email, telephone, and social media, each receiving a similar message that explained the research and invited them to participate. Known personal friends, students, and colleagues were initially approached and asked to

[5] Sandra Flesher, email to author, April 9, 2014.

contribute suggestions of other people to contact as part of this study, building a database of potential contacts with different relationships to Johnson across time. Many names resulted from online searches where found CVs indicate Betty Johnson as a former teacher. Each person named was contacted in the same manner as the original list of friends. A database of potential interviewees was created, narrowed down, and finalized (see Appendix B).

Due to the wide variety of their locations, 20 of the interviews took place by telephone and/or email. Many of Betty Johnson's lifelong friends and colleagues still reside in the Oklahoma City metro area and were willing to be interviewed in person. Those who declined the offer did so because they felt they had little to offer the study in terms of facts and remembrances.

Altogether, 38 interviews outside of immediate family provided a wealth of information. Former students relayed pedagogical methods and repertoire, and provided handouts, manuals and lesson recordings, as well as told anecdotes and personal stories of how Johnson mentored them. Colleagues revealed a profile of her personality, rehearsal and professional habits, and offered a peer-centered perspective. Friends provided biographical information and invaluable knowledge about her non-music side including interests, family activities, and general life habits. Every person interviewed offered anecdotes and perspectives, as well as commentary on the personal influence she had on his or her life. The wealth of positive memories reported about a well-loved person can present a critical problem for a researcher. No one likes to speak ill of the deceased, and praise of a beloved figure is commonplace, especially among informants who owe their place in the music world in some part to the research subject. The

challenge was to explore the interviews, to peel back the personal prejudice, however positive, so to reach for the kernels of fact about style, attitude, and influence that illustrate the authentic nature and talent that Johnson brought to the music community. The letters between Betty Johnson and Art Johnson and the interview transcripts and emails were examined for common themes.

The author of this research is a former bassoon student of Betty Johnson, whose lessons with Johnson first occurred for a few months as a beginning student until Johnson became ill. These lessons then continued under a college student studying with Johnson. The author resumed lessons with Johnson four years later for her junior and senior years of high school at a frequency of one every two weeks. Many of those interviewed in this research shared a longer and more personal relationship with Johnson. However, the relationship between Johnson and the author was deeply fond, and the author was with Johnson when she died. In an attempt to segregate the personal from the professional, the author's recollections are only occasionally included herein, and then primarily when those experiences are corroborated by those of other students during interviews, and to address Johnson's teaching style and educational pedagogy.

CHAPTER TWO: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Elizabeth Joan Johnson nee Sullivan was born in Amarillo, Texas on October 10, 1919 to Evelin May Sullivan, nee Horsbrugh, a painter, composer, and poet, and William Leonard Sullivan, a salesman who bought and sold drilling equipment.[6] Her maternal great-grandfather emigrated from Scotland and was the first manager of the Spur Ranch in Texas.[7] Betty was the third of four children in a staunch Catholic family. As a child, she attended a parochial school, and stories told later indicate that Evelin anticipated Betty would take orders as a nun. According to daughter Joan Straach, young Betty balked at her Evelin's dream idea in a diary entry because she "liked boys too much."[8]



Illustration 1: Betty Johnson and Sullivan Family Siblings Before 1950 (from left to right: Brother-in-law Frances Cortney, sister Dorothy Cortney, sister-in-law Vena Sullivan, brother Fred Sullivan, sister-in-law Jackie Sullivan, brother Jim Sullivan, Betty Johnson, Arthur Johnson)

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6 Joan Straach, interview with author, Cedar Park, TX, September 20, 2013.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

At some point when Johnson was young, her maternal grandfather moved the family to Oklahoma, according to Straach. Throughout her life, she lived in and around the center of Oklahoma City where she attended public school at Taft Middle School and Classen High School. Family pictures show that she studied ballet long enough to achieve pointe, a technique in which a ballet dancer supports their weight on their toes, a feat that requires years of training and tremendous strength in the legs and feet.[9]



Illustration 2: Betty in Childhood Photograph, on Pointe

Betty is assumed to have first learned to play the bassoon while at Classen High School. She then attended Oklahoma City University (OCU) during the Great Depression for a few years as a vocal major, but never graduated. Details as to the specific age she started to play the bassoon and the amount of time she remained in college are unknown. In an interview quoted later in this work, former student and friend Larry Reed (see brief biographical information described in Appendix C), recalls that Johnson started playing the bassoon at the age of 16 and in one news article, discussed later in this study, Johnson gives some context to her decision to study the

[9] Bedinghaus, Treva, "Are You Ready for Point? Things to Consider Before Trying Point in Ballet," http://dance.about.com/od/adultdancers/a/Begin_Pointe.htm (accessed June 17, 2015).

bassoon in high school. Interviewees agree that Johnson never graduated from college, but no one, including the university, can specify details about the years, times, or if there was a bassoon professor at the college while she was a student. According to her former bassoon student Barre Griffith (see Appendix C)[10], Johnson told him that she had a vocal teacher in college who "ruined" her voice. For that reason, she switched to the bassoon completely and never looked back. In 1937, at the age of 18, she joined the Oklahoma Symphony, then known as the Works Projects Administration (WPA) Orchestra from 1937- 1941, which was in its inaugural year. About joining the orchestra, Johnson stated, "I just tried out and was hired. Bassoon players always have been hard to find. It was full time at $75 dollars a week – a lot of money in those days."[11] When her daughter Joan was young, Johnson considered finishing college, but ultimately decided that she already had a career so completing her college education was not sufficiently important to undertake it.[12]

Fifteen year old Betty Sullivan met Arthur Johnson (1910-2000) in 1935, at Taft Middle School where he was then the band director.[13] Art was also a clarinet player who performed with and eventually became the personnel manager of the newly-formed Oklahoma Symphony. Married in 1939, a series of candid letters between the couple during that summer while Art was in Michigan attending education classes provide

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10 Barre Griffith, interview by author, Lindsay, OK, May 16, 2014.

11 Max Nichols, "Philharmonic Debut a Tribute to Betty Johnson," *Journal Record*, October 18, 1989, https://www.questia.com/newspaper/1P2-5497257/philharmonic-debut-a-tribute-to-betty-johnson [accessed October 8, 2015].

12 Straach, interview.

13 Ibid.

details of her life in Oklahoma, their new marriage, her experiences as a young bassoonist who had progressed to taking lessons from professional colleagues for the first time, and glimpses into her personality and deepening feelings about music at that youthful time in her life.



Illustration 3: Art and Betty Johnson as a Young Couple (Date Unknown)

Biographical facts abound in these letters. When they were written, Johnson was 19. At that time, she was enrolled at OCU taking voice lessons while performing as a member of the Oklahoma Symphony. According to a letter written on June 13, 1939, she had attended a "boring sorority" meeting that night and, "nearly went to sleep in the middle of it." In addition to a dreary sorority life, she was not enjoying voice lessons. Her writing style is revealing.

One consistent theme throughout the letters is how Art's summer-long absence after a few months of marriage was difficult for her. Every letter from her includes a declaration of longing; his letters were not available. Still, she wrote to Art about her enjoyment of summer-time activities and musical experiences. On July 26, 1939, she

recalls listening to a broadcast of *Don Juan* performed by the New York Philharmonic:

> Today, I played tennis, then went swimming, then played miniature golf. All in one day. Quite a lot for me. Oh yes, I also listened to the N.Y. Philharmonic play *Don Juan*. I played tennis with Louis, then went over to Harold and Marion's with Louis and Orley [Jones][14] and listened to the Sym. After that was over, Louis, his little sister Geraldine, Orley, and I went swimming and played golf at Blackhawk. We then ended our good time with ice cream at Bardons. It was sorta fun for a change.

While some of these letters evidence that even though she was young, Johnson demonstrated the desire to practice instead of socialize; others had nothing to do with music, such as learning to cook. For example, on July 6, 1939, Johnson recalls that she obtained a library card. "I've taken to reading quite seriously now. I'm gonna get educated." Another favorite activity was going to the show to see the most current, popular movies, including *On Borrowed Time*[15] and a musical comedy starring Jack Benny:

> Last night, one of your old friends called me, Ruth McCray. I didn't have anything to do so we went to the show. I didn't much want to go as I was all set in the mood to practice real diligently, but one must be polite so I went. The show was very good tho'. Jack Benny in "Man About Town."[16] I laughed until I was sick. Rochester was in it too. Gee, he's wonderful. If you haven't seen it already, don't miss it.[17]

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[14] French horn player and charter member of the Oklahoma Symphony. J. Landis Fleming, "The Story of the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra," Kerr Foundation (unpublished manuscript), 128.

[15] 1939 movie directed by Harold S. Bucquet and starring Lionel Barrymore, Cedric Hardwicke, and Beulah Bondi. "On Borrowed Time," http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031754/ (accessed July 16, 2015).

[16] 1939 movie directed by Mark Sandrich and starring Jack Benny, Dorothy Lamour, Edward Arnold. "Man About Town," http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031611/ (accessed July 16, 2015).

[17] Letter from Betty Johnson to Art Johnson, July 8, 1939, private family collection.

Johnson was drawn to the ever-popular Swing music, and said that she enjoyed a casual lifestyle "slouching around in shorts and slacks," as opposed to dressing up.[18]

Johnson's sense of humor comes out in these letters. In the letter written on July 19, 1939 she describes two jokes including one told by the Oklahoma Symphony Conductor about *Till Eulenspiegel* by Strauss: "One clever "lick" [Victor] Alessandro made was: he was explaining the story of Till and how prankish he was when all of a sudden, the mic [microphone] made one of those awful noises like they always do, so he very quickly said, "must be the spirit of Till." That got quite a laugh." In addition to appreciating a good joke, Johnson described pranks that her colleagues played on other orchestra members. She enjoyed laughing throughout her life, a characteristic substantiated by her colleagues and friends.

When Johnson was accepted by the Symphony after seeing a notice in a local paper about openings, she had not played the bassoon for long.[19] She was then a sophomore in college, and it was her first experience working in an orchestral environment. The interview with Ralph Rose, later in this study, points out that Johnson was not the only young player in this ensemble. In fact, during the 1941-1942 season, three members from that orchestra, flutist Ruth Herrick, oboist Walter Kessler, and Johnson were selected to play with the All American Youth Orchestra conducted by Dr. Leopold Stokowski.[20] While she refers to attending OCU, everyone agrees she did not

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[18] Letter from Betty Johnson to Art Johnson, August 7, 1939, private family collection.

[19] Nichols, *Journal Record*.

[20] Fleming, 50.

graduate. This was one contributing reason that she did not have the credentials to become a professor, but no one, including the university, can specify details about when or why Johnson withdrew. With the passage of time and few records available, it is also no longer possible to determine whether the university faculty included a bassoon professor under whom she might have studied, or if she specifically took bassoon lessons at Classen High School. The oldest colleagues and students interviewed in this study were still younger than Johnson and none were part of the symphony during her early days there; in fact, none had met her prior to 1946. This leaves over 7 years of experiences unreported on, including the crucial first years where the learning curve is the steepest. By the time these colleagues appeared in her life, Johnson was beyond the beginning stages of a performance career. They never saw her challenges as a young player because she was already a seasoned musician and a leader in the orchestra. Her personal writings from the summer of 1939 offer a look into this unknown side of her development.



Illustration 4: Betty Johnson as a Young Bassoonist (Date Unknown)

Young musicians not only experience insecurity about their abilities, but must also develop the self-discipline necessary to hone their craft. Before Johnson was the substantive bassoonist that colleagues claim she was, it is a logical conclusion that she went through the familiar ups and downs. Experiences like this aided her in developing and guiding students throughout her life; as a student of Johnson, the author of this study felt that Johnson seemed attuned to what her students were going through. In the letter dated June 15, 1939, Johnson describes to her husband how fellow performer and clarinetist Oakley Pittman[21] became mad at her because of her mistakes during a sectional. Pittman may not have been well-liked in her assessment, but Johnson accepted responsibility for her part in the drama:

> …today he won't even speak to me. Rather childish I thought. He was all over me missing an entrance. He was in charge of the section and as usual, wasn't getting much cooperation from anyone. I'd been playing all the time but rather badly and so one time I came in a little late. He blew up, cussed me out, and called an intermission. Then he came down and took me by the chin and shook my head. Guess I didn't have my mind much on what I was doing but it wasn't really as bad as he thought. Everyone was messing up their part so he took it out on me.

Practicing and developing an enjoyment of practice was a skill that Johnson tried to infuse into her students, as many interviewed stress in their commentaries below. She describes her own discovery in a July 1, 1939 letter as practice began to outweigh social life by choice, "I'm getting so I like to practice better than going someplace. So I stay home and practice." A week later, on July 8, 1939 she reiterates this and professes an enjoyment of practicing. "The picnic has been called off. Thank goodness, now I can

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[21] Oakley Pittman (1906-1999) played in the Oklahoma Symphony. He was also a band director at Classen High School and the Registrar for Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He is in the Oklahoma State University Band Masters Hall of Fame. Milliebelle, "Oakley H Pittman," http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=45618536 (accessed August 27, 2015).

practice. I've really grown to like doing it." And, by July 27, 1939, she gives a detailed description of a day of "good practice" as her personal schedule begins to mature:

> I got in some good practice today. I went to the aud. [auditorium] early and practiced from 8:30 to 10:00. Then, this afternoon, I put in about an hour of individual work. I've been doing most of my practicing at night but I think I'll start getting it in, in the morning before rehearsal. Guess I'm more in the mood then 'cause I really worked this morning.

These letters provide unique details into the development of her early practice discipline.

Although Johnson is widely considered to be a mostly self-taught bassoonist, these letters provide evidence that she received lessons during the summer of 1939 from George Goslee (1916-2006)[22], the orchestra's principal bassoonist that summer. On June 26, 1939, she introduced Art to Goslee through a letter. Unfortunately, the first page of the letter was not located, resulting in difficulty getting a clear picture. An assumption can be made that Johnson was describing the other bassoonists in her section for the summer:

> His name is George too. George Goslee. Two Georges in one section is bad. But he is quite different. He plays a very nice bassoon, but maybe I expected too much. Oh, don't get me wrong, he is far better than either George or me and can help us a lot. He has a smooth tone and technique and plays with a great deal of assurance.

Johnson continues in the same letter to describe how she was arranging to have lessons with the help of Victor Alessandro, the conductor of the symphony:

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[22] Rochester Philharmonic (1938-1939), Rochester Civic Orchestra (1938-1939), Indianapolis Symphony (1941-1943), Cleveland Orchestra (1943-1945), Philadelphia Orchestra (1945-1946), Cleveland Orchestra (1946-1988). Larry Huffman, "Cleveland Orchestra Principal Musicians: A Chronological Listing," http://www.stokowski.org/Principal_Musicians_Cleveland_Orchestra.htm#Bassoon%20Index%20Point_ (accessed July 16, 2016).

> I have had only one lesson so far. I don't know quite yet what the deal is. I asked Alessandro about it and he asked me if I thought I would be up to a lesson a day. I said sure. He said to talk to Goslee. But today, I talked to him again and he said that something had happened that would change things a little and that he had to talk to [Dean] Richardson[23] first before we could get thing settled.

Although he had been playing the bassoon longer, Goslee was only a few years older than Johnson. The July 5, 1939 letter reports that lessons had not been nailed down and Johnson wonders about Goslee's effectiveness as a teacher:

> Frankly, I'm a little disappointed in him as a teacher. His playing is fine, but he just doesn't seem to know how to tell me what's the matter with my playing and what I need most. (You without doubt!) They still haven't settled everything as to lessons, price, etc. And I haven't paid anything either. We're supposed to settle it all down in Richardson's office.

Although Goslee eventually went on to be one of the most desirable teachers of bassoon in the United States[24], he was then a young teacher who had just finished college at the Eastman School of Music. Oklahoma was just a brief stop in his career. Like other well-respected teachers, his skills had to develop, and the only way to grow as a teacher is to teach, and Johnson was likely one of his very first students. Fortunately for Johnson, on July 8, 1939, she reveals that they have a deal for lessons. "Well today we finally got it straightened out about the lessons. Starting next week we are to have our lesson a day. It will cost me about $38 or 39 dollars for the summer. It was to have cost $45, but since they fooled around such a long time getting started, I won't have to pay so much."

Johnson elaborates a few days later on July 11, 1939 about the arrangement.

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[23] Manager of the Oklahoma Symphony and state director of the Federal Music Project. http://www.okcphilharmonic.org/ralph-rose-1937-1938 (accessed July 16, 2015).

[24] "Obituary: George Goslee," *International Double Reed Society: Forum-Announcements*, http://www.idrs.org/IDRSBBS/viewtopic.php?id=733 (accessed July 16, 2015).

"So, tomorrow I have a private lesson. We've got it arranged now where we have two private lessons a week." Lessons appear to be going well by her July 16, 1939 report to Art, which suggests an appreciation of her talents and potential:

> Goslee said the other day that if I tried, I could probably get a scholarship to Eastman. He says they don't have any bassoons anymore. I don't think I want to go there tho'. I don't know why, but I would rather go someplace else. Maybe I would rather just stay right here if someone else were here too. Someone interesting I mean.

Goslee's familiarity with the standards at Eastman lends credence to his claim that Johnson was talented enough to attend his alma mater. True to later accounts of her life, Johnson seemed happy to stay in Oklahoma with Art, as evidenced by her teasing way of informing him she was not leaving for Rochester any time soon. The next letter on July 12, 1939, Johnson had good news to report. "Today, I worked plenty hard. Made reeds and took a lesson. I think I surprised Goslee with my lesson. He was very pleased. Guess maybe I'll amount to something after all."

Johnson did not always feel confident about her playing or her progress. She explains this feeling to Art on July 21, 1939, "I don't know if I'll be able to stand this much longer or not. Every day, I seem to be playing worse instead of better. I miss more notes than I ever have before and I'm practicing more than I ever did. I can't understand it." Three days later, Johnson was still in a playing rut, so on July 24, 1939, she describes an unpleasant lesson experience. "I had a terrible lesson today. I couldn't play anything right. Goslee said I'd better tell you to hurry home or my embouchure would be no good at all. I agreed with him on that point." Fortunately, throughout the summer, Johnson grew as a player and was given more responsibility in the section. Because Goslee was in Oklahoma for just a few months, she was ready for him to be gone, as

explained in her letter toward the end of the summer on August 4, 1939:

> Well, tomorrow I get to play 1st again, as Goslee's off to Winfield as usual [to visit his fiancé]. Saturday's the only day that I like to play anymore. But I usually sound lousy and I even get sort of nervous from lack of responsibility. I'll be glad when Goslee leaves for good. He makes me awfully mad sometimes. He's always criticizing people. But never Alessandro since he's from Eastman.

Johnson's youthfulness and a bit of petulance are revealed in this letter. She shows traits to Art that no one interviewed had seen, likely due to her youth, but also her habit of keeping many things private. She is still learning to work with people and revealed her insecurities about playing to the person who knew her best, her husband. However, she also demonstrates a hunger to be better and to play in the spotlight, a position to which she became accustomed. That summer, Goslee taught her many things about playing, reed-making, accepting instruction from a teacher, and working with others in a section. All of these skills that appeared to be highly developed by the time any interviewees met Johnson reveal themselves in these letters.

Having access to Goslee, a formally trained bassoonist, gave Johnson an opportunity to learn about reed-making. Letters from that summer reveal her discoveries, insecurities, and personal development in the reed-making area. In her letter dated June 26, 1939, she writes about learning to shape her own reeds:

> We are going to learn how to make reeds. We've already gotten most of the materials. He [Goslee] said that you should put the wires on the cane and leave them for two weeks. Then, tighten them and start cutting on it. He uses files almost completely and files while the cane is still wet. I think it will be fun after we get started.

Johnson's enthusiasm for developing this new skill was evident from the beginning. She experienced the trials of this important aspect of playing the bassoon including the disappointment of breaking a playable reed. Wrote Johnson on June 30, 1939: "I made a

reed last night that was playing pretty good until I knocked the side off it. It was the first one I ever made that sounded like anything tho'." Johnson also regrets breaking one on July 6, 1939: "Darn it! Tonight I started to practice and the very first thing I did was split my reed. My last good one. Goslee promised to bring me one today to make, but he forgot it so now I'm without a reed at all. He said he'd bring it tomorrow though." Fortunately, on July 8, 1939, she exclaims that she made a good reed: "Gee, I made a wonderful reed today. It blows so easy and oh what a tone! I think that I've really caught on finally how it's done. I also sent away for some cane from France today. And will order a shaper next week. Then, I'll be all set." In her letter a few days later, on July 11, 1939, she explains how she learned to shape a piece of cane. "Well, today, I learned a little more about making reeds. That is, I learned how to shape the raw cane. Now all I need is a shaper and they only cost $10.00." Later, on July 16, 1939, Johnson lets Art know she is making more reeds. "I have been trying to make some more reeds today but I haven't had much luck yet. Guess I've still got a lot to learn about a lot of things. Oh well, I guess it will take time, can't do everything at once." Johnson is discovering wisdom to accompany her craft that she will pass on to her students and colleagues. Two days later on July 18, 1939, Johnson reports exciting news:

> My Dearest Art, today I sold my first reed. I was really a little afraid to part with it for it was a pretty good reed and I might not be able to make another good one for a while. But I guess I needn't worry because I still have quite a lot of cane yet which, I hope, will last until my order comes from France.

This letter was the last to mention reed-making. According to those interviewed, Johnson spent the rest of her life making reeds to the best of her ability; a skill that her students and colleagues considered outstanding. However, as these letters prove, she

also went through the difficult process of trial and error when developing proficiency as a reed-maker.

The opportunity to interview people who can recollect the early development of Johnson's musical journey has passed. Fortunately, Johnson opens up in these letters to Art regarding her feelings about certain pieces and a blossoming love of music. This passion for music left a strong impression on her future colleagues, students, and friends. Former student Dustin Seay (see Appendix C) describes what he remembers about the topic. "I can recall only a handful of times when I played a piece really well for her. Mrs. Johnson would have her eyes closed, sitting in a sort of meditative-floating state. After a long, silent pause, she would open her eyes and say softly, 'Okay. That was very good."[25] The road of a professional musician is sometimes rocky. An example of struggle is found in Johnson's description and discovery of how music affects her, from a letter dated July 27, 1939 that begins with her recollection of a long day of rehearsal and her less-than-ideal day and moves into a description of the power of music and personal communication:

> You know it's strange what music does to me. This evening, I came home feeling lousy. I'd been blowing [playing] all day since 8:30 this morning until 6:00 this evening with an hour off for lunch and fewer than usual intermissions. My lips felt as though they were inches thick. It was awfully hot and very sticky and I was generally in a bad mood.

As part of the WPA program[26], the orchestra had rehearsal time requirements that often resulted in long days. Johnson continues to explain what helped improve her spirits,

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[25] Dustin Seay, written interview with author, July 10, 2014.

[26] The Symphony in Oklahoma was developed as a Federal Music Project as part of the Works Progress Administration Program (WPA), part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Program. Its purpose was to employ out-of-work musicians. http://www.okcphilharmonic.org/ralph-rose-1937-1938 (accessed July 16, 2015).

including a letter from Art and some inspiring music:

> The first thing that helped was your letter. I hadn't had one since Saturday: your card, which I was very glad to get but you know how cards are. Then I listened to the Tsch [Tchaikovsky] 4 [4th Symphony] by the Toronto Orchestra. Gosh, that's a wonderfully overpowering composition. It really builds one up to a high emotional pitch. Anyway, it does me. I can hardly wait for our winter season when we play that. It's got a wonderful bassoon part. I felt like a new woman after that piece. It inspired me [to] no end. I felt as tho' maybe I have still a little hope.

Interviews substantiated her constant and fulfilling love for music. In her letter of July 19, 1939, she recalls an experience while listening to a Johannes Brahms symphony.

> Another Wed. nite and another N. Y. Phil broadcast. And tonight they play Brahms 1st ! Gee that's a wonderfully overpowering composition. I'm really just now beginning to appreciate it. I don't suppose I ever will fully. I wonder if anyone ever does fully appreciate Brahms. He's so far above anything else. Every note is almost perfect. Hardly seems as though there is a flaw any place.

Brahms had a special effect on Johnson. Earlier that summer, on July 6, 1939, she described her enthusiasm about an upcoming concert involving Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Brahms Second Symphonies. She noted, "We are going to play the Tsch. 4th this winter. Wait till you hear my solos. I've been working on them a little with [George] Goslee and they're gonna come out all right. I hope. We are also going to play Brahms 2nd I think. That's another good bassoon part. Oh boy! I can hardly wait to get back in the "hot seat.'" Johnson's passion for playing matched her enjoyment of listening. She describes her pleasure from a symphony broadcast, including her sentiment for Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony:

> Did you hear the "Promenade Concert" from Toronto? The Mendelssohn transcription and Bach Suite. I like Bach a great deal. And the Tsch. *Violin Concerto*. That's a beautiful thing I think. I would certainly like to have heard the Tsch. 6 the other night. For you see I have a sentimental attachment for that symphony because it was the first one I ever played. Remember? Our first concert? Gee, that was a memorable occasion in my memory.

Johnson had emotional attachments to music and recognized the power music has to inspire the listener. Interviewees later remarked on Johnson's early feelings about music and its effect, sixty years after these letters were written. But, when these letters were exchanged, Johnson and Art were still newly-weds, married about less than five months at the respective ages of 19 and 28.

Their only child, Joan, was born in 1945. According to Joan Straach, in a series of conversations in 2013, her mother loved to play tennis and softball, and supported her daughter's horseback riding hobbies. Johnson was also interested in girl scouting, acting as Joan's Girl Scout leader at one time. However, Straach felt that overall her mother's busy professional career left little room for personal extracurricular activities.[27]

Johnson probably was not the average housewife or mother as she was already employed as a professional musician and teacher. Johnson was in awe of other musicians, but showed much confidence in her own abilities as well.[28] She played with talented, accomplished musicians, in both the symphony and summer music festivals, many of whom were at the top of their fields.

Betty and Art Johnson were rooted in Oklahoma City and shared a strong desire to stimulate and encourage musical activities throughout the region. Later in life, despite opportunities elsewhere in the face of a national reputation, a story familiar to her students embodies her attitude towards her sense of belonging and community. Regularly asked why she did not leave Oklahoma to play in one of the top orchestras in

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27 Straach, interview.

28 Ibid.

the country, Johnson was often heard to respond that she was right where she ought to be. According to teacher, longtime friend, and music education colleague Ad Acre,[29] the Johnsons used their respective positions as professional performers and teachers to motivate the powerful citizens of Oklahoma City to bolster strong music programs throughout the schools in the community. Barre Griffith substantiated this as he recalled a conversation in which Johnson told him unequivocally that she and Art Johnson made a pact when they got married that they would spend their lives building a musical culture in public schools and the community. They felt that in order to support an orchestra with full patronage, the citizens of Oklahoma City needed to have a deeper education in the arts, one that would also produce locally-trained musicians who could participate in the orchestra. If the music education programs did not start early, local performers would not be able to compete for spots in a successful upper level symphony. Many of the people interviewed remarked on the important role the Johnsons played in the development of the Oklahoma City music community.

Dr. John Clinton has been an educational staple in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area since he arrived there in the early 1970's. His extensive resume includes many years developing and growing the Oklahoma Youth Orchestra, and leading them on five international tours. He was also the conductor of the Interlochen Arts Camp Intermediate Orchestra and Band from 1975 through 1978. His Norman (OK) High School Orchestra performed at three Music Educators National Conferences, and he was Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Design at The University of Central

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[29] Band Director to Betty Johnson at Taft Junior High School; Student of Art Johnson at Taft Junior High School. Ad Acre, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 14, 2014.

Oklahoma from 2009 through 2013. Clinton knew of Johnson and observed her performing in the Oklahoma Symphony firsthand. He describes his impressions of her from the perspective of how her playing stood out to him:

> I came from a town that when you heard a bassoonist it was a miracle. When I came up to Norman to teach and then go hear the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra, I would hear this bassoon that was just fabulous in every possible way. I remember the Berlioz *Symphony Fantastique* that I heard her first play. That was the first indication that, oh, the bassoonist this is the real deal here; this is something very special. She was fantastic. Then when she would come to the high school [where I taught], she would occasionally demonstrate the bassoon. To hear her play while I watch was fantastic. [30]

Because they did not work together directly, Clinton did not formally meet Johnson for another four years when she taught students at the high school where he worked and would demonstrate the bassoon in various formats there. He noticed a significant difference in his students once they started to work with Johnson, an expansion of skills and confidence that was reflected in their performance ability:

> One thing about bassoonists at that time, until they studied with Betty, they were so quiet. All of a sudden, this projection started to happen. And this quality of sound started to cut through. You could hear what was happening in the bassoon section all of a sudden. It was her unique way of getting sound. I don't know what it was, but she really helped an awful lot with that. With Betty, it was serious business. Playing the bassoon was important and you needed to do it well. It was very business-like with her. And they [her students] did it. It was wonderful.[31]

Clinton felt that Johnson made considerable improvements in her students, thus effecting youth ensembles for the better as their sound became big and projection improved under her tutelage. In addition to private instruction as a professor, she came to the public schools annually to coach young musicians, and educate those who wanted

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30 Dr. John Clinton, interview by author, Norman, OK, May 16, 2014.

31 Ibid.

to learn about the bassoon and its pedagogy. Clinton recalls her visits: "She would just come to play for us... She would come down maybe one a year to help with the band and orchestra. She was always willing to come down. The thing I remember most was how serious she was about playing the bassoon. Playing well is important."[32] Clinton determined she was a special teacher immediately:

> When I came here, I was naïve. This opened up a whole new world to me at what music could be. It wasn't that I was afraid of her, but I had so much respect for her. I would watch her from a distance. Anytime I got to interact with her was special. But I was just a kid [21 years old]. Even at that age, I knew she was special. Everyone told me she was special. Then it was reinforced by hearing her play, hearing her students play, and talking to her briefly about things.[33]

Clinton took advantage of having an experienced bassoonist available, placing himself in the role of student, learning many things about the bassoon from her:

> I learned from her what all the out-of-tune notes are and what you can do to make them better, not always perfect, but what you can do to make them better. [The notes out of tune were] F's, F sharps [in the staff], that area, and then above that, the D above the staff. Below the staff, it seems like it's also the F sharps and E's below. Of course, all notes are out of tune, it just seems like some are uncharacteristically out of tune. What she said, which I always found interesting, was the quality of the instrument makes all the difference in the world. They quality of the reed makes all the difference in the world. The length of the bocal… the bocal? I didn't even know that word! The fact that yes, you do this, but people need to adjust around you as well. It's not just the bassoonist's responsibility. It's also the clarinet on those throat tones. You work with each other.[34]

Clinton never imagined the complexities of playing were so simple at the same time. He continues to describe the education she provided for him:

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32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

> When she would talk about the quality of sound and projection, she started talking about how that air is focused. Bassoonist's air has to be all around, like flute; the great amount of air that needs to be used to make that reed respond. So, quality of instrument, bocal, reed, adjusting pitches, and listening to her gave me an idea of what a characteristic sound of a bassoon was.[35]

Clinton credits Johnson with his ability to help bassoonists in his ensembles, saying, "As soon as I hear them, and I know what note is in the score, then I can talk to the bassoon. "Here's what you have to do." You can't just say, there's that lousy bassoon. Every note you play is out of tune until you get it in tune. It's the same thing with every instrument."[36]

The success of Clinton's programs and career were influenced by Johnson and her expertise. She not only supplied him with information about the bassoon, she also provided an example of a professional performer who knows the system and how to maximize the education of pupils in the public school system. Clinton explains how the success of Art Johnson's string programs coupled with Betty Johnson's position in the community formed a union that accomplished great things in the schools:

> Art was an outstanding teacher. The stories I heard about Art…OKC schools at that time [when he was directing] had incredible performing groups. The conductors and teachers at that time were known through the state and probably throughout the Southwest. Before there was OYO [Oklahoma Youth Orchestra], there was the Oklahoma Junior Youth Symphony. They [Betty and Art] were the ones who worked with that. It was an outstanding group. Most of the string players came from OKC. It was one of the few school districts that had a string program.[37]

According to Clinton, Johnson's relationship with her husband gave them a unique

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35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

perspective that helped propagate music in the area and particularly the public schools:

> In many ways, she was the face of the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra. Art was involved with high school band and orchestra people. The fact that he worked with them and knew them well, and that Betty was a professional bassoonist, kind of melded together to make a really nice combination of people who knew her and respected her and thought she understood schools. That's not always true. It's better than it has ever been now. In many cases, professional musicians don't have the faintest idea of what's going on in public schools. They have ideas about what it should be, but they don't know what's actually going on. Betty, because of her relationship with Art and that she was getting down in the schools…she had a good sense.[38]

Johnson made music accessible. For Clinton, Johnson was "a serious musician and teacher." He found himself "lucky to be surrounded by many people like Johnson when I first came to Norman." Most significantly, Johnson showed Clinton that "This [music] is something that's important. It's not just for the elite. Everyone can benefit from it. Everyone can enjoy it. Those kinds of things are what people like Betty passed along to people like me."[39] Clinton has been an extremely influential figure in the music education community in Oklahoma City and beyond. He credits the education and example Johnson set for him as a major influence in how he developed as a musician. His self-assessment provides a clear example of how her willingness to teach anyone - beginners, advanced students, adults, anyone who wished to learn - and dedication to music has aided the development of music education in her hometown, potentially across generations.

Throughout the decades, Johnson taught lessons after school during the week and on Saturdays. Students would come from all over the state. When asked about the

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

volume of pupils, Straach remarked, "I feel like I shared my mother with all of her students."[40] Former student from 1985 through 1992, and current military musician, Tracie Whitlaw (see Appendix C), recalls the warm hospitality and eye-opening experience of lessons at Johnson's house, presenting her with a home experience different from her own:

> My mom drove me there and she would usually wait outside in the car but there was always another student before me. Arthur was always either playing solitaire at the kitchen table or sitting reading the newspaper. He always had a bowtie on. He would ask me how I was doing and we would have a nice conversation together. The thing that that was absolutely amazing about having lessons at her house: I remember all the books and artwork that they had, and music was always playing. If I got there and she wasn't playing the bassoon, there was classical music playing in the house. I had never heard any of that before, being completely blue collar, [we had] no books in the house, so going there [Betty's] was a cultural education.[41]

Although students went there to learn the bassoon, the atmosphere of the Johnson home and the hospitality of their hosts, made a lasting impression.

After many years of teaching, it occurred to Johnson that students needed to know how to make reeds. She realized a major problem was that students could not buy a decent store bought reed. If they learned how to make them, they would be more successful musicians.[42] Being able to make reeds enables a musician to have more control over personal sound and technical demands. Bruce Frank Howard, one of Johnson's earliest bassoon students, is quoted in a 1942 *Daily Oklahoman* article, as indicating that the closest bassoon reed maker was in Saint Louis, 500 miles away. His

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40 Straach, interview.

41 Tracie Whitlaw, interview by author, Norfolk, VA, June 13, 2014.

42 Straach, interview.

description of Johnson's importance to the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra and her reed-making are contained in the following excerpt:

> She not only plays one of its two bassoons, but she manufactures the reeds, which permit both bassoonists to play their bassoons. And if it weren't for her, the other bassoonists in town would be out of luck. Say what you want to about a bassoon, it has to have a reed. Mrs. Johnson, her fingernail polish, her $100 gouging machine, and an assortment of what looks like glaziers' tools make the reeds. They sell at from $1 to $1.25 a copy. Besides, she needs peroxide to remove the lipstick from her bassoon reed after it has been used. Mrs. Johnson has been with the Oklahoma symphony five years, and it is easy to see why. There are no reed-makers nearer than St. Louis. Reed-making is an art which only one student of Mrs. Johnson has dared to try to master. To begin, the reed-maker needs more tackle than a fisherman finishes with, including pliers. A three-way cane-splitter spills specially-prepared, seasoned, and sized French cane. The thirds are planed to little more than fingernail thickness, then shaped and soaked, all operations requiring tools, good for no other purpose, except, the whisky glass. Before ready to fit on the mouthpiece, the reed is tied with silk thread and copper wire and hung out with the wash to dry. If left indoors too long, you see, the temperamental gadget becomes moldy. The drying requires two weeks. Different kinds of reeds are required for different kinds of music. There are both hard and soft reeds, bad and good reeds, and Mrs. Johnson plays good music.[43]

Johnson's importance to the regional bassoon community was obvious to Howard. That was just the beginning of what became decades of teaching that reached countless students and greatly impacted the Oklahoma music community.

One aspect of Johnson's life that surprised everyone, including her own family, was her investing prowess. Unbeknownst to Art, Johnson regularly invested small sums of money in the stock of new companies like Walmart and Microsoft. Parthena Owens, former colleague at OCU and second flute player in the orchestras, remarked on the twinkle in her eye as Johnson told them she had just "made a million dollars." Owens

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[43] "Bassoon Players Are Indebted To Reed-makers, a Woman," *Daily Oklahoman,* November, 20, 1942, https://familysearch.org/photos/stories/2854169 (accessed April 19th, 2014).

remembers a ride they took together after they played in a quintet:

> I was bringing her back from something and she goes, "Art never knew I did this. I would take just the tiniest bit of money and I would buy stocks. I'm a millionaire." And you would never know. She told me it was all a secret. She said, we have a million dollars. I was like, "Oh my gosh!" She was pretty twinkly. I don't know how we got on that subject. She just said, "Well, I would buy a Coke stock or Microsoft. And then it just got huge over the years." Art never knew. She did it behind the scenes. They were very thrifty.[44]

Friend and fellow Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute Colleague, pianist Virginia Sircy, describes how Johnson would check the daily stock reports in the business section of the Daily Oklahoma during their time together at the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain:

> One of the most amazing things I found was that she had become an investor, and a very shrewd one. There was this woman named Nancy Apgar. Betty said Nancy taught her a lot about investing. I don't know when that was, but I do know that we would be down here [Quartz Mountain] and the *Daily Oklahoma* used to furnish newspapers here. I would always pick one up for some reason. Betty would say, "Could I borrow the Business Section?" She would open it up to the stocks and smile. Then she would say, "Thank you," and hand it back to me. She said though that she lost some money before she started making it. I had heard that she got on the ground floor of Microsoft. That was so funny when she would ask for the business section. She wouldn't say anything else about it but thank you. I would say, "Betty, wipe that smile off your face."[45]

Johnson used her investment earnings and connections, according to Mark Parker, former colleague and current Dean of the Bass School of Music at Oklahoma City University, to supply the school with a contrabassoon:

> Another part that is very interesting about her contribution to the community is that she got the contrabassoon from the Boston Symphony, when they bought a new one, for OCU. They [BSO] had an ancient but wonderful contrabassoon. It was the one we played at OCU for a long time. After she retired, she said, "I

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44 Parthena Owens, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 30, 2014.

45 Virginia Sircy, interview by author, Lone Wolf, OK, June 27, 2014.

> want to buy a [new] contrabassoon for the university. She cashed in some Microsoft stock that had done very well and bought a contrabassoon.[46]

That contrabassoon is still in use by students. According to Parker, Johnson's decision to make this purchase led OCU to be one of the first universities in the nation to own a contrabassoon.

Johnson received numerous recognition and awards during her life. In 1982, she was erroneously described as one of four alumni first elected to the OCU Performance of Honor roster.[47] In response to the award, she received a write up in the *Journal Record*, Oklahoma's main business paper:

> Oklahoma City University has also inducted four graduates into the Performance Hall of Fame as part of the 1982 OCU Homecoming festivities held earlier this month. Honored were Williams Johns, Betty Johnson, Horace W. Robinson, and Don Stoltz… Johnson. Joined the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra at its inception in 1937. Since 1938 she has been the principal bassoonist. In addition, she has performed many solo works with orchestras around the country. She is recognized as the foremost teacher of bassoon in the southwest and is currently an instructor at OCU, a position she has held for 20 years.[48]

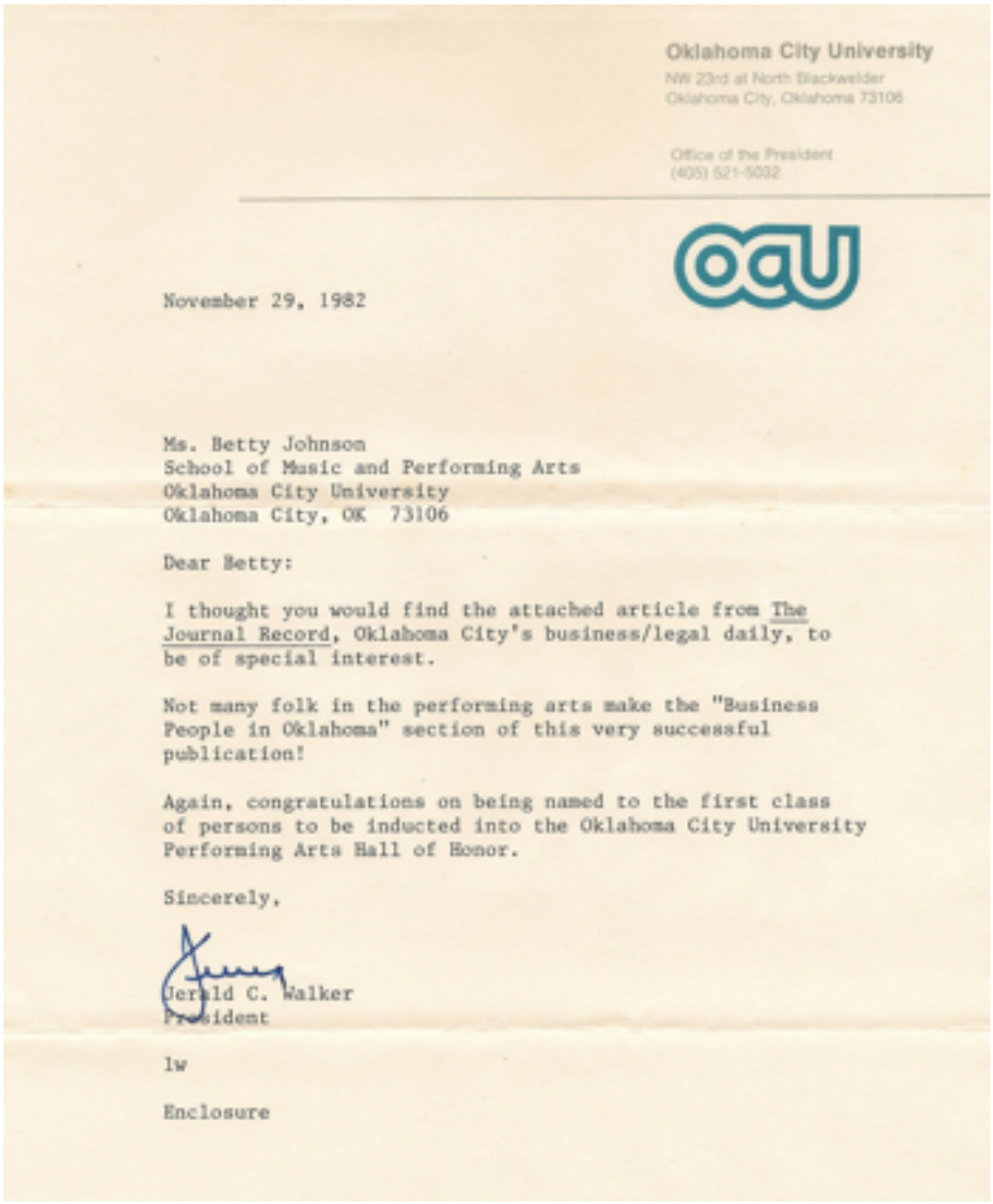
An interesting mistake, the article calls Johnson a graduate, but she was celebrated with this honor as an instructor. The president of OCU mailed the *Journal Record* article to her as part of a congratulatory letter upon being inducted into the Performing Arts Hall of Fame.

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46 Mark Parker, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, September 9, 2014.

47 "Betty Johnson," *Daily Oklahoman*. January 26, 2000, http://newsok.com/betty-johnson/article/2683968 (accessed April 19, 2014).

48 "Business People of Oklahoma," *Journal Record*, November 24, 1982.



Oklahoma City University
NW 23rd at North Blackwelder
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106

Office of the President
(405) 521-5032

November 29, 1982

Ms. Betty Johnson
School of Music and Performing Arts
Oklahoma City University
Oklahoma City, OK 73106

Dear Betty:

I thought you would find the attached article from The Journal Record, Oklahoma City's business/legal daily, to be of special interest.

Not many folk in the performing arts make the "Business People in Oklahoma" section of this very successful publication!

Again, congratulations on being named to the first class of persons to be inducted into the Oklahoma City University Performing Arts Hall of Honor.

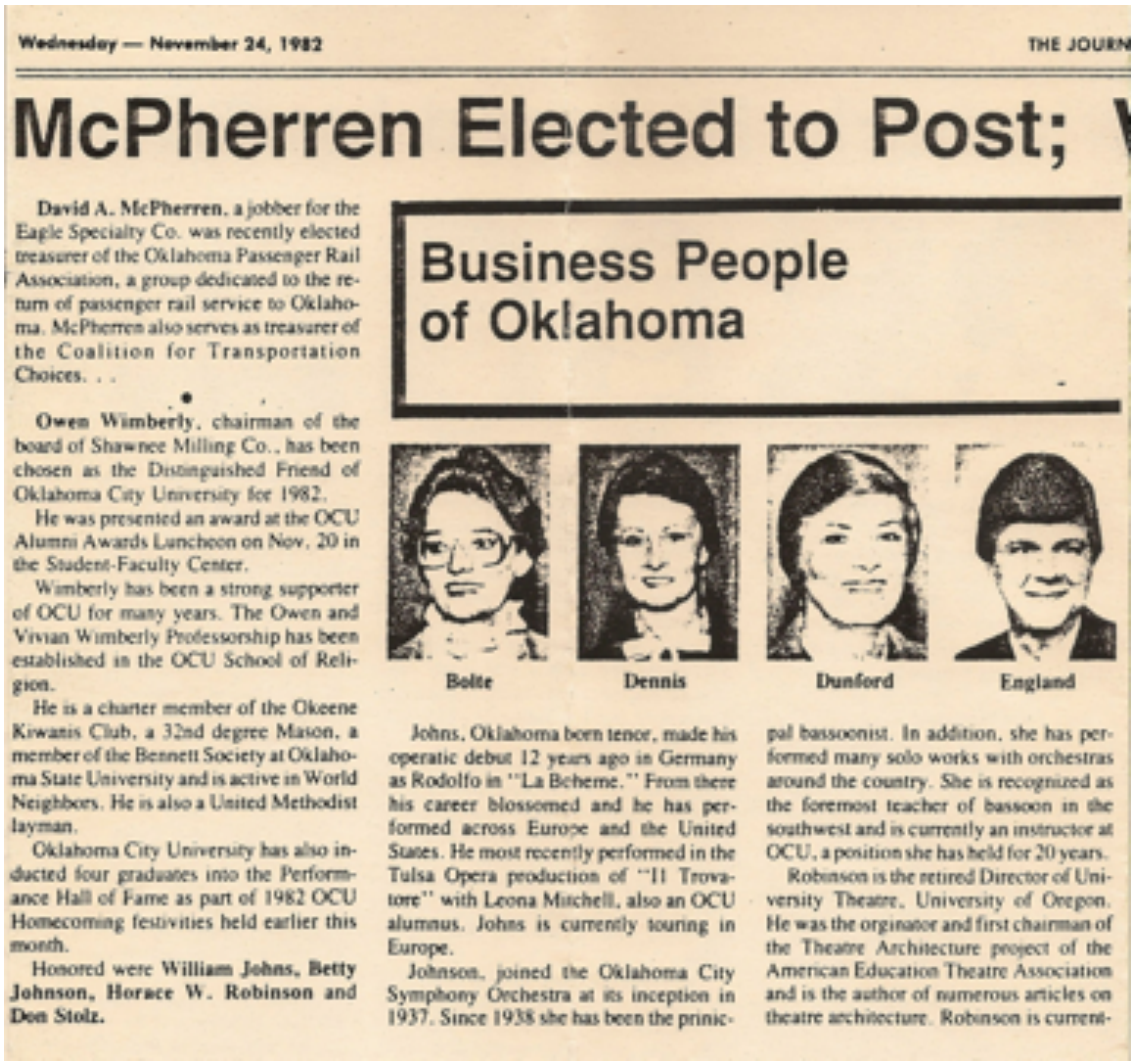
Sincerely,

Jerald C. Walker
President

lw

Enclosure

Illustration 5: 1982 Letter from Jerald C. Walker to Betty Johnson



Wednesday — November 24, 1982 THE JOURN

McPherren Elected to Post; V

David A. McPherren, a jobber for the Eagle Specialty Co. was recently elected treasurer of the Oklahoma Passenger Rail Association, a group dedicated to the return of passenger rail service to Oklahoma. McPherren also serves as treasurer of the Coalition for Transportation Choices. . .

•

Owen Wimberly, chairman of the board of Shawnee Milling Co., has been chosen as the Distinguished Friend of Oklahoma City University for 1982.

He was presented an award at the OCU Alumni Awards Luncheon on Nov. 20 in the Student-Faculty Center.

Wimberly has been a strong supporter of OCU for many years. The Owen and Vivian Wimberly Professorship has been established in the OCU School of Religion.

He is a charter member of the Okeene Kiwanis Club, a 32nd degree Mason, a member of the Bennett Society at Oklahoma State University and is active in World Neighbors. He is also a United Methodist layman.

Oklahoma City University has also inducted four graduates into the Performance Hall of Fame as part of 1982 OCU Homecoming festivities held earlier this month.

Honored were **William Johns, Betty Johnson, Horace W. Robinson** and **Don Stolz.**

Business People of Oklahoma

Bolte Dennis Dunford England

Johns, Oklahoma born tenor, made his operatic debut 12 years ago in Germany as Rodolfo in "La Beheme." From there his career blossomed and he has performed across Europe and the United States. He most recently performed in the Tulsa Opera production of "Il Trovatore" with Leona Mitchell, also an OCU alumnus. Johns is currently touring in Europe.

Johnson, joined the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra at its inception in 1937. Since 1938 she has been the principal bassoonist. In addition, she has performed many solo works with orchestras around the country. She is recognized as the foremost teacher of bassoon in the southwest and is currently an instructor at OCU, a position she has held for 20 years.

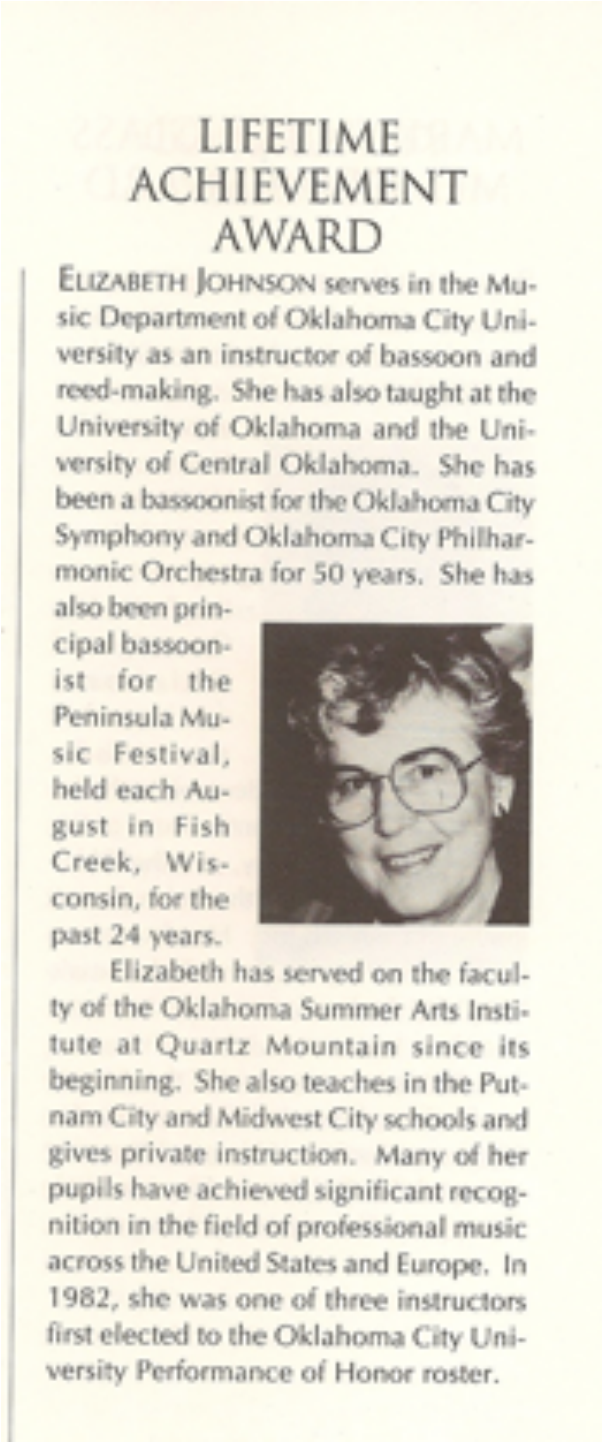
Robinson is the retired Director of University Theatre, University of Oregon. He was the orginator and first chairman of the Theatre Architecture project of the American Education Theatre Association and is the author of numerous articles on theatre architecture. Robinson is current-

Illustration 6: Portion of 1982 Article with Betty Johnson Biography

In 1991, Johnson was one of 21 businesses and individuals presented with the annual Governor Arts Award for Lifetime Achievement, by Governor David Walters, in a ceremony at the state capitol. The award recognizes "individuals and organizations whose efforts have impacted the arts in their communities or throughout the state."[49] Her former student, Arthur Grossman (see Appendix C), also received the award. The

[49] "Governor's Arts Awards," Oklahoma Arts Council. http://www.arts.ok.gov/Our_Programs/Governors_Arts_Awards.html (accessed July 17, 2015).

Awards program included brief biographies of both.

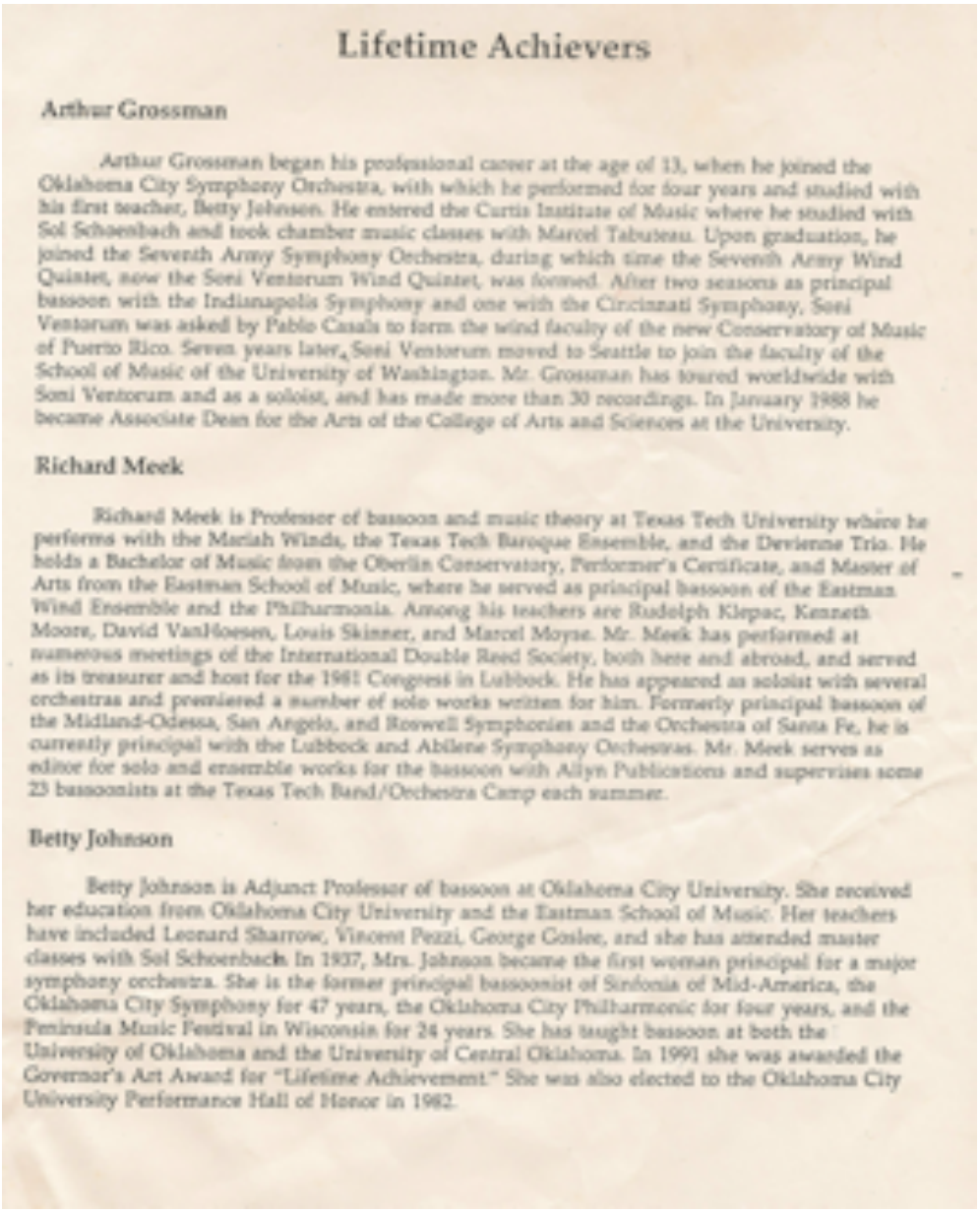


LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

ELIZABETH JOHNSON serves in the Music Department of Oklahoma City University as an instructor of bassoon and reed-making. She has also taught at the University of Oklahoma and the University of Central Oklahoma. She has been a bassoonist for the Oklahoma City Symphony and Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra for 50 years. She has also been principal bassoonist for the Peninsula Music Festival, held each August in Fish Creek, Wisconsin, for the past 24 years.

Elizabeth has served on the faculty of the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain since its beginning. She also teaches in the Putnam City and Midwest City schools and gives private instruction. Many of her pupils have achieved significant recognition in the field of professional music across the United States and Europe. In 1982, she was one of three instructors first elected to the Oklahoma City University Performance of Honor roster.

Illustration 7: Announcement of Lifetime Achievement Award



Lifetime Achievers

Arthur Grossman

Arthur Grossman began his professional career at the age of 13, when he joined the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra, with which he performed for four years and studied with his first teacher, Betty Johnson. He entered the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied with Sol Schoenbach and took chamber music classes with Marcel Tabuteau. Upon graduation, he joined the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra, during which time the Seventh Army Wind Quintet, now the Soni Ventorum Wind Quintet, was formed. After two seasons as principal bassoon with the Indianapolis Symphony and one with the Cincinnati Symphony, Soni Ventorum was asked by Pablo Casals to form the wind faculty of the new Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico. Seven years later, Soni Ventorum moved to Seattle to join the faculty of the School of Music of the University of Washington. Mr. Grossman has toured worldwide with Soni Ventorum and as a soloist, and has made more than 30 recordings. In January 1988 he became Associate Dean for the Arts of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University.

Richard Meek

Richard Meek is Professor of bassoon and music theory at Texas Tech University where he performs with the Mariah Winds, the Texas Tech Baroque Ensemble, and the Devienne Trio. He holds a Bachelor of Music from the Oberlin Conservatory, Performer's Certificate, and Master of Arts from the Eastman School of Music, where he served as principal bassoon of the Eastman Wind Ensemble and the Philharmonia. Among his teachers are Rudolph Klepac, Kenneth Moore, David VanHoesen, Louis Skinner, and Marcel Moyse. Mr. Meek has performed at numerous meetings of the International Double Reed Society, both here and abroad, and served as its treasurer and host for the 1981 Congress in Lubbock. He has appeared as soloist with several orchestras and premiered a number of solo works written for him. Formerly principal bassoon of the Midland-Odessa, San Angelo, and Roswell Symphonies and the Orchestra of Santa Fe, he is currently principal with the Lubbock and Abilene Symphony Orchestras. Mr. Meek serves as editor for solo and ensemble works for the bassoon with Allyn Publications and supervises some 25 bassoonists at the Texas Tech Band/Orchestra Camp each summer.

Betty Johnson

Betty Johnson is Adjunct Professor of bassoon at Oklahoma City University. She received her education from Oklahoma City University and the Eastman School of Music. Her teachers have included Leonard Sharrow, Vincent Pezzi, George Goslee, and she has attended master classes with Sol Schoenbach. In 1937, Mrs. Johnson became the first woman principal for a major symphony orchestra. She is the former principal bassoonist of Sinfonia of Mid-America, the Oklahoma City Symphony for 47 years, the Oklahoma City Philharmonic for four years, and the Peninsula Music Festival in Wisconsin for 24 years. She has taught bassoon at both the University of Oklahoma and the University of Central Oklahoma. In 1991 she was awarded the Governor's Art Award for "Lifetime Achievement." She was also elected to the Oklahoma City University Performance Hall of Honor in 1982.

Illustration 8: Lifetime Achievement Biographies

Johnson's personal archive included a handwritten award acceptance speech, discovered with the program for the Oklahoma Governor's Lifetime Award banquet. However, one cannot be certain this speech was specifically connected to that honor. Whatever the occasion, a simple attitude and a bit of humor comes through:

> It is with deep humility that I accept this award. I feel very honored to have been chosen as one of the original recipients. You know, it is usually a football player, baseball player, pianist, or conductor who is chosen for this sort of thing and to have a Bassoonist receive such notoriety and attention is indeed an unusual and deeply appreciated honor. Thank you very much.

In the early 1990's, Johnson was diagnosed with breast cancer. She succumbed in January 2000. According to friends, students and colleagues, during that period of health challenges, Johnson continued to play, teach, and give lessons. Honoring her request, there was no funeral, but instead a party was held to celebrate her life.

Appropriately, former students and colleagues came together to celebrate Johnson's life with a Bassoon Bash, a tradition she began and popularized at OCU in 1995. The Bash was originally two days long and featured presentations, master classes and a concert of music for the bassoon. According to the Daily Oklahoman article, Arthur Grossman, Richard Meek and over 40 other bassoonists likely attended the 1988 Bash.[50] Bassoonists came together to play bassoon ensembles on a large scale. At the commemorative Bash, students and colleagues came from around the country to remember her. A solo bassoon piece by Thomas Sleeper, *Melody for Betty Johnson*, was premiered, performed by former student Kathryn Sleeper (see Appendix C).

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[50] "OCU Plans Fourth Bash For Bassoon," *Daily Oklahoman*. March 12, 1998, http://m.newsok.com/ocu-plans-fourth-bash-for-bassoon/article/2605771 (accessed July 17, 2015).

Margaret E. Petree
College of Music and Performing Arts
School of Music
Mark Edward Parker, Dean

INSTRUMENTAL FACULTY

Woodwinds
Parthena Owens, flute
Lisa Harvey-Reed, oboe
Patricia Card, clarinet
Brian Gorrell, saxophone
Larry Reed, bassoon

Brass
Stephen Goforth, trumpet, Director of Jazz Studies
Penny Schimek, trumpet
Martha McQuaid, horn
Fred Fulmer, trombone
Wayne Allford, tuba, euphonium

Percussion
David Steffens

Strings
John Arnold, violin
Jacqueline Schwandt, viola
H.P. Scott Card, cello
Patrick Temple, guitar
John Schimek, double bass, Coordinator of Strings

Conductors
Mark Edward Parker, Director of University Orchestra
Matthew Mailman, Director of University Bands

Margaret E. Petree School of Music and Performing Arts
2501 N. Blackwelder, Oklahoma City, OK 73106-1493
Phone (405) 521-5401
or visit the OCU School of Music website at http://
www.okcu.edu/music

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY
MARGARET E. PETREE COLLEGE OF MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS
School of Music
Mark Edward Parker, Dean

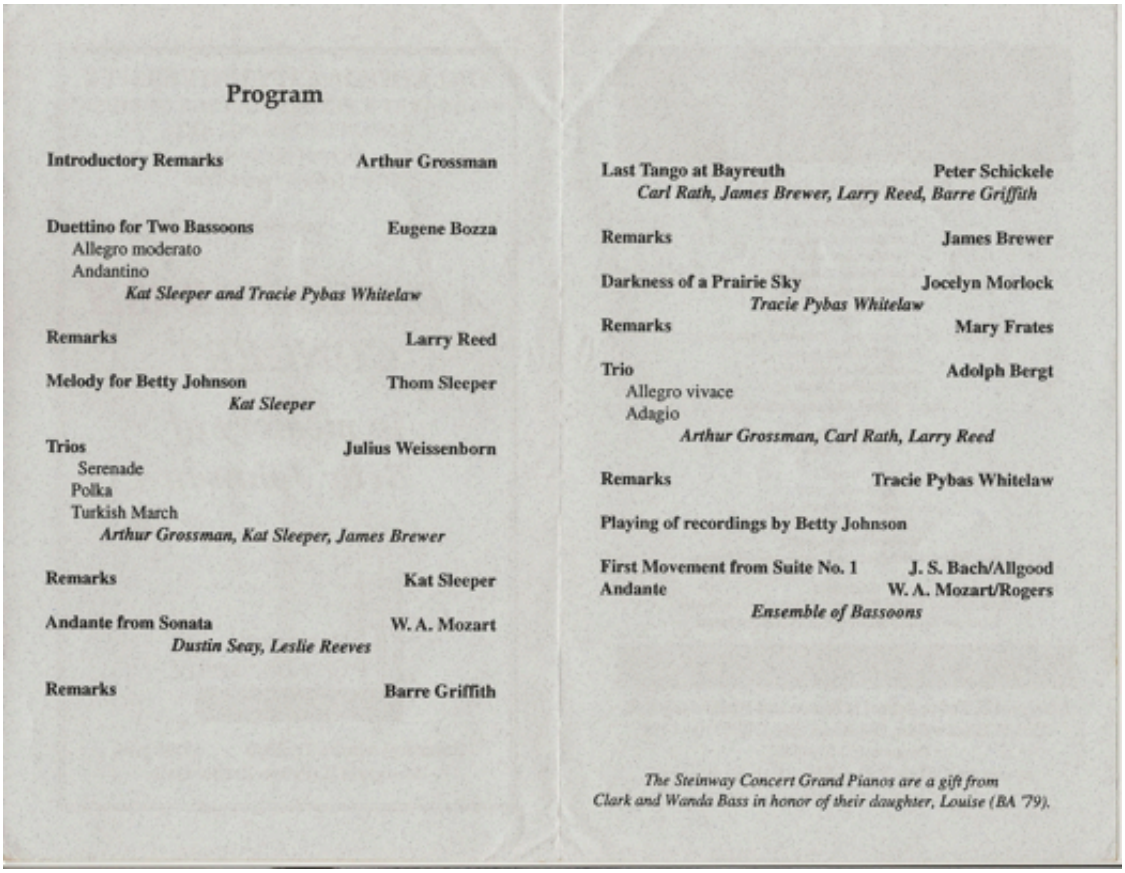
presents

A BASSOON BASH CONCERT

in memory of Betty Johnson

OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY
University for Leaders

Saturday, March 11, 2000 7:00 p.m.
Margaret E. Petree Recital Hall



Program

Introductory Remarks — **Arthur Grossman**

Duettino for Two Bassoons — **Eugene Bozza**
Allegro moderato
Andantino
Kat Sleeper and Tracie Pybas Whitelaw

Remarks — **Larry Reed**

Melody for Betty Johnson — **Thom Sleeper**
Kat Sleeper

Trios — **Julius Weissenborn**
Serenade
Polka
Turkish March
Arthur Grossman, Kat Sleeper, James Brewer

Remarks — **Kat Sleeper**

Andante from Sonata — **W. A. Mozart**
Dustin Seay, Leslie Reeves

Remarks — **Barre Griffith**

Last Tango at Bayreuth — **Peter Schickele**
Carl Rath, James Brewer, Larry Reed, Barre Griffith

Remarks — **James Brewer**

Darkness of a Prairie Sky — **Jocelyn Morlock**
Tracie Pybas Whitelaw

Remarks — **Mary Frates**

Trio — **Adolph Bergt**
Allegro vivace
Adagio
Arthur Grossman, Carl Rath, Larry Reed

Remarks — **Tracie Pybas Whitelaw**

Playing of recordings by Betty Johnson

First Movement from Suite No. 1 — **J. S. Bach/Allgood**
Andante — **W. A. Mozart/Rogers**
Ensemble of Bassoons

The Steinway Concert Grand Pianos are a gift from Clark and Wanda Bass in honor of their daughter, Louise (BA '79).

Illustration 9: Bassoon Bash Program in Memory of Betty Johnson

Johnson's focus was a critical tool in her teaching. Interviewees have offered insight into this aspect of her life and her interactions with others. They generally note that Johnson loved to smile, watch people, and was a happy, even funny, person with a great sense of humor. As a teacher, she was serious. Former colleague Jerry Neil Smith played next to her as the principal clarinetist in the orchestra for several years and gives his opinion of Johnson:

> [Betty] was like everybody's grandmother… if their grandmother was a great bassoon player. She was like one of my older aunts. We had that kind of kind of relationship. I respected very much her experience not only in music, but also in life. She had a very fine philosophical attitude about life and living it. She was a joy to be around and a friendly person. I supposed she was capable of holding a

> grudge but I never heard about it and I never saw anyone who didn't like her very much. She was a friendly and sensitive person.[51]

Smith continued to discuss how her personality influenced him and underscored the fact that Johnson was a highly private person who kept the public and personal parts of her life separate:

> I found every aspect of her personality, her professional way of handling matters, her style, her playing, every aspect of her work and her performance to be meritorious. There was a lesson to be learned if you are smart enough to pay attention. Those who were around her are all better for being around her, both personally and professionally in every way. I'm sure she made a lot of mistakes as a young person like everyone else does, but she had lived a long life and had very few character flaws. None were ever revealed in my presence. She was a real jewel.[52]

Smith worked closely with Johnson in the Oklahoma Symphony and Philharmonic, as well as the University of Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute as a fellow woodwind player. He had the opportunity to know and observe Johnson in many contexts. His insights provide important details about Johnson's personality.

Lisa Harvey-Reed joined the OCU faculty in 1986, and has played oboe in the Oklahoma City Philharmonic since 1989. She describes her relationship with Johnson, her sense of humor, and the strength she showed through the end of her life at age 80:

> We shared a studio in the old building at OCU and would discuss the schedule. We'd run into each other at school. We had a faculty quintet in the late 1980's and would rehearse and perform many school concerts and recitals. Those were fun times with Johnson. She always had a twinkle in her eye and a wicked sense of humor. She referred to Daniel Barenboim as "Boing Boing" and would laugh uproariously. In the car on the way to these gigs, she would always be ready to laugh at something. She would bring her toolbox every service but I don't remember her fussing excessively over reeds. I know she DID, but I just don't remember it. When we first started the quintet, I was just getting to know her and she was coming off treatment for breast cancer. While she didn't have the

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51 Jerry Neil Smith, interview by author, Norman, OK, May 13, 2014.

52 Ibid.

> stamina at first, she always had a "never give up" attitude and kept plugging away at it. She seemed to eventually conquer that disease and the consequences of its treatment. She was always tenacious about everything. My perception of her contribution to the bassoon world is that she was very generous with her time and knowledge with her students. She was eager to share her knowledge and taught many students over the years at OCU and OU. I feel that her health issues eventually caught up with her. She was not playing bassoon as much anymore, but threw herself even more passionately into her teaching. One pervasive theme I recall is that her students loved her and realized that she had a lot to give from her many years of experience.[53]

Another former symphony colleague and friend, oboist Richard Killmer, remembers Johnson as "Totally positive. Always looking to the bright side of things. She wasn't a pushover. She really spoke her mind and always looked for the positive in everything."[54] According to Johnson's students and colleagues, it was not only her expertise on the bassoon that made her a great teacher, but also her positive personality.

A small circle of intimate friends knew Johnson beyond the orchestra setting. She was well-liked, but glimpses into her personal life are rare. Former colleagues and friends, Lacy and Beverly McClary saw this private side of Johnson and Lacy offers rare insight:

> I don't remember exactly when the first time came, but the Johnsons asked me to come to one of their Saturday night things. That was the one night in the week when the orchestra was not rehearsing or performing. So I would go to the store and buy myself a steak and take it there. Arthur would put it on his grill. Johnson made a salad. That was a way to blow off steam one night a week. They had it every Saturday for a long time.[55]

The longtime relationship between the Johnsons and McClarys provides valuable information essential to this study. Another close friend of Betty and Art's was Robert

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53 Lisa Harvey-Reed, email to author, January 29, 2014.

54 Richard Killmer, telephone interview by author, April 23, 2015.

55 Lacy McClary, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 12, 2014.

Weiner,[56] a colleague at OU and OCU and principal oboist in the Oklahoma Symphony, who was also welcomed into their private lives as soon as he arrived in Oklahoma City:

> We used to go out to restaurants. Betty invited me to her home frequently where we always had lots of discussion about everything under the sun. She and Arthur were quite friendly to me right from when I first arrived to OKC. As to illustrations of friendship, that's to say in an exact manner. She did offer advice on many things in life. We did co-found the Chamber Players with a couple other symphony musicians. She somewhat took me under her wing in helping me learn how to live in the orchestra environment. She always had sensible commentary on whatever topics we were discussing.[57]

Weiner describes their friendship further with more detail:

> Betty and Art would invite me over to their home frequently. She would often make homemade pizza, homemade ice cream, chili, etc. She was a good cook. We would get into discussions of all sorts, including music and orchestra politics. Betty had an ability to make what would seem a sensible solution to any problem. I used to like to take the contrary side and then intellectually argue the issue with them. At that point, Arthur would get really engaged as he enjoyed that kind of repartee. Betty didn't argue that, but rather, used to get a good laugh out of watching the proceedings. That was one of the great things I remember about Betty - she was straight with what she said. It's hard to tell specific stories about her after all these years, but I will say that I enjoyed the relationship I had with her and Arthur.[58]

He also remembered that "Betty always kept her tools in a fishing tackle box. On the orchestra's many run outs, she would occupy the front seat on the bus and work on

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[56] Robert Weiner's teaching positions include Cornell University (1973-1974), University of Oklahoma (1974-1976), Oklahoma City University (1976-1983), Conservatory at the Ollin Yolistli in Mexico City (1990-1995), Frost School of Music at the University of Miami (1998-present/2015). His playing positions include freelancing in New York City (1970-1974), principal oboe Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra (1974-1988), principal oboe Mexico City Philharmonic (1990-1995), and various positions in South Florida including principal oboe in the Florida Grand Opera, Atlantic Chamber Orchestra, Miami City Ballet, Miami Symphony, and Miami Mozarteum (1995-present/2015). He has also performed principal with the St. Louis Symphony and the Florida Philharmonic.

[57] Robert Weiner, written interview by author, May 29, 2014.

[58] Ibid.

reeds. I don't know how she managed it with the bus bouncing around, but she did." When it came to friendships, Weiner stated that "Betty took real interest in and showed great concern for her students… she was generous with her time and truly tried to help them. This also applied to how she was with her friends." According to Weiner, Johnson was consistent in the way she treated friends and students alike. Even though they were peers, she had an effect on him as a musician and person:

> I played with her so I couldn't help but be influenced by her tone and phrasing. Actually, though, we were compatible colleagues on and off the stage. She was honest but kind. I don't recall her saying anything in a nasty manner about anyone. Yes, she did have her opinions. She did offer those quietly and privately. Perhaps that sense of appropriate was an influence. She was a warm human being - like a loving mother who didn't sugar coat, but also didn't embarrass.[59]

This consistency and kindness with which Johnson treated people, even in times of criticism, made a lasting impression on Robert Weiner. He considered himself fortunate to be close to her and share many moments of music-making and friendship. Although she had a small circle of friends, Johnson's relationships were close knit and full of mutual respect.

When Kay Dean Walker started playing extra in the Oklahoma Symphony Percussion section in 1959, she was very young, still an OCU student, and had no idea that as time went on she would develop a friendship with Johnson. Eventually, Walker became the orchestra's principal Percussionist. She recalls early days when she would drive with the Johnsons to orchestra concerts around the state:

> When we would go on out of town trips, the orchestra used to take trips to towns in Oklahoma, sometimes I would ride with them instead of the bus. They were always talking music of course and I was very interested because I was just new to the whole thing. I felt safe with them because I didn't know too many people

[59] Ibid.

> and they kind of took care of me really. We always had room at some hotel in the town where we were. Sometimes couples would be in rooms. They always let me come in and pal around with them and go eat with them.[60]

And so, their friendship deepened, in part because Art Johnson and Walker played in the percussion section as Walker noted:

> We just kept being friends. They were so busy and I was so busy and we didn't really have time to do a lot. I was closer to Betty and Art than anyone because Art played in the percussion section with me. He played cymbals and bass drum. That kept us [the orchestra] from hiring someone else. He was so funny. She had the upper hand of everything, but he would really give her a time. She would throw up her hands and turn around or walk off.[61]

Walker and Betty Johnson also spent casual time together outside the orchestra:

> She and I played a little tennis. We had a good time. We would meet over at the tennis center and play on a free court. She really liked to play. None of us were really very good. We didn't have any lessons or anything like that. We just went out. We knew the rules and we would play as well as we could. It was just fun. That was one fun thing I did with Betty.[62]

They spent leisure time with other people as well:

> Every weekend, we would go to somebody's house and we would drink champagne and go out to eat. That was fun and we just always looked forward to that. I was doing a lot of stuff and she was doing a lot of stuff. We just eked out time to be together. I would talk to her on the phone. She, Art, and I would go out to eat lunch. We went to a cafeteria a lot because they could get food they needed to eat.[63]

Walker enjoyed memories of her time with Johnson.

> I have a good feeling when I think about Betty because she always seems up and was always anxious to do things. We had a wonderful time playing tennis. We would laugh because none of us were any good. She was very intelligent. I don't

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60 Kay Dean Walker, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 7, 2015.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

> think people realized how intelligent she was. She knew lots of things. She knew how to figure things out. Very serious about life, but it was all a fun thing too.[64]

During the interview, Walker was asked if she knew anything about Johnson's mother believing that she would join a religious order. Walker responded, "Somewhere back there I think that she had said that jokingly about, "Well, my mother thought I was going to be a nun." We all just fell out. She loved jokes. She would just die laughing. She had a wonderful life. She loved her students. She lived for her students. She took care of them."[65] Finally, Walker describes Johnson's personality, as she perceived it:

> As long as things were going well, she was not really a serious person. I could always tell if something was bothering her because she just kind of was a little bit different. It was like her mind was preoccupied with something else, but she was right there with me too. I never pried into whatever was bothering her. I just tried to be a good friend. She was very private. She was a wonderful person to be around. I always enjoyed going over to the house. She cooked very well but didn't cook a lot. She loved to make chili…. I have good memories of Betty. She was a good friend and fantastic player. Every time I hear a bassoon, that's who I think of.[66]

Their relationship grew over many years, a friendship that allows Walker to provide her unique look into Johnson's more personal side.

During the interview process, the initial interviewees were asked to identify others who were close to Johnson and could provide more insight into her personality, life, teaching methods, and career. The name that arose frequently was former student and colleague, Larry Reed. Starting lessons with her as a high school freshman (1966) and continuing through college at the University of Oklahoma (1974), Reed spent much

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64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

time with Johnson during the last decades of her life. After teaching bassoon and music theory at Baylor University from 1975-1980, Reed left the music world for a business career. He has remained an active bassoonist throughout his life, playing with Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Lawton Philharmonic and other regional orchestras. Like many of her students, he remained in touch with Johnson throughout her life and that emotional tie tinged his interview:

> She was monumental in my eyes. I was very close to her when I was studying with her directly and when I left to do my masters work, we stayed in frequent contact by regular mail. When I would come home, we would always get together and play duets. That was a big part of my education: being able to play with her and match pitch, trying to play as musically as she did. Then, when I went to Baylor, we stayed in touch. I also asked her down, and she did a bassoon day and gave a solo recital [at Baylor]. We stayed in contact until I moved back to Oklahoma and then it was even more frequent. I played extra with the Oklahoma Symphony until she retired. She was one of the few remaining original members of the orchestra. So we stayed in touch. We were very, very close. I always felt close to her and Art. Our lives continued to be intertwined until her death.[67]

Reed's reflection on Johnson tells of her passions. "She communicated a passion for not only music, but the bassoon. Everything for bassoon. Her life was totally immersed and she inspired me to be that way."[68] Transitioning from a student to collegial relationship was an interesting challenge for Reed. When asked for personal stories, Reed recalls the important moment when he made the transition from student to friend and colleague:

> The most significant [personal story] was the year I was given the opportunity to play full time next to her. The second bassoonist, James Brewer, left for a year on a leave to do his masters work in Philadelphia. I was asked to play. Of course, I was scared to death, but what an educational experience! In that year, I remember I finally had the guts to somehow ask her if I could call her Betty instead of Mrs. Johnson. I felt like we were colleagues at that point. I was

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67 Larry Reed, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 14, 2014.

68 Ibid.

> twenty years old, so she was always Mrs. Johnson. She said, "Yeah, call me Betty." That was kind of a breakthrough in our relationship as colleagues.[69]

Reed goes on to describe some of the things they would do with their new relationship status:

> We were just very close friends. I would always go up and see her and Art. She would give me a nice scotch. She had some stuff she used to buy. It was called "egg bread." She would make wonderful sandwiches. A lot of times she would serve little treats like that after a lesson or when I would come up. She was very healthy. She had a cancer scare in the 1970's when I was at OU [University of Oklahoma] in the early 70's. She became very health conscious and a very healthy eater. She was always very full of life and very animated. Only in the last couple of years did her physical ailments get her down. That in itself was inspiring.[70]

Because of his self-described close relationship with Johnson, Reed's insights and information assisted in providing greater detail about the different areas of Johnson's life.

Johnson was well respected among the bassoon community throughout the country. Leonard Sharrow (1915-2004) was one of the prominent American teachers and performers of bassoon in the 20th century. His first job was as principal bassoonist with the National Symphony in Washington, D.C. He joined the NBC Symphony starting in 1937, and in 1947 with Toscanini, made what many consider the "definitive recording of the Mozart *Bassoon Concerto*."[71] Drafted in World War II, he toured with Irvin Berlin's show, "This Is the Army," raising money for the Army Emergency Relief

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69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 John von Rhein, "Obituary of Leonard Sharrow," *Chicago Tribune*, August 21, 2004, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2004-08-21/news/0408210166_1_principal-bassoon-nbc-symphony-chicago-symphony-orchestra (accessed July 17, 2015).

Fund. After the war, he played for a season with the Detroit Symphony before returning to NBC. Next, he played principal with the Chicago Symphony from 1951 through 1964, and taught at Indiana University, Bloomington, from 1964 through 1977. Sharrow joined the Pittsburgh Symphony as principal and taught at Carnegie Mellon University from 1977 to 1987, after which he returned to Bloomington. He moved to Cincinnati in 1999 to be near his son.[72] He was also one of Johnson's musical admirers. Several of the interviewees mentioned a party in 1989 at Reed's house where Sharrow was a guest. Valerie Watts began her tenure as principal flute with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and professor at the University of Oklahoma in 1988. During that time, she performed with Johnson many times. She describes the circumstances of that party and the respect Sharrow had for Johnson:

> We had, at OU, a Masters Performers Series. Carl Rath, Sally Bennett[73], and I worked on it. We got money from the Honors College. We brought these outstanding artists in bassoon, oboe, and flute. And they gave master classes. Leonard Sharrow was one of the people who came. His classes were really great. I watched some of them. So, they had a dinner at Larry Reed's house. They had a dinner for Leonard Sharrow. Johnson was there too. He was so gracious with her that you knew that she was just so well-respected by the bassoon community.[74]

Larry Reed's recollections are similar to those of Watts:

> The party was at my house. It was in 1989. I have a picture of Betty Johnson and Leonard Sharrow embracing. I don't know what their connection was, but I think she might have studied with him. They had some connection. That was one of the big reasons she suggested I go study with [Leonard] Sharrow for my

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72 Ibid.

73 Professor of Oboe at the University of Oklahoma and principal oboist with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

74 Valerie Watts, interview by author, Norman, OK, May 13, 2014.

> masters work in Indiana. They were close. I don't remember how they got to know each other.[75]

Although the specific facts of how Sharrow and Johnson knew each other are unknown, these observations that Johnson was close with Leonard Sharrow speaks to her reputation among bassoon players throughout the country. It also suggests that even given her choice to remain in Oklahoma, Johnson had a positive relationship with one of the most respected bassoon teachers and performers in the country.

Johnson's favorite music, notes on the bassoon, and personal opinions were an area of mystery to most of the interviewees. While many agree that she loved the notes right above the staff in bass clef, Reed remembers her telling him her favorite note was, "C sharp above the staff. She also had a beautiful singing high F. That E, F, G range... just wow. That's what I specifically remember. That beautiful full finger C sharp was gorgeous."[76] According to Reed, her favorite pieces included both traditional and nontraditional pieces:

> She loved the Wolf-Ferrari [Suite-Concertino in F major for Bassoon and small orchestra]. She loved Brahms, Tchaikovsky, and Mozart. She played the Ray Luke Concerto several times. There are some things that nobody ever plays. There's a piece called *Through a Looking Glass* by Deans Taylor. It has a big bassoon solo in it. No one has ever heard of it anymore. I think the symphony used to play that back in the 1960's. She loved that. She loved all the masters. Alborada del Gracioso is one I remember that she loved. These are all great masterworks, bassoon pieces obviously.[77]

Reed goes on to describe what it was like to hear her play these pieces about which Johnson apparently felt so fondly:

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75 Reed, interview.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

> The first time I played with her, I played contrabassoon on Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. On that same concert, we played the Debussy *Nocturnes*. I remember how smooth and ethereal that was. And then to hear her play *Afternoon of a Fawn*… Oh my Lord! There is something about her high F. It makes me shiver just to think about it…the one right above the staff.[78]

Seay recalls pieces that she loved: Carl Maria von Weber's *Andante e Rondo Ungarese*, *Op. 35*, Andre Jolivet's *Bassoon Concerto*, and the Antonio Vivaldi Concertos.[79] Johnson was not afraid to pass on her opinions about pieces she enjoyed.

Betty Johnson left a large network of loyal students and colleagues who admire her greatly. Her students teach and perform throughout the country. This includes but is not limited to Arthur Grossman (Seattle, Washington), Tracie Whitlaw (Norfolk, Virginia), Kathryn Sleeper (Central Florida and Crested Butte, Colorado), Denise Reig Turner (Albuquerque, New Mexico), Shannon Highland (Dallas, Texas), Dustin Seay (New York City, New York) and others cited elsewhere in this study. Although she may have had offers, none of the interviewees could recall an instance where Johnson publically or privately expressed interested in leaving the area to play in a "more prestigious" group or took auditions for other jobs. Johnson's students and colleagues have absorbed her influence and instruction and carried those ideas throughout their travels.

Johnson's life touched countless people through friendship, performance, and education. For many interviewed, the success of her career was that her attitude, work ethic, family upbringing, and love of people guided Johnson throughout her private life and career. The choices she made influenced her community, students, and colleagues.

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78 Ibid.

79 Seay, interview.

CHAPTER THREE: PROFESSIONAL CAREER

Johnson, a charter member of the Oklahoma Symphony, told her student Kathryn Sleeper that she, "just happened to be in the right place at the right time."[80] A brief history of the Oklahoma City Symphony coupled with Johnson's previously examined handwritten letters to Art in 1939, sheds light on Johnson's experiences in the symphony in its early days including the influence of the conductors. An exploration of the background of the Oklahoma Symphony also aids to the discussion about her place as an early female in a symphony, discussed later in this document.

The Ladies Music Club, the precursor to the WPA Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra, began just one year after Oklahoma achieved statehood in 1907. Organized as a way to infuse culture and art into the new boomtown, the founders brought in well-known artists, beginning in 1909.[81] In 1921, the Club began a string choir and professed a vision of adding woodwinds and brass in order to create a full symphony. By 1924, an unnamed daily newspaper heralded that a symphony was on its way. The first public concert with the new instrumentation was given on October 24, 1924.[82] This young orchestra continued to grow: "During the seven seasons the first Oklahoma City Symphony existed, it was able to open the world of symphony music to many thousands who had never heard a live symphony orchestra."[83] This first orchestra was forced to

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80 Kathryn Sleeper, e-mail to author, January 26, 2015.

81 Fleming, 5.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 11.

disband in 1931 as outside forces like the repercussions from the stock market crash and the Great Depression, created an unemployment rate of 25% in Oklahoma. However, before its demise, it brought classical music to communities around the state.[84]

The years between 1931 and the formation of the new orchestra in 1936 were culturally lean, but the Ladies Music Club continued to present concerts. In addition, the Oklahoma Chamber Music Society, the only musical entity in the area at the time that could qualify for a federal grant under the Federal Music Project of the WPA, formed a new group in 1934: the Oklahoma City Society Sinfonia.[85] The Sinfonia was led by Dean Richardson, the state director of the program, and included violinist Ralph Rose, the future inaugural conductor of the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra.[86] The ensemble performed through 1936 before evolving into the Federal Symphony, which began rehearsals in September of 1937.[87]

With many professional musicians throughout the country out of work and qualified for federal relief, Richardson identified 500 local artists and requested help from the Federal government to form orchestras in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Initially, there were only enough local registered musicians to form a symphony in Tulsa; Oklahoma City did not have enough potential members to warrant the establishment of

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84 Ibid., 11.

85 Ibid., 13.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid., 14.

a new orchestra. So, in 1936, the Tulsa Symphony was formed.[88] However, some political leaders in Tulsa rejected the New Deal and wanted nothing to do with the WPA programs. In 1937, the executive board of the Tulsa Symphony voted against all Federal funds.[89] The city was unable to support the group with private funding and several of the players left for Oklahoma City, including Ralph Rose. The residents of Oklahoma City, annoyed by the establishment of an orchestra in Tulsa, pressured Richardson to push for a new orchestra in the state capitol instead. Richardson succeeded and declared that, "The Oklahoma City Federal Symphony was not an extension of the Tulsa Project, but was instead an effort to carry on an aggressive plan to use the maximum number of musicians who needed jobs."[90] The new Oklahoma Federal Symphony (which later became the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra in 1941 when funding moved away from the WPA programs and into private sources) recruited 60 members and began vigorous practice for six to eight hours a day under the direction of Rose.[91] This new orchestra included bassoonist Betty Johnson (then known as Betty Sullivan).

The group rehearsed for three months before giving their first concert. They were received with praise and accolades from the public, who felt it was a "fine thing for Oklahoma City. It had a good start now and can get somewhere if it will keep up the

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88 Ibid.

89 Ibid., 15.

90 Ibid., 17.

91 Ibid.

good work."[92] Ralph Rose worked tirelessly to train this group of "young, mostly inexperienced musicians. Most of the players were in their 20s, and few had any experience with symphonic music."[93] They all learned and experienced growing pains together. The first symphony had 33 hours of rehearsal each week.[94] A. Clyde Roller was the principal oboist in the orchestra and later became the assistant conductor. He remembers the first group of musicians fondly:

> The camaraderie in that first orchestra was marvelous. Most of us were on the WPA rolls because we had to make a living in those hard times. We were all pretty much in the same boat. The orchestras of today don't have that same warm, intimate feeling we had for each other in those days.[95]

Johnson was among that group of close musicians.

The Oklahoma Symphony was privileged to be led through the years by outstanding conductors whose training, guidance, knowledge, and professionalism educated the musicians, whom they conducted, including Johnson. The tenure of Ralph Rose encompassed the first season (1937-1938). A young, talented conductor from the Eastman School of Music named Victor Alessandro got his start as a conductor with the Oklahoma Symphony in 1938. Like most of the orchestra, he too was a young man, just 22, when he started.[96] At that time, there were 35 members in the symphony and the

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92 Ibid., 20.

93 Ibid., 19.

94 Ibid., 23.

95 Ibid., 24.

96 Ibid., 29.

season included ten concerts.[97] He was described in the press as a "personable young man, small and lovely."[98] Alessandro was "determined to be a popular conductor," and he intended "to listen to the audience rather than to the experts."[99] Once asked what it takes to make a successful musician, he replied:

> First of all, a great deal of hard work, combined with some natural talent, sincerity and honesty. We must consider that classical music is like a book, in that it tells a story, and you must concentrate on the music to understand what is being said. It is difficult at first, like reading a book with fine print. If you will sit and listen to it a little while each day and listen for the picture, it becomes easy to understand. You can develop the ability to see the picture.[100]

The Johnsons were good friends with this young conductor. Art Johnson described Alessandro as "having a heart like a hotel - with room for everyone."[101] About his abilities, charter member of the orchestra and violin player, Colata Frey said:

> Most of the veterans give Alessandro a great deal of credit for building the orchestra. Alessandro inherited a bunch of rather ignorant musicians. Most of them were people who came to the city from little country towns and had studied with country teachers. They played pretty well and learned a great deal from the long rehearsals we had. That is what Victor had to pull together, and he did a good job at it.[102]

By the 1944-45 season, the orchestra was being billed as, "One of the country's major orchestras."[103] When Alessandro joined the San Antonio Symphony in 1951, he left

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97 Ibid., 38.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 39.

101 Ibid., 41.

102 Ibid., 57.

103 Ibid.

behind an outstanding ensemble.



Illustration 10: Guy Frasier Harrison (center) with Art Johnson and Betty Johnson

Guy Fraser Harrison took the baton in 1951 as the next conductor of the Oklahoma Symphony at the age of 55. He was born in England in 1894 and came to the United States in 1920.[104] He spent four years in the Philippines (1914-1918) as a church choirmaster before heading to the Eastman School of Music to teach piano and organ when the school opened in 1921. In 1929, he began conducting the Rochester Civic Orchestra and, in 1930, he was named the associate conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic. [105] By the time he arrived in Oklahoma City, he had built 35 years of

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104 Ibid., 92.

105 Ibid., 93-94.

professional experience in the music field.[106] He declared, "I hope to woo Oklahoma Symphony fans with a balanced musical diet, blending the old with the new, the classical and not so classical, with something for those who are older and the young in between."[107] One tradition Harrison began was the playing of the National Anthem at the beginning of each concert. When asked about this, he explained, "I was brought up in England and there, every event, whether it be a concert, play, or meeting of any kind, starts with the singing of 'God Save the King'."[108] The audience expected this from him for the duration of his tenure. He also preferred to have the curtains closed before the concert. Then, when the curtain was raised, the orchestra was revealed. He used local soloists and performers as often as possible beginning in the first season.[109] Reviewer Tracy Silvester realized his talent upon hearing the Brahms Second Symphony at his first regular concert. "It was in this work that he showed the development and the depth of perception of the very art of Brahms. She continues to discuss the feeling she got from the players on stage:

> His coming to Oklahoma is a major triumph for music here. The intensity with which Harrison and the orchestra worked was impressive in this major work. One felt that the orchestra members were getting as big a thrill playing as were those listening. It was a magnificent musical experience.[110]

In Harrison's second season (1952-53), the orchestra played 12 subscription concerts,

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106 Ibid., 95.

107 Ibid., 96-97.

108 Ibid., 99.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid., 99.

22 radio concerts, five Little Symphony (chamber orchestra) programs, three pops concerts, and four children's concerts.[111] Harrison continued the tradition of radio broadcasts, pops concerts, community outreach, and classics begun by his predecessor. Other impressive statistics about his first season included the fact that there were now 25 female musicians in the orchestra, and it was predicted that the first international broadcast that season (in October) had an estimated listening audience that "might total 800 million people."[112] The total number of players was not mentioned; however, in the previous season, 84 musicians played in the orchestra.[113] Johnson and her colleagues now played in one of the top orchestras in the country, with an international following.

Harrison was "delighted with the warm reception and sensed that the residents of Oklahoma City "really appreciated" their orchestra. He said he "received cards and letters from all over the world commenting on the world-wide Sunday night broadcasts."[114] Popular pianist Liberace even commented on the orchestra saying, "It appears that Oklahoma City has the best of everything."[115] A few years later when the 1954-55 season came to a close, they had played more than 70 concerts during the season. In addition, the radio broadcasts were made over the NBC Network, which included 400 stations as well as the Mutual Network. A production director from Chicago was sent to the city to direct the programs and it was estimated that those two

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111 Ibid., 101.

112 Ibid., 102.

113 Ibid., 90.

114 Ibid., 105.

115 Ibid., 114.

networks combined had the largest listening audience in the world.[116] In the following season, the Symphony was "again selected by the U.S. Information Agency to be broadcast, for the sixth season, over the Voice of America. The station reached 79 countries, including those behind the "Iron Curtain" and also the so-called "Bamboo Curtain."[117] Former Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra member and close friend of Johnson's, oboist Don Jaeger, had the opportunity to hear one of these radio broadcasts in Norway in 1959:

> When I was on my Fulbright [Scholarship] in Amsterdam, I was visiting family in Norway at Christmas. And the family members owned a small hotel in a little community in the middle of Norway. They had the radio on. Good music most of the time. And all of a sudden, I hear, "Guy Fraser Harrison and the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra," In English among all this Norwegian. It was one of those broadcasts that we did. And on that particular concert there was a piece by a Norwegian composer named [Harold] Saeverud called Rondo Amoroso and it was for bassoon and oboe. Kathy Palou was playing the oboe part and Betty [Johnson] was on the bassoon, and I heard that all the way in this little town in Norway around Christmas. I hadn't been in the orchestra at that time. This was the year after I graduated OCU. Those broadcasts were broadcast all over Scandinavia.[118]

Johnson was a documented soloist over the airwaves, and after only 19 years, she was the principal bassoonist of a well-known orchestra with some international reputation for its broadcast performances. The musicality, work ethic, and experience she received in this hometown group probably trained her for a lifetime of playing and gave her invaluable experience that later helped Johnson to develop young musicians.

During the 1957-58 concert season, the orchestra was selected as one of six

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116 Ibid., 122.

117 Ibid., 123.

118 Don Jaeger, telephone interview by author, August 1, 2015.

symphonies to share a Ford Foundation grant commissioning new works.[119] It was also filmed by the United States Information Agency for a program to be aired first in Brussels and then across the rest of Europe.[120] Harrison continued to build on the dream of the Ladies Music Club, the hard work of Ralph Rose, and the effort and dedication of Victor Alessandro to create an even more renowned orchestra. By the time Harrison retired as the conductor in 1973, he had built the symphony and its musicians into a top organization.

Ray Luke was named as the associate director of the Oklahoma Symphony in 1969, a position he held until becoming the fourth conductor of the orchestra.[121] He later became the resident conductor for the 1973-1974 season. In the competition to replace Harrison, the orchestra would bring in five guest conductors.[122] Ray Luke was an accomplished composer and the head of instrumental music at Oklahoma City University.[123] His close relationship with Johnson is well-documented in this study. He conducted the first and last of that season's subscription concerts, while the applicants would conduct two concerts each: one all-orchestral concert and the other with a soloist.[124] "My principal goal," Luke said, "Was to keep the orchestra in top shape for the guest conductors who were trying out, so they would have a fair chance of showing

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119 Fleming, 158.

120 Ibid., 158-159.

121 Ibid., 208.

122 Ibid., 241.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid., 241-242.

what they could do."[125] He still conducted all of the state's "runout" concerts, the pops and children's concerts, and other special concerts. He was also the musical conductor of Oklahoma City's Lyric Theatre for five years.[126] Luke eventually conducted between 85 and 90 concerts that season.[127] He also said that he was also "torn between the three fields of teaching, composing, and conducting, but that he preferred teaching and composing."[128] Accepting the permanent appointment, he knew that taking over such a strong group during time of transition necessitated a special attitude. He explains:

> Traditionally a symphony usually goes to pieces at a time like that. I was interested in keeping the orchestra intact, and that was the reason I thought it was important to tell the orchestra that I was not a candidate for the permanent post. Then there would be no worry on the part of musicians about whether or not I would be their future conductor.[129]

Luke's selfless attitude toward conducting the orchestra presumably rubbed off on its members, including Johnson.

In 1974, British-born Ainsley Cox left his post as the assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic to become the conductor of the Oklahoma Symphony.[130] Previously, he attended the last Oklahoma Symphony concert of the 1973 season. When it was over, Cox told Luke, "You have some of the finest musicians I have ever worked

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125 Ibid., 254.

126 Ibid., 242.

127 Ibid., 253.

128 Ibid., 255.

129 Ibid., 254.

130 Ibid., 242, 258.

with."[131] When asked about his teacher Dr. Leopold Stokowski, Cox said, "I think he was one of the true originals in music and in life. He changed the public's way of thinking about serious music, and he certainly changed the whole concept of orchestral sound."[132] Cox first met Stokowski in 1962, the same year Stokowski started American Symphony. According to Cox, "Part of his [Stokowski] intention was to give young players, composers, and conductors the opportunity to work with a great conductor and mature musicians."[133] Although Cox was well-trained and extremely dedicated to the Oklahoma Symphony, his tenure with the organization was relatively short as economic pressures mounted and he left at the end of the 1978 season.

At the age of 62, Luis Herrera de la Fuenta was the next conductor of the Oklahoma Symphony.[134] His tenure lasted from 1978 through 1988. In March, before he took over, he had been the guest conductor for a pair of concerts. A review of those concerts from the *Journal Record* remarked, "It was an afternoon of superlatives, when the guest conductor comes up with the finest concert of the year. Orchestra members and the audience seemed to know somehow that it was a special occasion, and there was excitement in the air."[135] The description of the conductor indicates that he used no score, just his "hands, head and body to conduct."[136] Later that month, the decision was

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131 Ibid., 251.

132 Ibid., 258-259.

133 Ibid., 259.

134 Ibid., 327.

135 Ibid., 312.

136 Ibid.

made to hire Herrera. The new season would be 31 weeks long with 51 contract players and an average weekly salary of $255.[137]

Herrera released a program for the season consisting of more traditional music, contrary to the more modern music choices of Ainsley Cox. He listed all nine Beethoven symphonies, along with Mozart, Brahms, Rachmaninoff, and Wagner. Board members were pleased. Hopes were high and more money was raised that season than had been raised in years.[138] Herrera described his calling as "music making in which the conductor and the musicians exchange experiences to the continual enrichment of the orchestra."[139] He continued to talk about the two composers who still amaze him after playing so much standard repertoire: Mozart and Beethoven. "In Mozart, there is not one note in excess and there is not one more than is needed. This is not human, this is perfection. And Beethoven was human, very human. There are strange paths in his music."[140] The orchestra prospered during his time as its leader and fundraising was strong. Herrera felt that by the second season, the orchestra had become "a more finely tuned team."[141] According to him, they were ready to present the Richard Strauss tone poems, which are "lush show pieces of orchestration that will show a good orchestra to

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137 Ibid., 313.

138 Ibid., 314.

139 Ibid., 315.

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid., 329.

high advantage."[142] He wanted to play music that brought out the strengths of the orchestra. Because of his efforts and traditional programming, attendance of concerts grew and the number of concerts increased.[143] Although at this point in her career, Johnson would have played most, if not all, of the standard orchestral works, the opportunity to perform them with a conductor who appreciated these masterpieces so deeply contributed to and fed her love of the classic composers, a point that she professed to many students and colleagues, and that some interviewees recalled. At the end of his time, the orchestra was again plagued with financial trouble and problems involving the Musician's Union caused the Oklahoma Symphony to cease in its current form. Johnson had reluctantly retired by then at the end of her 49th year, but was honored in a gala concert celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the creation of the Oklahoma Federal Symphony, likely as she was a charter member.[144]

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid., 334.

144 Ibid., 400-401.
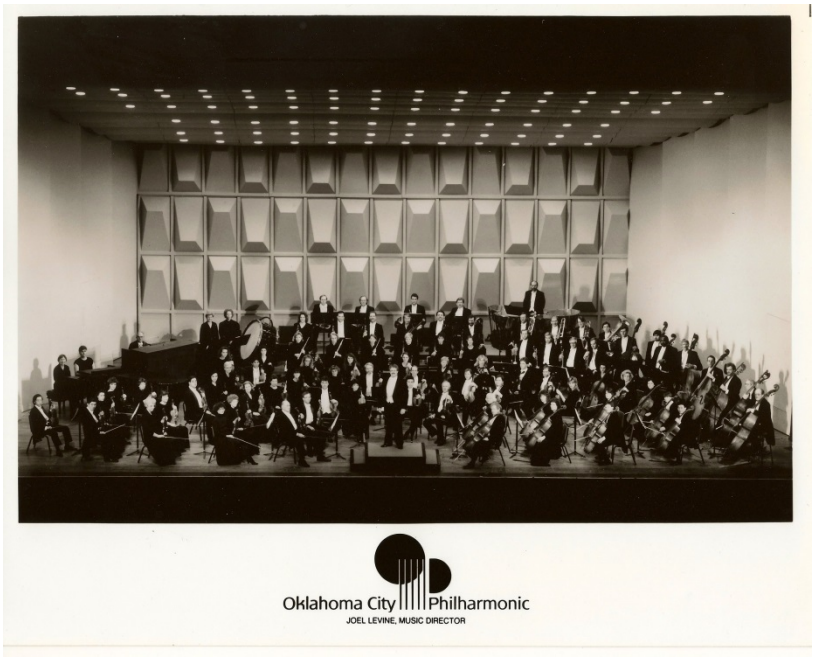


Illustration 11: Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Joel Levine Music Director

In April of 1980, it was announced that Joel Levine would become the assistant guest conductor starting in the next season.[145] He was later responsible for reforming the orchestra during the 1989 season, introducing a new name: Oklahoma City Philharmonic. Credited for resurrecting the orchestra and restoring it to prominence, he will retire at the end of the 2017-2018 season. If the pattern of conducting excellence continues, the next conductor will continue the service to the community began so long ago with the Ladies Music Club.

Lacy McClary, who joined the Symphony in 1958 as a member of the first violin section, coming from Texas as a midseason replacement, offers much insight to the life, music, and personality of Johnson. After playing with the Dallas Symphony and serving in the Navy, McClary initially had not planned on returning to a symphony. He

145 Ibid., 334.

recalls his first moments with the symphony in a rehearsal:

> I sat down and the orchestra started to play. When I sat down, it was like I had been here all my life. I thought, this is as fine a sound as I've heard anywhere. And it just happened that for the concert that was coming up in five days, one of the pieces we were playing was The New England [Triptych] by William Schuman, the American Composer. It has wonderful woodwind soloes all through it. And here's this wonderful sounding bassoon and all the other players were really terrific. They played so beautifully together with such style. And I just sat there marveling in this. Reveling in it.[146]

McClary continued on Johnson's musicality:

> So that's what I heard from then on. Through all those many years coming out of Betty Johnson's bassoon: this wonderful sound, great phrasing, and style. Such a depth and warmth and character in the sound, and so I was a fan of Betty's from the first rehearsal that I had with this orchestra until the last time we played.[147]

McClary's evaluation holds a respectable amount of legitimacy. He played with talented colleagues in Dallas before joining Oklahoma City including Bassoonist Willard Elliot (Principal, Chicago Symphony 1964-1997), Clarinetist Harold Wright (Principal, Boston Symphony 1970-1993), and Bassist Joe Guastafeste (Principal ,Chicago Symphony 1961-2010), all three of which had long tenures in major orchestras after their time in Dallas.

After two years in Oklahoma City, McClary moved to Kansas State Teaching College for ten years. During that time, he and his wife Beverly remained in touch with the Johnsons. When they returned to Oklahoma City in 1972, McClary became the concertmaster where he found that, "At that time, the orchestra schedule was very heavy. We were going all over this part of the country playing concerts. As usual, Betty

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146 Lacy McClary, interview.

147 Ibid.

just sat there and played these wonderful bassoon parts… I consider it a great privilege that I was able to be an associate of Betty's.[148]

Soon after, McClary joined with Johnson and the first and second oboists, Robert Weiner and Helen Baumgartner, to form the Oklahoma City Chamber Players. They performed frequent concerts together in the summers for many years. McClary retired from the symphony in 1984, but came back for 6 seasons when the orchestra reformed as the Oklahoma City Philharmonic. Altogether, they played in the symphony together for over 20 years.

Many of Johnson's colleagues were renowned musicians who began their careers in the Oklahoma Symphony. One of those talents was oboist Richard Killmer. Hired as the principal oboist right after his graduation from the Eastman School of Music, he played with Johnson from 1967 to1970. Killmer had received a call from Harrison asking him to join the Oklahoma Symphony, an offer that was extended to Killmer's wife Sydney, a violist in the New Haven Symphony. Killmer considered Oklahoma City to be very important in their mutual musical development.[149] He recalls getting to know Johnson and how welcome the Johnsons made them feel in a new city:

> We joined the orchestra and because the [Oklahoma] quintet started doing some things right away, we got to know Betty really well. And then she would invite us over. We had just been married a year. She and Art would invite us over to their house just to be nice neighbors. We just loved them. We would just have these long evenings of chatting. It was wonderful. We felt like we were family. I think she made everybody feel that way. We just talked about all kinds of stuff. We were newlyweds. We just always had something to talk about. I don't even remember what our conversations consisted of. All I remember is just loving to

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148 Ibid.

149 Killmer, interview.

be at their house; being so comfortable and welcome there.[150]

After leaving Oklahoma City, Killmer went on to teach the oboe at Yale for a year, before joining the St. Paul Minnesota Chamber Orchestra as their principal oboist, a position he held for eleven years before joining the faculty at the Eastman School of Music. He describes that he kept in touch with Johnson and often asked advice from her:

> After I left Oklahoma City, I went back to Yale for a year and then was hired as principal oboe in the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Prior to my taking that job in St. Paul, I sought her advice, which I often did. I called her and asked her if she thought it was a good idea if I took the job. She thought it was a very good job and I took the job. She was very happy that worked out. Then, when I was offered the job at the Eastman School of Music as Professor of Oboe, I also called her that time and sought her advice.[151]

Kilmer described the kind of advice that Johnson offered and how she helped him to work through problems related to his career:

> She asked me questions to make sure I understood the comparison of the job I had in St. Paul versus the job I was looking at in Eastman. She just kind of kept me thinking about what I was giving up by leaving a professional orchestra in term of performing, and what I was gaining in lifestyle and so forth [by going to Eastman]. She was just a sounding board and I always valued her advice. She always had good advice.[152]

He valued her subtly and approach to teaching:

> Her subtle way of telling something she thought you should know. This happened when I was dealing with reeds or worrying about my reeds. She said, "You know Richard, did you notice that the length of the reed? The ultimate length of that reed is really important and it all depends on how that piece of cane is vibrating. Did you notice that?" That was her way of telling me that you've got to clip your reed. She would just say things to me but it would all be

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150 Ibid.

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

> in a subtle way. Never trying to tell me something directly in that regard. She would just kind of hint at something. And I always learned. I learned so much from her. And then I would ask her questions. She had so much experience. And just playing with her. Just listening to her playing. You couldn't help but gain experience from that. She would just play with such joy. She just sang like the bassoon was an expression of her voice.[153]

While informing him about the history of the other oboists, Johnson would use examples of other player's difficulties to give advice:

> She would give me the history of all the oboe players who had been there [in the Oklahoma Symphony]: Al Laubin, Jack Holmes, De Vere Moore. There is another one of the lessons. If my reed seemed to be getting kind of heavy, she would say, "De Vere could just never get to the end of a phrase because his reeds were just too heavy. And he insisted on playing on those heavy reeds. And we all felt sorry for him because he just couldn't make it from the beginning of the phrase to the end without passing out." And so that was the lesson: your reeds are getting too heavy.[154]

Johnson used examples of players like De Vere Edward Moore, who went on to play the oboe in Chicago Symphony, and Alfred Laubin who became a famous oboe maker, to demonstrate to Killmer that everyone has trouble with reeds. He was always grateful for not only her advice and wisdom - the secret is to find the problem and fix it - but her method of offering it. During the interview, Killmer called the respect that Johnson received from her students and effect she had on her colleagues exceptional, saying of Johnson's effect on him, "She was a totally genuine person; totally giving person. Generous and she was so smart about it all. She was just savvy. She knew how to function in musical society. And I learned that from her also. She was a great example."[155] Killmer learned from her rehearsal habits as well:

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153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid.

> I was always there an hour ahead of time. I was so worried about reeds that I was an hour ahead. The next wind player after I was there was Betty. She was always on time, always prepared. She always could play her part. Betty was one of the stars of the orchestra. Any of us [new members] who really knew anything at all knew that nobody was better than the people who were there. You were just hoping that you could live up to what they could do. For someone not to understand that sitting behind them was one of the great musicians, people, and teachers of all time… Those of us who took advantage of that situation… it made my career.[156]

The admiration and high regard Killmer holds for Johnson is apparent and not minimized by the successful career he has experienced. He describes her consistency:

> I think she was always diligent about reeds and I know that she complained about reeds from time to time, but she was always dealing with them and she always had the reed she needed. I never remember her not being able to play ever. Of course, I have built her into a goddess. She could do no wrong. There had to be a reason for that. I mean, because of her consistency and attitude. She would come into Beethoven Fifth Symphony and say, "Oh my goodness, I get to play Beethoven's Fifth Symphony! This is great music! "That was her attitude all the time. Great integrity.[157]

Johnson's playing made a long-lasting effect on Killmer, who describes the lyrical quality and leadership as an educator that he remembers most:

> The lyrical quality and musical commitment. She always played like she meant it. She wasn't playing the bassoon. She was playing the musical idea which is something I try to teach. She played bassoon fine, but that wasn't what you were aware of. You were aware of what you were doing with the bassoon as a musical instrument. She got way past the bassoon. I just always enjoyed hearing her play. She would set the standard. I felt like the whole woodwind section played for each other. I feel like with her strong leadership, my youthfulness and the other skilled players, we were just able to carry the conversation always artistically as we passed our solos. We are always aware of each other as we were passing things around. It was my first job so I thought that's the way it always was. Fortunately, I went to an orchestra that had the same thing, the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. I was in it for 11 years and the same camaraderie was extraordinary.[158]

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156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.

Killmer had much to say when asked what he has learned from Johnson and how she influenced him by setting the standard:

> I think she, from her position in the orchestra, set the standard that I ascribe to. The work ethic, the standard, the consistency of intonation, the ability to have reeds that function on your instrument, and the obvious respect she showed Guy Fraser Harrison, the conductor. And I felt the same way. I felt that he was absolutely wonderful. Her example of how to show respect for others. It all came back to her with a great example for all of us. Her teaching, her dedication to her teaching, was an excellent model for all of us. It clearly influenced my teaching. I think I followed the example. I hope I followed the example.[159]

Killmer explains why he thinks Johnson never left Oklahoma and the orchestra.

> I think that she had found a home and she was happy and she was contributing. I don't think she ever felt compelled to leave. I feel like she was very happy where she was. And she had a good life. There again, I try to teach my students having a good life is the best thing you could have. So wherever you are, and you find that, enjoy it. Don't say, "OK, now I have to leave this good life and go to something that may not be as good just because I'll get ten dollars more a week in a paycheck." I think that she was very happy to be a contributor where she was. And I never had any sense that she was looking for something else, at all.[160]

When asked if she would have preferred to be remembered as a teacher, performer or good person, he confidently responded, "I would say person, teacher, performer, in that order,"[161] adding that she had a humble personal quality. He last visited with Johnson, then ill, several years before she died when he returned to Oklahoma to give a concert and workshop at the University of Oklahoma. The bassoon players in the concert with him at the time were Carl Rath and James Brewer. He describes how he discovered Johnson was in the hospital:

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159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

> They told me about Betty, that she was in the hospital. So I went to the hospital. She had just had the operation. She's sitting on the edge of the bed. The room was filled with flowers. Art was carrying the flowers down to the car. I said, "Betty, you should be in bed. What are you doing?" She said, "Well, I've got to get up and go to your concert. I'm not going to miss your concert." That's the kind of person she was. She came to the concert. The last time we probably spoke was at that concert. I would call her from time to time to just to chat about stuff.[162]

Johnson impressed many of her colleagues, as comes out in the interviews; Killmer was no exception. He considers himself an admirer. "You're talking to the original Betty Johnson fan. Not the original but maybe the most. Enough good things can't be said [about Betty]."[163] Killmer is just one of the many successful colleagues of Johnson's in the orchestra who went on to achieve excellence and high acclaim in their fields.

Another renowned musician who considered Johnson as a great colleague and friend is oboist and conductor Don Jaeger. He remembered the first time that he heard Johnson play when he was a high school student in the early 1950s. As a young oboist, he had the opportunity to sit at the end of the bassoon section during an Oklahoma Symphony rehearsal. "It's the first time I ever heard bassoon playing like that."[164] A few years later, while a college student playing with the Wichita Symphony, Guy Fraser Harrison offered Jaeger a job to play Second Oboe and English Horn in the Oklahoma Symphony, so he moved to Oklahoma in 1956 and played in the symphony while finishing his degree at Oklahoma City University. He remembers how thrilling it was to playing front of Johnson:

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162 Ibid.

163 Ibid.

164 Jaeger, interview.

> When I joined the orchestra, I was sitting right in front of her for two years. I admired her playing so very much and then of course we became friends. Every Friday night it seemed like, during the season, a group of us would go over the Art and Betty's home for a cookout so that was the social opportunity to get to know her as well. We did become very good friends.[165]

Jaeger got to know them better when he fulfilled his student teaching requirements with Art Johnson as his director at Northwest Classen High School. He also took bassoon lessons from Betty Johnson during his time at OCU. Jaeger left the orchestra in 1958 after receiving a Fulbright scholarship to study in Amsterdam with the principal oboist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. When he returned to the United States, he joined the Dallas Symphony. The first bassoonist at the time was Willard Elliot, who later played principal in the Chicago Symphony from 1964-1997. Jaeger related specific opinions about how Johnson compared to the other renowned bassoonists whom he encountered during his career:

> When I came back and played in the Dallas Symphony and of course the first bassoonist at that time there was Willard Elliot who went on to the Chicago Symphony. I think the thing that I can safely say is that I always felt knowing some of the world's most famous bassoon players, Bill [William] Waterhouse[166] in London was a very good friend, he's a bassoon scholar. He was first bassoon in the BBC Orchestra and the London Symphony. And then Willard Elliot[167]

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165 Ibid.

166 William Waterhouse was the longtime principal bassoonist of the London Symphony and the BBC Orchestra. He is also known for his research on and collection of historical bassoons. He is also responsible for writings all the bassoon entries for the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*. June Emerson, "William Waterhouse," The Guardian, http://www.theguardian.com/news/2007/nov/09/guardianobituaries.obituaries (accessed August 3, 2015).

167 After earning a master's degree in composition from the Eastman School of Music, he played with the Houston Symphony for three years and the Dallas Symphony for 11 years. In 1964, he joined the Chicago Symphony and played until retiring in 1997. Karen Mellen, "Ex-cso Bassoonist Willard Elliot, 73," Chicago Tribune, June 10, 2000, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-06-10/news/0006100044_1_mr-elliot-fossils-houston-symphony-orchestra (accessed August 3, 2015).

> and so many others like Seth Krimsky[168] in Seattle and so many who played with me here and there. I always felt that if Betty had had the desire to do so, she could have moved on from OKC and become the principal bassoon in any of the major orchestras: Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago. But of course, she was happy in Oklahoma City and her husband Art was a highly regarded band director at Northwest Classen. So she didn't pursue that. But I always felt that if she had wanted to, there would have been no question that she was one of them.[169]

Jaeger's opportunity to play with Johnson and other bassoonists whom many analysts consider to be the most prominent in the field at that time, adds legitimacy to his opinion that Johnson also ranks highly.

Johnson assumed many other roles in the symphony over the years. As the wife of the orchestra manager, Johnson was often an extension of Art's position. When he was not able to be on the bus, she directed the driver. Lacy McClary remembers Johnson filling in for her husband, including that she knew where to take the orchestra to eat on road trips:

> She knew all the restaurants because they had to find places where the players could eat on these trips. So she knew them all, what they served, and how bad or good it was. I think mainly she did that because she was taking Arthur's place. He had to teach school [and couldn't always ride the bus]. She had to steer the bus driver to the right places for people to eat, get to the concerts, and rest stops: all the logistics. She took care of that when she was riding the bus. There were few places scattered around that you looked forward to eating. She knew where they were. When you were close, you went.[170]

Many of her colleagues remarked that when they were new in town, the well-

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168 Seth Krimsky studied bassoon with Norman Hertzberg and has played principal with the Seattle Symphony and Opera from 1990 until the present. "Seth Krimsky," Seattle Symphony, http://www.seattlesymphony.org/about/meetthemusicians/theorchestra/artists/orchestra%20order/bassoons/krimsky-seth (accessed August 2, 2015).

169 Jaeger, interview.

170 Lacy McClary, interview.

established Johnson's were among the first to welcome them and make them feel at home. In addition, the Johnsons were often doing favors: helping to find housing, arranging salary advances and other necessary things for newcomers. McClary recalls how the Johnsons took in a new percussionist, Tom Gauger:

> The Johnsons were very good about taking in new people and helping them along. I know for instance she [Betty] talked about Tom Gauger, who later went to Boston [Symphony]. When he was fresh out of school and newly married, they came here and they didn't have enough money to get through the first day. Arthur arranged for him to get an advance on his pay with the orchestra and just took them in. Being the new guy, you really were the only one who wasn't established here so they tended to take you in and get you going.[171]

These colleagues appreciated the generosity that the Johnsons showed to them.

McClary taught the violin at OCU for nearly twenty years, where he was able to play with composer and Professor Ray Luke (1928-2010)[172]. The university faculty chamber orchestra included advanced student players. Through this ensemble, Johnson was able to play in an orchestral setting with her students. These types of experiences are assumed to give students additional education in performance, depth of repertoire and rehearsal etiquette.

According to her colleagues, Johnson had exemplary rehearsal etiquette; she

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171 Ibid.

172 Ray Luke graduated from the Eastman School of Music with a Ph.D. in 1960. He was a professor and conductor at Oklahoma City University from 1962-1997. He is known nationally as a composer of contemporary classical music and the Oklahoma Symphony premiered 17 of his works between 1960 and 1973. Some of the many awards he has received include the 1969 Grand Prix Gold Medal in the International Competition for Composition, a 1979 Oklahoma Governor's Arts Award, and annual awards from the 1960's through the 1990's from the American society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). He was also the interim conductor of the Oklahoma Symphony during the 1973-1974 season. Dianna Everett, "Luke, Ray Edward (1928-2010)," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, www.okhistory.org (accessed July 31, 2015).

was prepared, rarely experienced reed problems, and was insistent about being at rehearsal early. McClary describes riding to rehearsals with her:

> During those seasons when I was driving Betty to run outs and things, she was always wanting me to hurry up. She had to get there. I just assumed get there in time to take my fiddle out to walk on stage and play a concert, but Betty needed to be there really early and get everything ready. She took it seriously. I took it seriously but I never needed that time. Betty wanted to be early and get everything lined up just right. She was such a pro. She had been doing it for so long, she didn't worry about things. She just played and was always prepared.[173]

Rehearsing was serious and essential. Other colleagues remarked that Johnson was quiet during rehearsal and focused on the job at hand. Jerry Neil Smith recalls playing with her:

> When Betty Johnson was on stage, she didn't waste much time messing with reeds or doing mechanical things. She was also not a big talker. She was not one to sit around and converse with other members of the woodwind section or anyone else. It's not that she was hard to talk to, it's just that she was very involved in her business. She was kind of a quiet person in the section. I was probably the noisiest one.[174]

Smith continued to talk about Johnson's talent:

> She was a great player. She played most of the music many times with her great many years performing in orchestras. She knew the music very well and she was always well prepared. It was a great pleasure to play first clarinet [with Betty]. They play in octaves often. It's such a beautiful sound when the bassoon and clarinet players decide to honor one another. She played about every standard orchestral piece.[175]

Smith also had a high opinion of Johnson's sight-reading and careful approach to playing the bassoon:

> She was also a great sight-reader. She could play a new difficult Latin American

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173 Lacy McClary, interview.

174 Jerry Neil Smith, interview.

175 Ibid.

> tune that might be brought in at sight as well as anybody could. Very excellent reader. She didn't have any bad sides. She played everything and I'm sure she prepared. She was a very careful person. She had years to make mistakes. She's not going to bend a bocal or anything. That would never happen to her. Never.[176]

Robert Weiner learned much from playing in the woodwind section with her:

> She was always punctual, early. She adjusted in the orchestra. She was very perceptive and good at evaluating what she heard. From time to time, we did listen together to our own symphony broadcasts, which were aired sometime after the concerts. She always had good advice about tone and reeds used for example.[177]

World War Two Veteran, Monument Man, and longtime bassist in the Oklahoma Symphony and Philharmonic from 1950-2007, Hap Apgar, recalls the rapport she had with her colleagues as well as her ability to always be prepared:

> She was outgoing and happy. If something funny happened, she laughed. She was a good person to be around and she didn't have any enemies in the woodwind section or the rest of the orchestra. She was very pleasant to be around. Betty was a great lady and a good musician, and she was always prepared with her materials when she went to rehearsal. In those days, you didn't learn on the job. She was always prepared.[178]

Johnson was responsive to the demands of the conductor, as Lacy McClary stated:

> For a good many years, she was able here to make more music than she would have been able to anywhere you could think of that she might have gone. I always felt that one of [Oklahoma Symphony conductor] Guy Harrison's great trait was that he took the music where he thought it ought to go, and it went there. But, he was at the same time very flexible. When he had someone like Betty Johnson who was such a good musician, he was able to allow her to make the most music possible. When you have musicians like that working with a conductor like that, it's just amazing what can happen.[179]

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176 Ibid.

177 Weiner, interview.

178 Hap Apgar, telephone interview by author, May 21, 2014.

179 Lacy McClary, interview.

The rapport Johnson shared with Harrison was significant to the quality of her music. McClary felt that this brought out Johnson's expressiveness, adding that, "Anybody who can get through the surface of the music and listen to Johnson play could not help but absorb the wonderful ideas about what music is about. For her, it was heartfelt." A common theme among the interviewees is praise for her musical expression and talent at phrasing. The orchestra's quality and personnel, including Johnson and conductor Harrison, was a big reason McClary returned and stayed in Oklahoma City permanently. He offers interesting information about the orchestra, including the enormous amount of repertoire the group was playing and the demanding frequency of performance:

> With the orchestra here, and these terrific players and Harrison, and the orchestra played so much music in those days. You can't imagine the amount of music that went by. There was very little rehearsal time. As a matter of fact, the orchestra committee in one of their negotiation periods where they were trying to get enough money to live on, had done a lot of research. They had discovered that the only other orchestra in the United States that actually played more music in a season than Oklahoma City, was the Boston Symphony.[180]

It is all together possible that a contributing factor to why Johnson had no need to go elsewhere to play was that she was already performing more often and with greater variety of material than most bassoonists in the country, including those in the top orchestras. By then, the Oklahoma Orchestra was also performing twenty, hour-long international broadcasts per season. They would have one rehearsal on Sunday afternoon for each concert program, directly followed by the taping of the broadcast that night. According to McClary, they rarely played a piece for a second time. He describes the wide scope of people the recordings reached:

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[180] Ibid.

> Those [concerts] were all over the world. They were broadcast on mutual network here in the United States. That was when the networks still had everything together. If they put out a broadcast, all their stations carried it. They couldn't just pick and choose like what they do now. So they were all over the United States and all over Canada with the Canadian Broadcast System. They went all over the world with the Arms Forces Broadcast Network.[181]

McClary remembers that they received banners and notes of appreciation from fans in numerous countries including Norway and Germany. The musicians were extremely proud of their work, gathering to listen to broadcasts on a two-week delay. McClary recalls:

> It was kind of an amazing thing. All the players got together and sat around and listened to it when it was actually broadcast two weeks later. We were really proud of them. Usually there was a soloist for the broadcast and [Guy Fraser] Harrison was willing to let players in the orchestra play.[182]

This international exposure was instrumental in spreading Johnson's reputation, as she was given ample opportunities to perform as a soloist for an international audience. This included the world premiere of the piece written for her by Ray Luke. Larry Reed describes the relationship between Johnson and Ray Luke:

> She loved Ray Luke. He was a long time composer and teacher at OCU and he composed a bassoon concerto for her, which she premiered and then played again in her last season, or near the end of her career in the Oklahoma Symphony. They always had a wonderful relationship. He wrote another piece for bassoon and piano called *Contrasts*.[183]

Mark Parker also remarked on that relationship.

> She was very attached to the Ray Luke *Bassoon Concerto* written for her. It was evident to me at the time that it really came out of a friendship, love, and respect that those two had before the piece was written. Ray Luke absolutely

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181 Ibid.

182 Ibid.

183 Reed, interview.

> worshipped her as a musician and she worshipped him as a composer. To collaborate on that piece was a career highlight for both of them. This was not the normal, "I'm going to play your piece." There was a deep background to it.[184]

The Ray Luke Concerto was not the only piece she performed as a soloist with the orchestra. Table 1 identifies the locations, dates, audience, and works performed by soloist Johnson with the Oklahoma Symphony.

Table 1: Betty Johnson Solo and Chamber Group Performances by Conductor

Victor Alessandro

3/28/1946	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191	Little Symphony #9
3/13/1947	Franz Joseph Haydn	Sinfonia Concertante in B-flat Major, Op. 84	Little Symphony #6
11/20/1947	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante for Winds in E-flat Major	Little Symphony #1
1/15/1951	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191	Little Symphony #3

Guy Fraser Harrison

3/1/1953	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191	Radio Broadcast #17
3/16/1953	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191	Little Symphony #4
2/15/1954	Richard Strauss	Duet-Concertino	Little Symphony #4
2/21/1954	Richard Strauss	Duet-Concertino	Radio Broadcast #15
11/23/1954	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante for Winds in E-flat Major	Little Symphony #1
1/26/1958	Burrill Phillips	Concert Piece for Bassoon and String Orchestra	Radio Broadcast #12- aired 2/9/1958
1/26/1958	Joseph Wagner	Introduction and Scherzo for Bassoon and Strings	Radio Broadcast #12- aired 2/9/1958
1/29/1961	Burrill Phillips	Concert Piece for Bassoon and String Orchestra	Radio Broadcast #14- aired 2/26/1961
2/3/1963	Roger Goeb	Concertante for Bassoon and Strings	Radio Broadcast #11- aired 2/17/1963
3/24/1963	Antonio Vivaldi	Bassoon Concerto in E minor, RV 484	Radio Broadcast # 18- aired 4/7/1963
3/23/1965	Ray Luke	Bassoon Concerto	Classics #12- World Premier
11/28/1965	Elliott Schwartz	Concerto for Bassoon and String Orchestra	Radio Showcase Concert 03
3/10/1968	Ray Luke	Bassoon Concerto	Concerto Concert- OCU Auditorium
2/23/1969	Franz Joseph Haydn	Sinfonia Concertante in B-flat Major	Concerto concert #2- OCU Auditorium
3/16/1971	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major, K. 29	Norman- University of Oklahoma- Runout Concert
3/26/1972	John MacLean	Portrait for Flute, Bassoon, and Strings	Concerto Concert- OCU Auditorium

184 Parker, interview.

3/26/1972	Frank Martin	Concerto for Seven Winds	Concerto Concert- OCU Auditorium
3/30/1972	Frank Martin	Concerto for Seven Winds	Norman- University of Oklahoma- Runout Concert

Brian Priestman (candidate for conductor replacing Guy Fraser Harrison):

1/22/1978	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante for Winds in E-flat Major	Classics #6

Ainsley Cox

3/5/1978	Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari	Suite Concertino in F	Classics #9
3/13/1978	Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari	Suite Concertino in F	El Reno- Runout Concert
3/14/1978	Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari	Suite Concertino in F	Edmond: Central State University Ballroom- Runout Concert

Luis Herrera

5/4/1980	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major, K. 29	Classics #11
5/9/1980	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	Sinfonia Concertante in E-flat Major, K. 29	Duncan- Runout Concert
2/19/1984	Ray Luke	Bassoon Concerto	Classics #7

Johnson's tenure in the symphony was not without controversy. The Oklahoma Federal Symphony was affected by strikes, financial problems and union holdouts and, when the Oklahoma City Philharmonic formed, controversy about whether or not Johnson should continue to play enveloped the organization. Johnson had planned to retire after her 50th year in the Symphony in 1987.[185] The board decided to retire her at the end of her 49th year. Only the broadest of information was shared or known to those outside the conversations and incidents; interviewees were reluctant to provide any details as most were not privy to the deliberations. Members of the negotiating committee, including Oklahoma Symphony second bassoonist and former student, James Brewer (see Appendix C) fought hard for Johnson:

> When they asked her to step down from playing principal, it made me really mad… She had already hinted plenty that she was going to retire in that 50th year and they still fired her, forced her out. I even went to the management office and said, are you crazy? Someone who has been in the orchestra since

185 James Brewer, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 27, 2014.

inception… You gotta be kidding me![186]

The board ultimately decided to continue with their initial decision and Johnson left at the end of her 49th year. Soon after, the orchestra went bankrupt due to what it claimed was union pressure and financial problems. When the group reformed in 1989 as the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the orchestra positions were not completely filled, and some of the musicians wanted to see Johnson sign a contract before they would sign theirs. The leadership was willing to make this happen and Johnson was hired as the principal bassoonist.[187]

Former colleague and principal bassoonist of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Carl Rath, witnessed the transformation from Symphony to Philharmonic, especially where Johnson was concerned:

> After such a long and successful career as principal bassoonist, it was only natural that she would become the first principal bassoonist of the newly established Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra in 1988, a move I supported. In 1991, the decision was made to have auditions for a co-principal bassoon position, which I won, and Betty and I alternated sitting first through the season. I remember that she played principal in *The Nutcracker*, and she let me take the principal position for the *Rite of Spring*, my first and only time to perform this masterwork. For the most part, we got along great; so great, that she wanted to continue the co-principal position, but the contract was only for one year and then I became principal bassoon and Betty played second. This may have been the first time she had ever played the second position on a regular basis![188]

Rath had hoped to receive private instruction from Johnson when he first moved to Oklahoma in the 1980's. Unfortunately, he explained, she never received his letter and the lessons never happened: playing next to her seemed to make up for the lack of

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186 Brewer, interview.

187 Joel Levine, email to author, August 1, 2015.

188 Carl Rath, written interview by author, emailed August 3, 2014.

lessons:

> As difficult as it may have been to be playing second bassoon, she and I got along famously and she made helpful suggestions to me. I didn't get the lessons I had hoped for in the 1980's, but sitting next to her in the 1990's were a lesson all the time. It was very easy to play with her.[189]

Jerry Neil Smith confirmed Rath's insight that Johnson did not balk about playing second bassoon.[190] .

The controversy involving these orchestras serves to prove an irrefutable fact. Johnson was a significant performer in the professional musical community in Oklahoma. By the time these events had happened, she had already experienced bouts with cancer and as hard as it might be for the interviewees to recognize, Betty Johnson was past her playing prime. No one denies that there were probably people who were playing better at that point, but she was still able to perform the music. Carl Rath remarks on his impressions of her as a player in her seventh decade of life:

> Unfortunately, I had only experienced Betty's last years as a player. Even though there are struggles as we age, she seemed to be in automatic mode. I marveled at her ability to play so well in her 70's! I could only imagine how great of a player she must have been in her younger days.[191]

More importantly, her presence in the orchestra was ultimately symbolic and a major factor in reestablishing the ensemble. Many former colleagues contemplated the re-formation of the orchestra, suggesting that if she had not been a part of the new orchestra, the attempt would have failed.

Johnson was eventually forced to retire. Mark Parker, former colleague and

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189 Ibid.

190 Jerry Neil Smith, interview.

191 Ibid.

current Dean of the Bass School of Music at OCU described some of the personal and private feelings that Johnson shared with him about forced retirement: "She came and confided in me that she was told she couldn't play in the symphony anymore. It was one of the hardest and most serious conversations we ever had. She wasn't ready by any means. She would have kept playing until the last day."[192] The manner of her departure from the symphony, while arguably necessary, was not outwardly welcomed according to interviewees, including the orchestral management who had to make the decision.

Johnson was not known to express concern about being a female in a male-dominated profession. When asked about that topic, interviewees thought that Johnson paid no attention to her gender when it came to playing and performing. One of the reasons for her lack of concern likely had to do with the fact that there were many females in the Oklahoma Symphony. Hap Apgar was one of those colleagues with a definitive answer when asked if he thought her gender was significant:

> The orchestra was full of ladies playing everything, including lots of violinists and woodwind players. The woodwind players at that time tended to be men because they doubled as Saturday night Saxophones [in dance bands]. But otherwise, they were all in the same.[193]

Because the first group dedicated to bringing art and music to Oklahoma was the Lady's Music Club, there was a strong tradition of female involvement in the Oklahoma regional music community by the time this WPA orchestra was formed in 1937. The musicians playing in that orchestra were hired partly because they were eligible for assistance under the framework of the Federal Program. As far as can be determined,

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192 Mark Parker, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, September 9, 2014.

193 Apgar, interview.

under that program, gender was not a consideration. Many women, including violinist Colata Frey joined the orchestra the same time as Johnson. She was in the orchestra for 47 years.[194] Other women in the symphony included Ruth Driskill, who years later wed conductor Victor Alessandro. The much talented Driskill began playing principal flute in 1939 at the age of 14.[195] According to the offices of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, records that would reflect the distribution of male and female performs in the Oklahoma Symphony were not kept consistently. However, the unpublished manuscript of the history of the orchestra includes the statistic that at the beginning of the 1952-53 season, 25 women were playing in the symphony.[196] To contrast, a decade later during the 1962-1963 season of the Boston Symphony, three women out of 104 musicians were playing in that ensemble.[197] Although Oklahoma was not considered to be a major symphony until it was firmly established several years after its inception, the presence of women in the orchestra at such a formative time predated many orchestras when it came to gender equality.

The reputation of Johnson surpasses her gender. Many, without gender as an issue, considered her great. The former students and colleagues interviewed for this study agreed that Johnson never considered her gender as an issue or weakness. Kay Dean Walker (percussion) was a close female friend to Johnson in the orchestra. She does not recall ever speaking with Johnson about being a female in the symphony. She

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194 Fleming, 374-375.

195 Ibid., 29.

196 Ibid., 102.

197 Ibid., 190.

also remembers that many women were in the Oklahoma Symphony and Johnson did not think "gender ever played a part."[198] Like Johnson, Walker was a pioneer in the orchestra setting. Many years after she started playing principal in the orchestra, a colleague told her that she was the first female to play principal in the percussion section in a professional symphony. In the interview, she stated, "Gender doesn't seem like it was such a big deal back then." Walker supports the notion that Johnson was not focused on gender. Richard Killmer never thought it was unusual to have women in an orchestra. He said, "In that orchestra, it wasn't an issue at all."[199] When asked if Betty mentioned being one of the first female bassoonists, student, colleague, and close friend Larry Reed remarks, "We might have talked about it. She didn't have her hat on that. That was not a big deal for her. Johnson had a very healthy sense of humility. I never really sensed that she was tooting her own horn ever."[200] Although Johnson was a significant figure in the women's movement, it was not an issue for her nor did she talk about it with anyone. About the issue of gender, her daughter Joan describes her mother as "unassuming. She just wanted to play and teach kids. She was before all the hype about women's rights. I don't think she cared."[201] Johnson focused on playing her bassoon to the best of her ability and was quiet about her accomplishments.

This study included inquiries into the comparative monetary compensation for men and women musicians. A comparison of Johnson's salary to male colleagues in the

198 Walker, interview.

199 Killmer, interview.

200 Reed, interview.

201 Joan Straach, email to author, October 5, 2015.

orchestra proved unfruitful. Payroll records for the Oklahoma Symphony are nonexistent.[202] In addition, records of her payment from the universities where she taught, over time, are impossible to verify, also due to a lack of records.

Numerous interviewees give Johnson credit for being the first woman playing principal in a major orchestra. However, absolute proof of that fact is also difficult to corroborate due to the passage of time and lack of documentation.

Fortunately, some statistics about women in orchestra have been collected and calculated. Highly qualified female musicians started emerging from the three leading conservatories founded in the early 1920's (The Eastman School, Curtis Institute and Julliard School) as well as the developing college music departments around the country, and the female musicians wanted an opportunity to play professionally.[203] Although women made up half the share of music students in the United Stated by 1925 and women's committees provided the main source of fundraising for professional orchestras, females were not allowed to participate in the professional symphonies.[204] Two graduate level orchestras were founded in 1920: the American Orchestral Society in New York and the Civic Orchestra in Chicago.[205] Women were allowed to play in these ensembles, which encouraged the formation of nearly 30 women's symphonies,

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202 Oklahoma City Philharmonic offices, email to author, October 5, 2015.

203 Carol Neuls-Bates, "Women's Orchestras in the United States, 1925-45," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950,* eds. Jane M. Bowers and Judith Tick [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986], 350.

204 Ibid., 349.

205 Ibid.

popular from the 1920's through the 1940's.[206] Originally, these groups became popular in the 1870's from the influence of a Viennese Ladies Orchestra tour of America. Two variations of women's ensembles emerged: professional groups surviving on the novelty of being a group of women playing mostly popular music and an amateur ensemble allowed to play serious music for no charge.[207] The first ensemble to form in America was the Los Angeles Woman's Symphony Orchestra, founded in 1893.[208] After a few decades in 1921, the Philadelphia Women's Symphony Orchestra was established, followed by the Chicago Woman's Symphony Orchestra, the Woman's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and the New York American Women's Symphony Orchestra, all in 1924.[209]

The Boston Woman's Symphony Orchestra was one of the more important women-only groups although only in existence four seasons (1926-1930).[210] The orchestra toured the eastern half of the United States in 1928 and 1929, playing standard works that included Beethoven's Symphony no. 5 in C Minor, opus 67, and Schubert's Symphony no. 8 in B Minor (the *Unfinished*), thus encouraging scores of women to

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206 Ibid.

207 Kimberly A. Wooly, "Women in Music: The Experiences of Bassoonists Nancy Goeres, Judith LeClair, Isabelle Plaster, and Jane Taylor" (DMA diss. Florida State University, 2003), 13. http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5353&context=etd (accessed July 20, 2015).

208 Nuels-Bates, 351.

209 Ibid.

210 Ibid., 357.

learn orchestral instruments.[211] In 1928, the tour included fifty-five concerts in forty-three days, and the second tour included seventy-five cities, monumental for any modern orchestra today.[212] At first, the group received a cold welcome, but after the performances, audience members left with the notion that women players and conductors were up for the task of performing symphony masterworks.[213]

In 1903, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) admitted women into the union.[214] As the Women's Orchestras enjoyed popularity in the 1920's, lower level orchestras throughout the country began allowing small numbers of women into their ranks, mostly in string sections.[215] The WPA orchestras, like the one Johnson joined in Oklahoma City, also provided opportunities for women in the 1930's not previously available.[216] A few early exceptions for admittance into the thirteen major orchestras were made starting in 1923 with the Cleveland Orchestra when they hired four women to play. The San Francisco Symphony followed in 1925 when they hired four violinists

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211 Ibid., 357-358.

212 Ibid., 357.

213 Ibid. 358.

214 Amy Louise Phelps, "Beyond auditions: gender discrimination in America's top orchestras" (DMA diss., University of Iowa, 2010), 6. http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2059&context=etd (accessed July 20, 2010).

215 Nuels-Bates, 358.

216 Ibid., 359.

and one cellist.[217] Many sources consider harpist Edna Phillipps to be the first female principal player. She was hired in 1930 by Leopold Stokowski of the Philadelphia Orchestra.[218] He brought in another woman, cellist Elsa Hilger, in 1935.[219] In 1937, the first principal female in a brass section, Ellen Stone Bogoda, was hired as the principal horn of the Pittsburgh Orchestra.[220] The first mention of a bassoonist playing principal in a major symphony was a World War II replacement in the Boston Symphony: Ann de Guichard played for two seasons starting in 1945.[221] Because the demand for female players arose to replace men going off to battle during WWII, few new exclusively female orchestras were founded after 1945.[222] Doriot Antony Dwyer is given credit for being the first principal female in one of the top five American Orchestras when she became principal flute of the Boston Symphony in 1952.[223] Johnson began playing in the Oklahoma Symphony much earlier, so her employment cannot be credited to the need for replacement players during WWII. However, the reputation of the Oklahoma orchestra grew rapidly, partially from the international radio broadcasts. By 1948, the Oklahoma Symphony "had the largest per capita membership of any orchestra in the

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217 Beth Abelson Macloud, *Women Performing Music: The Emergence of American Woman as Instrumentalists and Conductors (*North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), 141.

218 Ibid., 142.

219 Ibid.

220 Macloud, 142.

221 Wooly, 14.

222 Ibid.

223 Macloud, 142.

country."[224] In 1950, season 14, "Oklahoma City was said to be one of the smallest cities in the country to have a major symphony orchestra, and, with 5,000 subscribers, was said to have the highest per capita symphony audience in the world.[225] The following year, Victor Alessandro was given credit for "Raising our orchestra from the WPA level to one of the top 25 in the nation."[226] These definitive statements about the growing status of the organization give credence to the notion that Johnson was playing principal in a major symphony. While harpist Edna Phillipps is credited with being the first principal player and Ellen Stone Bogoda the second, Johnson is undoubtedly one of the first five women to play principal and it can be assumed the first widely recognized female player on her instrument. Bassoonist and only remaining founding member of the Dorian Quintet, Jane Taylor, mentions Johnson in this context during a 2001 interview published in *The Journal of the International Double Reed Society*. "When asked "Do you think of yourself as a pioneer in some ways, as one of the first female bassoonists, or as a quintet member?" Taylor responded:

> Well, I certainly am not a pioneer in that sense. Not many, but several women preceded me and every now and then people would ask me if I was Tina DiDario. She was, I think the first female bassoonist to tour and to travel abroad in a quintet situation. I don't think I was the second one, so I'm a bit down the line. Considering that there were not that many in the beginning, many people look to me as a pioneer. I don't feel that I wasn't a pioneer, but I was certainly not first. Many women had preceded me. Mel Kaplan was a pioneer, if anyone was, of the first touring quintet, The New Art Woodwind Quintet. For my first symphony job, which was started before the Dorian Quintet started, I used to listen to the Oklahoma City Symphony on the radio where Betty Johnson played first bassoon- a great bassoon player. For all I know, she may have been the first

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224 Fleming, 72.

225 Ibid., 90.

226 Ibid., 91.

> serious great bassoon player. I loved her playing before I knew she was female.[227]

The Dorian Quintet formed in 1960 when women were becoming more prevalent in symphony orchestras.[228] Taylor is a successful female bassoonist, who is still considered a pioneer in her field. Many facts support the notion that Johnson was one of the first female principal players in a major symphony. Although she was not the first, her presence as a female principal player in a major orchestra was significant.

In addition to her principal position in the symphony, Johnson played in numerous chamber ensembles and summer festivals, including the Peninsula Festival in Wisconsin, The Northwood Festival in Michigan, and the Fred Waring Orchestra in Pennsylvania. She was also a pillar at the Oklahoma Summer Art Institute Program every year at Quartz Mountain in Lone Wolf, Oklahoma. Mark Parker describes the joy Johnson felt from these enriching experiences, noting that "she loved it. She had a really close network of friends who were like her, living and breathing music all the time. She came back excited about what had happened every summer."[229]

Through these summer engagements, Johnson was exposed to other widely renowned musicians. Every summer for 24 years, she drove to Fish Creek, Wisconsin to play in the Peninsula Music Festival. Thor Johnson (1913-1975), conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra from 1946-1958, established the festival in 1952. The ensemble consisted of a 35-40 piece chamber orchestra "composed of outstanding

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227 Susan Shaw, "Jane Taylor of the Dorian Wind Quintet: An Interview," *International Double Reed Society* 24, no. 1 {2002}: 63.

228 Ibid., 59.

229 Parker, interview.

musicians recruited by Thor."[230] In addition to the Cincinnati Symphony, Thor Johnson had guest conducted the Chicago Symphony and the Philadelphia Orchestra. In 1957, he became a full professor and Director of Orchestral Activities at Northwestern University and in 1964; he accepted a position as the Director of the Interlochen Arts Academy and conductor of its orchestra. He finished his career at the Nashville Symphony Orchestra.[231] With experience conducting some of the finest orchestras in the nation, the fact that Thor Johnson hired Johnson to play in his festival for so many years is a testament to her abilities, his regard for her as a colleague, and her national reputation as an outstanding bassoonist. Former colleague in Oklahoma City and lifelong friend, oboist, and conductor Don Jaeger, was responsible for connecting Betty Johnson with Thor Johnson. He explains how it happened:

> I was teaching at the Interlochen Arts Academy and touring with Thor Johnson and the Chicago Little Symphony. We were someplace in Kansas and Thor asked me a question. He was also the founding music director of the Peninsula Music Festival in Wisconsin, a summer music festival. And he asked me, "Don, I'm looking for a first bassoon player for my festival in Wisconsin in the summer." Do you have anyone to recommend. And I said, "Do I ever!" So I recommended Betty and she took the job and she and Art went up there for many summers, I don't know exactly how many. It would have been in the early 60's when I made the recommendation. So they went up there and had a wonderful time. I saw him many times after that and every time after that, he would come up to me and say "Don, thank you for Betty Johnson!" He obviously admired her as much as all the rest of us.[232]

Thor conducted major ensembles and worked with outstanding bassoonists throughout

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230 "Thor Martin Johnson (1913-1975), Founding Music Director," http://www.musicfestival.com/index.php/about-the-pmf/thor-johnson-pmf-founding-conductor (accessed July 24, 2015).

231 Ibid.

232 Jaeger, interview.

his life. The ensemble played nine full concerts in three weeks and he knew Johnson was able to handle that rigorous and challenging schedule. Many outstanding musicians and conductors played with Johnson during those summers. According to Carl Rath, "Betty is well-known and respected by the people that knew her at the Fish Creek [Peninsula] Festival and I come across a few in Wisconsin to this day."[233] James Brewer had the privilege of playing in the festival for eight years with Johnson during the 1970's. According to Brewer, the three-week festival was intense with nine different concerts during the duration.[234] Many outstanding musicians played in this orchestra with Johnson, thus spreading her reputation nationally by her Peninsula colleagues.



Illustration 12: Peninsula Music Festival Orchestra 1988

Don Jaeger also started a summer music festival: The Northwood Festival in northern Michigan. He was able to have Johnson attend for a few years. He describes

233 Rath, interview.

234 Brewer, interview.

the experience:

> For about three or four summers, she came to play first bassoon for me. So I not only sat in the orchestra with her as a youngster myself, but then she was the first bassoon when I was conducting. She played the Mozart Concerto with me once, for several performances. We had some other very distinguished bassoon players in that orchestra through the years. For example, Barrick Stees from the Cleveland Orchestra. Betty did a beautiful job as you could imagine. And then our date conflicted with the summer program in Fish Creek, Wisconsin one summer and she had been there for so many years that she properly chose to do that rather than continue with the Northwood Orchestra.[235]

Although she did not play as long in Northwood as at other festivals, Johnson was exposed to even more musicians from around the country, further spreading her reputation nationally.

For at least two years during the mid-1950's, in August, the Johnsons drove to Watergap, Pennsylvania to play in the Fred Waring Orchestra. Fred Waring (early 1900's-1984) was known as "the man who taught America to sing."[236] He was important in choral music production and a composer who started *Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians*. By the 1930's, his orchestra was 55 members and not only had a six-month booking at the Roxy Theater in New York City, but also had its own radio program. He started a music publishing company called *Words and Music*, later changed to *Shawnee Press*. After he started the company, his popularity earned him a television show on CBS in 1949. At Watergap, the Johnsons participated in orchestral

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235 Jaeger, interview.

236 Monica Escamilla, revised and expanded by Eileen Akin, "Waring, Frederic Malcolm," Spring 2009. http://pabook.libraries.psu.edu/palitmap/bios/Waring__Fred.html (accessed July 24, 2015).

radio broadcasts for Waring.[237] While there, Betty Johnson taught students and played in the orchestra, and Art Johnson was employed as the stage manager. This experience increased Betty Johnson's national visibility through playing with musicians from outside Oklahoma, as well as giving her more opportunity to be heard over the airwaves.

Johnson joined the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain during its inaugural year, 1977, and taught every year but one, until her death, and told the author of this study that this festival was dear to her heart. The most talented high school students in artistic disciplines including orchestra, poetry, dance, photography, theater, and choir still audition for and attend this institute, which includes an orchestra whose members have gone on to professional music careers. Jerry Neil Smith recalls working with Johnson those early years, the contributions she made at its inception, and the respect she received:

> Around 1977, I became a part of the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute. My job was to go round the state and audition students. Betty would join with the woodwind faculty down there. A number of the faculty were from out of state and across the nation. She was always the bassoon teacher. The woodwind faculty would get together and make decisions about who should be brought in for the various areas. She always made a big contribution because she was probably the best-known and most experienced teacher and performer in the whole region, which was larger than Oklahoma.[238]

For most of the time that Johnson was at the Institute, the orchestra played four full masterworks concerts during the two-week camp. The program was intense. The author of this study, who was a student there, along with the other interviewees who attended

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237 Ibid.

238 Jerry Neil Smith, interview.

the institute recall that Johnson had the bassoonists warm up before breakfast at 7 AM, and spent the days coaching orchestral music, teaching reed-making, and giving private lessons. Smith remembers the outstanding bassoonists who came to Quartz Mountain:

> We always had good bassoon students. Most of them were Betty Johnson's students who were in high school. Even though they may have been from cities far from Oklahoma City, she often taught students from all points in the state of Oklahoma. She had a following from all over the state, not just our area here [Oklahoma City]. They came to her. She was not what you call a road person as far as teaching goes. They sought her out because she was well known and had been since before Guy Fraser Harrison.[239]

Johnson tried to give her students the best and broadest educational experience possible, even those not directly related to music. For example, interviewees like Whitlaw and Seay who attended Quartz Mountain remembered how Johnson took the section for ice cream at least once a summer, and had an annual trip to the small nearby town of Blair, Oklahoma, to eat at Luigi's Italian restaurant where she insisted on everyone trying the famous calzone. Johnson was continually looking for ways to bring the world to her students. She also believed in giving students as many playing opportunities as possible. Tracie Whitlaw remembers the way Johnson was able to give her students valuable experience at Quartz Mountain by spreading parts around the section:

> Another incredible thing about her was that she didn't have a pet or favorite [student]. At the Summer Arts Institute, we played Shostakovich's *Ninth Symphony*. I was a sophomore or junior in high school. There were three bassoonists there. She split the solo up so we each had a segment of it. No one had to do it on their own and everybody learned the whole thing. Everybody had the opportunity to take part in the solo, and we were at different levels. I just feel like in most places, they would have given it to the strongest player and that would have been it. She was very adamant on rotation and making sure that every player had a chance to do stuff, even if they weren't the strongest player. That's something I've used and remember in my teaching. It's so easy to just

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239 Ibid.

> give it to the strongest player. It's better to spread it around.[240]

Although every section changed the order for each concert, Johnson made an effort to give her students as much playing experience as possible.

Betty Johnson was a proponent of new music, and Beverly McClary describes their meeting and relationship:

> Lacy brought me up to meet his friends. It was during the [orchestra] season. The first home I went to in Oklahoma City was the home of Arthur and Betty Johnson, after a rehearsal probably. They had steak night at the Johnson's. We were here for two years and then went to Kansas. When we came back, I was teaching at Oklahoma City Community College: Applied Voice. I'm also a composer and was doing a little composing. I was a bassoon player, though not a good one. I had been interested in writing a piece and I wrote the *Edgar Allen Poe Songs*. She and I did the premier performance of those for the Ladies Music Club. It is voice and bassoon. We performed those a lot and had a lot of fun. We did those down at Quartz Mountain [Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute], and that was a fun thing.[241]

She goes on to describe other pieces they premiered (*Songs from the Timberlines* and *Chamber Songs of Thomas Hardy)* and Johnson's willingness and excitement to collaborate with other musicians:

> I had two other pieces, *Songs from the Timberlines for Voice, Clarinet, Bassoon and Piano*. We did those down at Baylor. I did a recital for NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) and Betty and I went down there and did the Timberline Songs as well. We did the premier of those. I have another set that we did: *Chamber Songs of Thomas Hardy*. Those are for two sopranos, piano, oboe and bassoon. We did the premier of those in Canada at a festival. She was always so willing. Immediately things came together.[242]

McClary noted that Johnson probably played for the fun of it, if not for the pay:

> I had the advantage of just having her as a friend, never in a certain way. I don't

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240 Whitlaw, interview.

241 Beverly McClary, interview with author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 12, 2014.

242 Ibid.

> think she ever got paid anything for the playing with me. It was all volunteer work: Ladies Music Club, various things. She was so generous with her time. I couldn't say you're going to get union pay for this gig. We just worked as friends collaborating in that way. I had to say it was not professional… it was more for fun.[243]

In the early days of the Symphony, musicians were paid very little. Hap Apgar describes the willingness of many of the musicians to play for a low salary, noting about Johnson that "She helped the orchestra to survive by being there and playing at a time when the principal players got 60-70 dollars a week. I probably got 75 dollars for being principal. That's the way the orchestra world was in those days."[244] Based on the comments from the interviewees, money did not seem to be a force in determining Johnson's work ethic or her desire to play and perform. She loved what she did and, like many others from her generation, she made things work.

Johnson taught the bassoon at several area universities, and participated in clinics throughout the region. Her faculty stint at Central State University while known to be for many years is not documented both because records were not retained over time and because Johnson did not maintain a CV. Johnson also instructed bassoon at the University of Oklahoma. Interviews have proven that for many years, she taught at Central State, The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma City University, simultaneously.

Johnson spent several years teaching part-time at The University of Oklahoma. Inquiries to the university for the official years of her tenure resulted in a suggestion to search for records on the university website. The earliest documentation of Johnson

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243 Ibid.

244 Apgar, interview.

being a Teaching Assistant in Bassoon is found in Minutes of a Regular Meeting, November 10, 1948. The portion mentioning her consists of a note about a change in salary: "Mrs. Betty Johnson, Teaching Assistant in Bassoon, School of Music, changed from $350 for 9 months for part-time to $33.33 per month for 4 ½ months service ¼ time, September 1, 1948 to January 16, 1949."[245] Johnson had taught for at least one year prior to that memo, therefore her tenure at OU had begun by the 1947-48 school year. She left OU at the end of the 1976-1977 academic year. Jerry Neil Smith recalls his time at the University of Oklahoma with Johnson:

> In 1975, I came to The University of Oklahoma as the director of the school of music and Betty Johnson was already teaching here. When the school started in the fall, I met Betty. She came up and started the process of setting up schedules for students. She had a number of very good bassoon students at that time and for about three years; it was a part time job.[246]

She did not remain at OU much longer. Interviews revealed two accounts as to why she left the university. Smith recalls his experiences as the person in charge of major change at the university:

> There were no full-time wind people except for Irv Wagner [trombone]. I tried to change things pretty quickly and tried to establish full-time artist teachers in every position. Within a year or so, the bassoon job became full-time. I told Betty she would be full-time if she was going to stay here. I think she was concerned that in academia, it might be necessary for her to teach other things besides the bassoon that she wouldn't want to, or that it would take too much of her time from other responsibilities that she had. She was probably teaching at OCU and other places I wasn't aware of. She said she would not stay on as the full-time bassoon teacher, meaning a lot more time in Norman.[247]

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245 "Minutes of a Regular Meeting, November 10, 1948," https://www.ou.edu/ousearch.html?type=web&q=betty+johnson+bassoon&globalheader%24btnImg_googleSearch.x=0&globalheader%24btnImg_googleSearch.y=0 (accessed July 24, 2015).

246 Jerry Neil Smith, interview.

247 Ibid.

Others were more direct regarding her academic credentials, the foundation for a college professor. The University could not hire her full-time because she did not have the proper credentials to be a full-time professor; she was not a college graduate. Carl Rath describes his experiences with Johnson beginning when he came to OU in 1981.[248]

> Before moving to Oklahoma in 1981, I had heard about Betty Johnson from a friend who played in the summers with her at Fish Creek, Wisconsin… Not knowing the reasons for her departure from teaching at OU, there was some bitterness directed toward the situation, understandably, after so many successful years of teaching at OU. I walked into a frosty situation, but Betty sent me some comp tickets to a symphony concert in my first year of teaching at OU. From then on, we had a very nice professional and friendly existence.[249]

Perhaps the true reason why she left OU may never be revealed; she certainly did not discuss it with her intimates who were part of the interviewee group in this research. If not immediately, Johnson eventually perceived the change to be in the right direction. Although she left somewhat abruptly and Rath sensed tension, Johnson's attitude made a lasting impression on Rath:

> I met a few [of her students] and their love and devotion to her remind me of my own former college teacher. In fact, because of this love and devotion, I created a special award at the University of Oklahoma honoring both Betty Johnson and Fred Schroeder, my mentor at Lawrence University.[250]

Betty Johnson's legacy lives on at the University through this award.

Brad Benson (see Appendix C), one such student of Johnson's at the University of Oklahoma, has gone on to educate many students and future music educators. From 1979 to 2001, he taught orchestra, band and music theory in the Norman Public

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248 The bassoon professors at the University of Oklahoma between Johnson and Raths' tenures were Charles "Chip" Kauffman (1977-1979) and Carl Wapple (1979-1980). Carl Rath, email to author, July 28, 2015.

249 Rath, interview.

Schools. He has held his current position as the Director of Fine Arts in Norman Public Schools since 2002. Benson was a brass player who was encouraged to take lessons from Johnson during his time as a music education major. He explains how it all happened:

> I am primarily a brass player and was very interested in learning more about woodwinds and teaching woodwinds. An older student at OU told me that I should try to take lessons or get a group lesson with Mrs. Johnson because she was fantastic and I would learn more than I could in any other way. This turned out to be true! A small group of us talked her into giving us a group lesson for one semester.[251]

Benson goes on to describe the pattern of lessons and how Johnson was able to adjust to the purpose of lessons: to become a good teacher of bassoon:

> The semester I was with her, we met once a week. The slant of the sessions was to learn how to play and teach bassoon for music education students. Everything we learned was not only about playing, but always also from the perspective of, "this is how you teach this to beginners/high school students." A part of our classes was playing a short solo passage that was technical and one that was lyrical. We also had to play a short duet with another player in the class.[252]

Benson effortlessly remembers specific details after over 30 years:

> I do remember specifically learning the fingerings to 4th space G. She made a big deal out of the half-hole technique. We experimented, we practiced, and we played Hot Cross Buns using the technique. When we got done, she said that if we'd do that with beginning bassoonists, they would enjoy learning things that others considered difficult, and many new concepts and skills could be done the same way.[253]

Johnson tried to make the lessons applicable to many topics and many people. She had future educators and students in mind when she taught. Benson explains:

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251 Brad Benson, written interview by author, received June 11, 2014.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

> I would say this above all. Through this [lessons] and other things, I, as a brass player and beginning level violinist was never afraid of the bassoon. That was a wonderful gift that I think she gave all of us that were lucky enough to have a semester or clinic or lessons. I loved the bassoon and the sound of the bassoon, and I was not afraid to teach it. Even today, beginning teachers shy away from teaching the bassoon and I think it can hurt and limit students. It can affect the sound, quality, and flexibility of even public school ensembles.[254]

He continues to describe what he could do specifically as a player and pass on to his students:

> When she was done with me, I knew many fingerings without looking at a chart. I could do and teach the physical set up for the bassoon and embouchure, and I could produce a solid tone quality throughout the practical range of the bassoon. Most of all, I could teach bassoon on a beginning level and help those older bassoon students in our bands and orchestra. I was not an expert, but I could teach because of what she did to me and for me. And, I was not afraid. In fact, I was excited about teaching bassoon, and whether or not I realized it, that attitude she gave me (through inspiration and learning specific skills) must have influenced students to be excited about beginning and continuing to learn bassoon.[255]

Johnson's personality and teaching manner made a lasting impression on Benson:

> She was always so positive, so nice. But at the same time, now that I look back on it, she was able to have very high standards for us; expect a high level of conceptual knowledge and skill development- we were really learning a lot, practical and inspirational, and at the same time, didn't even realize how demanding she was because she was so good at setting up for the value of everything we were working on.[256]

In addition to experiencing her teaching first hand, Benson also recalls a moment when her studio was recognized for its outstanding playing:

> One thing I remember: Michael Hennagin got Aaron Copland to come to OU for a week and I have a memory of playing the *Tender Land Suite* in the OU orchestra with Copland conducting and at one point he stopped, looked over the

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254 Ibid.

255 Ibid.

256 Ibid.

> string section to the bassoons. He told them how beautiful they had just played and told them to thank their teacher for their beautiful sound and expressive playing.[257]

Not only did Benson recognize that a teacher's greatness or legacy is reflected in her students, but the famed Copland recognized that the woman who coached that bassoon section was special. Johnson made a mark on those who crossed their path, and according to Benson, the future students of her musical descendants. He describes his beliefs about her lasting contributions:

> Besides a legacy of students fanning out throughout the US and the world, and influencing others through performing and teaching at universities, I would include the countless band and orchestra students she has influenced as a result of teaching future teachers like myself. She had a big and positive impact on the number and quality of bassoonists that participated in school music programs.[258]

Even as a part time bassoon instructor, Johnson influenced Benson, and likely many other students, and through that influence assisted in developing future generations of musicians. To this day, Benson considers himself lucky and grateful to have learned from Johnson during his education at the University of Oklahoma.

Although she taught at the other universities, Johnson spent the majority of her teaching years at OCU (1962-2000). In fact, she was actively teaching there when she passed away. Mark Parker remembers his initial impressions of Johnson when he first arrived at OCU in the fall of 1990 to conduct the band, orchestra, operas, and musicals, a position that he held for five years before becoming dean of the school:

> I was very impressed. One of the first things I had heard about her, and one of my earliest jobs was to build up a band and orchestra, was when Ray Luke said, "Well, we always have bassoons here because Betty Johnson teaches bassoons here. And she can take somebody that comes in as a freshman and sounds like a

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257 Ibid.

258 Ibid.

> duck. And then in December by their first jury, they sound like a bassoon." He was right. When I came, the ensembles were small, but the bassoons were first class.[259]

Parker immediately knew there was a very special bassoon teacher at his new university. That introduction to Johnson was only the beginning of their relationship. One of his first tasks was in the area of recruiting:

> The faculty came together to design a new recruiting plan so I spent a lot of time with individual faculty. Betty was always extremely positive and very much of the attitude. We can do it; we can build the program up again. She was a real leader and calming voice to the faculty.[260]

She had strong ideas about recruiting and the importance of a faculty quintet, a strategy that is widely-used by universities:

> She was very insistent that the faculty woodwind quintet was a vehicle that was available but not being used for recruiting. So we quickly put things in place to do that. Like I said, there was never a problem getting bassoons because she always knew all the bassoonists. She had the pipeline going. She always, with her summer work and professional festivals that she played in, she found contacts that way too. I think her main idea was, "if we can get bassoons here, we can get anything. What's the problem? Let's go!" Very matter of fact. That was a first impression. Very straight shooter. Matter of fact person. Did not beat around the bush.[261]

According to Parker, Johnson was a strong leader among her colleagues:

> Always punctual and professional. It goes with that no nonsense idea. If she needed something, she would do it. She was always on time if not early. She would make it happen. I know there were some performances of the faculty chamber orchestra and she held a kind, gentle, but strong leadership position in those rehearsals. "We have to do this. I'm sorry, but the intonation is off. We have to go back." Definitely was the matriarch of the instrumental faculty.[262]

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259 Parker, interview.

260 Ibid.

261 Ibid.

262 Ibid.

In addition to being a leader to the faculty, Parker describes the influence on her students:

> Every studio is based on the leader/teacher and every bassoonist [at OCU] had the same good attitude and work ethic. They wanted to play, wanted to play in everything, wanted to play more. That got instilled in students very quickly. It was one of the things, as I became dean, I held her up as an example. Betty's students are always here for making music and being interested with great attitudes.[263]

The reverence and respect given to her by her colleagues was a testament to Johnson's positive, helpful, and hard-working approach to teaching.

Mark Parker still uses Johnson as an example with faculty members today. For example, she had strong ideas about how to teach the craft of performance to students:

> She had this idea that the best way to build professional musicians was to throw them on the stage and let them perform. Set a date. If they are not ready, they will learn something from it. Throw'em out there. That's one of her secret to success. A lot of students find ways to say they are not ready and the faculty go along with it. That was never an excuse allowed in Betty's studio. "You've got to perform on stage. You're gonna perform. You better work a little longer." There would be faculty meetings with people saying some of the performances on music assembly weren't up to snuff and she would say, "That's not what it's about. We aren't here to hear polished performances. We are here to give them experiences so they can learn to be polished."[264]

In Parker's opinion, Johnson gave no excuses and did not expect that from others, her colleagues and especially her students. She demanded the best effort from everyone. The concept of striving for excellence was a significant part of the accolades she and her students received. Tracie Whitlaw describes her experiences in college, as Johnson would sign her up to perform and encourage her to try out for every opportunity she

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263 Ibid.

264 Ibid.

possibly could:

> Every Wednesday, there would be lunchtime concerts and recitals that people would play on. Most studios, a student would say they would like to do it and then the teacher would sign them up. Sometimes what would happen to me, I would walk in and that week it would be posted who is playing. I would look and wonder who was playing that week. I would see my name up there and what I was playing this week. She had me performing like every single week! That was so nerve wracking, but I think a brilliant move on her part. She did that to all of her students.[265]

Whitlaw knew how difficult it was to have a performance every week, especially when it did not go as well as she wanted:

> I can remember those first years. One time I went out and tried to play an A, and a B flat would come out. Every time I played in the Chapel, something horrible would happen. She always signed us up whether we wanted to do it or not. That was true even as a high school student. I single handedly give her credit for who I am today.[266]

Those challenging performance experiences that Johnson provided also helped to prepare Whitlaw for a lifetime of performance excellence. Johnson's successes offered her opportunities to go elsewhere according to Mark Parker:

> She is responsible for so many performers and teachers. She is among a handful of bassoonists in this country that created so many protégés. The spread of what she did is amazing. I remember her saying on many occasions, "People asked me why I stayed at OCU. I had other offers. I could have gone to "big schools," but I was where I was supposed to be. This place is worth it. These people are worth it. I'm here for a specific reason. I didn't have to stay here. I chose to stay here because it's where I'm supposed to be. I could work all over this country, but I'm where I'm supposed to be. I could be anywhere I want to be… I'm here!"[267]

It was no secret to Parker or other interviewees who addressed this subject that she had

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265 Whitlaw, interview.

266 Ibid.

267 Parker, interview.

a strong desire to be right where she wanted to be - in Oklahoma City. Perhaps the highest praise Parker has for Johnson is his admiration and respect for her teaching talent. “Of all the teachers I have known, or any instrument or voice anywhere, I hold her up as the prime example of a teacher.”[268] Such words demonstrate the lasting positive effect that Johnson continues to have at her university.

The professional career of Betty Johnson extended over 60 years. Her record of success as a performer and educator is apparent when one looks at the people she influenced over the years. While some might be astounded that she chose to spend the majority of her time in Oklahoma, the contributions she made to the community through performance, education of future educators, and specific bassoon instruction has left a legacy still alive in Oklahoma and throughout the country.

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[268] Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHING METHODOLOGY

No one has been able to identify Johnson's first teacher, giving rise to the handy description of her being mostly self-taught. In fact, one of the most striking facts about her life is that, apart from the few months she took lessons from George Goslee in the summer of 1939, this was likely true. Without the access to her personal letters from 1939, no one would have known about those months of instruction, and the level to which she had instruction prior to joining the orchestra is still a matter of speculation. When asked who her teacher was, Larry Reed felt that he had a definite answer:

> You don't know? You never heard this? Betty Johnson [was her teacher]. She was very much self-taught. When she started bassoon, she was 16 years old. The WPA Project began in 1937. She basically picked it up and learned it on her own. She was a beginner when she started in the orchestra. Now later on, I'm not sure about the time frame, she went to New York and studied with Vincent Pezzi. But other than that, she learned it all on her own. That just speaks to her ability, her innate musicality. Back then, she didn't have access to traveling orchestras or maybe she listened to some long play records, but I'm sure she didn't travel a lot to hear other orchestras.[269]

Hap Apgar not only confirms what Reed said about Vincent Pezzi, but he also remembers how the two bassoonists got along together:

> I come from an era where I knew and worked with the principal bassoon at Eastman. Name was Pezzi. Betty went there a couple of times and took lessons from him. I don't know whether she had a real beginning bassoon teacher or not. She was mostly self-taught. He was the principal teacher and bassoonist in the Rochester Symphony so no problem getting in touch with him. All she had to do was show up. They got along. She absorbed what she wanted to get. Found out how to make reeds his way, embouchure, and so on.[270]

Robert Weiner was also aware that Johnson was primarily self-taught, and had

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269 Reed, interview.

270 Apgar, interview.

conversations with her about reed discoveries and her favorite bassoonists:

> While I kind of have the thought that Betty was pretty much self-taught, I have a vague recollection that she mentioned taking some lessons with Vince Pezzi, who was at Eastman when she was a younger bassoonist. We were talking about reeds and I mentioned some characteristics of what I was doing at the time on oboe, and she got all excited. "That's what I do! That's my reed!" I believe she really liked Sol Schoenbach[271] and Leonard Sharrow…their approach to playing.[272]

Why did she choose the bassoon? Johnson herself provides the answer in a newspaper article from 1989, one of the few records in which she provides insight into this decision. "When I went to Classen High [School], they needed a bassoon player. It fascinated me, and it was a challenge, so I learned."[273] Not surprisingly, these reasons for playing the bassoon are still very common in today's schools, nearly 100 years later. So, the assumption that she taught herself to play in high school prevails. Without doubt, Johnson was sufficiently proficient to be offered the position in the new Oklahoma Symphony while still a teenager.

Johnson developed an impressive teaching style. As mentioned previously, she felt the best way to learn to perform was to just do it. Another quality not lost on Mark

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271 Sol Schoenbach (1915-1999) attended the Institute of Musical Art, later the Julliard School, on scholarship, and studied with Simon Kovar. He was a studio musician for CBS from 1932 at the age of 17 through 1937, when he won the audition as the principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra. He was an enlisted man in the Army during WWII during 1944 and 1945. When he returned to Philadelphia, he returned to his old position, replacing his one year replacement, George Goslee. He remained in Philadelphia until 1957, also playing in the Philadelphia Woodwind Quintet. Harrington E. Crissey Jr., "Sol Schoenbach- The Last Conversations?" *International Double Reed Society* 24, no. 1 {2001}: 31-32. http://www.idrs.org/publications/controlled/DR/DR24.1.pdf/Schoenbach.pdf (accessed July 28, 2015).

272 Weiner, interview.

273 Nichols, *The Journal Record*

Parker was her philosophy of teaching or willingness to teach all who were interested, and her success at assisting a poorer student to become a more successful student and performer. And, while many interviewees stressed the gentle qualities that they encountered in Johnson, Parker also saw tough side to her personality:

> Some people complain about what their students didn't know when they came to their teacher. That was not her thing. For her, whatever they didn't know… it was her job to teach them. And she would be tough. She would be stern. But she was always, if you didn't know something, she would just teach you. She wouldn't berate you for not knowing. She would berate you for not working and practicing. She got really angry when she would hear teachers complaining about students. She would say, "That's your JOB! Teach them. Stop complaining and teach them!"[274]

Johnson taught students of every age in the same way according to Parker:

> I don't think she taught much different by age. She loved young students. She thought anybody could do it. She did not have this idea that, oh you're not old enough to play high. She would show you everything. She was sure you could do anything. Like I said, the Ray Luke comment about from August to December… She had a method that taught really quickly. "Ok, we are gonna figure out the hand problems, the movement, the sound and then we are just gonna do it." She was very insistent on chamber music. She thought that was a necessity. She didn't think there could be too much of it.[275]

Larry Reed likewise praised her enthusiasm for teaching students of all ages and levels:

> I saw her teach people like Arthur Grossman, who came to be one of the top bassoonists in his field. I saw her working with a former student of mine, Richard Beene, who is one of the best bassoon players around. She had enthusiasm for teaching people at that level. I would call that coaching. But I saw that same enthusiasm for the junior high kids that she was first teaching how to put the instrument together. That's always stuck with me: Her enthusiasm no matter what the level of player.[276]

Johnson's impressive performing coupled with her love of teaching also made a strong

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274 Parker, interview.

275 Ibid.

276 Reed, interview.

impression on Reed's life:

> She just wanted to spread her love for the art: music and bassoon. They were both intertwined for her. To me, that's her legacy, her passion. The fact that she shared that playing in her lessons with students is critical, I think, rather than just sitting in your ivory tower and pronouncing things. She had the ability to show how it's done, rather than just teach somebody with words. That was crucial. And then you go to a Symphony concert. Back then, the concerts were in pairs. They gave a Sunday afternoon concert at 3pm and they gave a Tuesday evening concert, always at 8:15. I would usually go to the Tuesday evening concerts. It was a little more formal affair. To go to a lesson with her on Saturday morning and then go hear her in action on Tuesdays…really, wow. That was something. Sometimes, they say those who can't perform teach. She was exactly the opposite. She was a performer and she had a passion for teaching as well. Teaching was not a side to her. It was part of the whole thing. She loved it just as much [as performing].[277]

Johnson's all-inclusive approach to teaching contributed to the overall success of her students, and also promoted the general feeling of devotion and admiration that many of her students and colleagues felt for her. Johnson had her own keenness for teaching, even at public schools where other outside music teachers no longer spent any time and where the quality of education was diminishing. Parker recalls:

> There was a certain teacher here at one time who said you really can't expect to get any good students from those schools because they are just awful and would go on complaining. Betty said, "We still have to teach them. They are still people who are worth something. We can't throw them out just because they haven't had good teachers. It's our job to teach them. She cared about the schools and programs. She knew that public schools were going down. She said it was our job to try and make it better.[278]

Johnson showed no prejudice about where her students came from. She was a master at spotting hidden potential, and perfected the art of bringing out the latent abilities of each individual.

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277 Ibid.

278 Parker, interview.

Through trial and error, learning from her own experiences, Johnson became a successful and influential teacher. Former students were asked for specifics about her pedagogy, as well as general characteristics in her teaching demeanor and personality. Students from every decade from the 1940's through her last students in the late 1990's were interviewed (see Table 2).

Table 2: Past Students Interviewed about Pedagogy with Years of Study

1	Arthur Grossman	1946-1953
2	Barre Griffith	1953-1962
3	Don Jaeger	1956
4	James Brewer	1962-1970
5	Larry Reed	1966-1974
6	Kathryn Sleeper	1973-1978
7	Brad Benson	1974-1976
8	Mark McCoy	1975-1979
9	Denise Reig Turner	1980's
10	Tracie Whitlaw	1985-1992
11	Dayna Smith	1988-1995
12	Anna Resnick	1991-1996
13	Dustin Seay	1995-1999
14	Shannon Highland	1997-1999

Changes in Johnson's style and method are likely due to her own experiences and growth as a teacher. One topic that came up during interviews was the inventive way Johnson approached the equipment. Larry Reed offers a few vignettes about technical things that Johnson had him do to his bassoon:

> Regarding the f sharp thumb key, she always had us take apart the key and take out the connecting rod. She thought that gets in the way. I sent my instrument a few years ago to a repairman. He called me and said this doesn't have a rod in there. I told him I took it out. I don't know why though. She played around with things like that. She was the one who told me that you can take an old bocal, drill a little hole right beyond where the reed goes on the bocal. You can pop out

> a high E. Once you do that, if you don't cover it up, you can't play with anything on the low register.[279]

Reed appreciated Johnson's opinion about how to change the bassoon mechanics to improve sound. The author of this study remembers a similar experience about Johnson's technical expertise that occurred at the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute in 1995, where the orchestra was playing Respighi's *Pines of Rome*. The opening of that piece involved notes that are in the difficult upper register. Because the author was experiencing trouble reaching those notes, Mrs. Johnson played that horn and determined it needed one of her inventive fixes. She removed the vent keys and proceeded to use a tiny drill bit to enlarge the holes by hand; explaining that making the holes a little larger enabled the higher octave notes to come out easier. Johnson knew that the equipment one used was just as important as the player. Through her experience and pioneer attitude about bassoon playing, she developed creative methods to help her students succeed.

Every decade in which Johnson taught is covered in this study. Her students interviewed here have become successful professional performers and recording artists, professors, private teachers, arts administrators, and music educators in public schools. In addition, those who chose careers outside of the music field have become successful business leaders, public servants and community leaders. The common thread of all interviews is the notion that Johnson's musical instruction, teaching method, and personal character had an enormous impact on their development not only as musicians, but as human beings.

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[279] Reed, interview.

General characteristics about Johnson's teaching emerged. When asked about the regular pattern of lessons, Reed describes a typical session as it influenced his current role as a teacher:

> I think what we did, and what I do when I teach, is we played some scales. I played my method [book]. She always assigned me one or two studies. Then you progress onto a solo you might be working on, or some orchestral rep, stuff like that. When I was having reed problems, she would pull out her knife, make a couple of strokes, and it would be perfect. We rarely spent more than 15 to 20 minutes of an hour lesson on reeds.[280]

Reed's recollections are representative of the descriptions of lessons given by other students. Johnson was kind, but firm, expecting students to practice. Reed recalled a lesson at a time when there was an accomplished young pianist present to accompany him:

> She [the pianist] came to a lesson one time and I guess I was saying something kind of arrogant. She [Betty] kind of snapped and said you'll never do very well if you don't practice any more than you do. There I was in the company of this great high school pianist and I was a little embarrassed. She shook me up. She had a way of calling you on things if she felt you were getting too big for your britches. I remember that to this day. And, I did practice.[281]

Students who did not show motivation and work ethic could not receive lessons from Johnson until they had proven that they were ready. In fact, the interviews produced stories demonstrating that she would withhold lessons from students unless they practiced. Tracie Whitlaw recalls her first memory involving that demanding reputation when she was just 15 years old:

> I was fifteen years old. My band director said I had to have private lessons and there was another student, an older student, at the high school, who had taken lessons from Betty and they gave me her phone number. It took me a couple of

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280 Ibid.

281 Ibid.

> months to work up enough nerve to call her because he said that she was very mean and that she would throw you out if you came to a lesson unprepared. She didn't believe in students wasting her time. I have a feeling this kid just didn't practice. I finally did call her.[282]

James Brewer backed that story with his own recollection of a brief interruption in his lessons for a similar reason during the 1960's.

> At some point during high school, she decided I wasn't practicing enough so she turned me over to Joan Powell, the second bassoonist in the Philharmonic. I studied with her for at least a year. I remember working really hard and the next year I played a solo at contest and Betty Johnson was judging it. She immediately took me back after my performance.[283]

Although Johnson was willing to teach anyone no matter what their background or previous skill level, she also understood that students needed to practice to become proficient, let alone great. Continuing to teach a student who was unwilling to work hard wasted the student's time and their parent's resources. It also took lesson opportunities away from students who wanted to achieve through work and study with Johnson. Whitlaw was grateful for the warning about putting forth effort to satisfy Johnson's high expectations. She recalls an experience later, while in college that demonstrated how much her beloved teacher cared about her progress. Johnson may have been a taskmaster, but had her student's progress in mind:

> I'm glad I got advice from that kid in high school because I always showed up prepared for my lessons. And in college, if I happened to be five minutes late because I was held up from another class, I would walk into the music building and other students would be like, "Mrs. Johnson is looking for you." I would be like, "What? I'm going as fast as I can!" She definitely took that stuff very seriously. She was a taskmaster. That's what made her good.[284]

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282 Whitlaw, interview.

283 Brewer, interview.

284 Whitlaw, interview.

The expectation was that if Johnson was giving of her time and energy, her students should be willing and ready to dedicate their time to practicing and improving their skills.

She was generous with her time and resources. Often, hour-long lessons would be twice or even three times as long, time permitting. According to Whitlaw, "She charged fifteen dollars an hour for a lesson and I usually stayed for at least an hour and a half, maybe even two hours. But, she only charged fifteen dollars."[285] Her prices varied through the decades. When Barre Griffith started studying with Johnson in 1953, lessons were three dollars and reeds were five. He was supposed to have 45-minute lessons, but they almost always turned into at least an hour. In the late 1960's, Reed remembers lessons costing "$10 or 15 an hour." At the end of her life, she was charging twenty dollars for an "hour" lesson. In actuality, the price was for the lesson, not an hourly fee, as Johnson did not ever charge a student more than twenty dollars, no matter how long it lasted. The author recalls that as a university instructor, Johnson was aware of the length of the class period; students would often only be able to take a one-credit lesson, which had a thirty-minute time limit. Even there, Johnson always planned for at least 45 minutes because, as she remarked to many students, she felt that it took a considerable amount of time to put the instrument together. In a thirty-minute lesson, this would vastly limit the time for interaction between the teacher and student. Her generosity with both time and talent played a big part in her effectiveness as a teacher, and engendered commitment to her and the bassoon by students.

The majority of former students who were interviewed for this study appreciated

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[285] Ibid.

that during lessons Johnson would often play or sing along. Griffith benefitted from her singing. "The singing was the thing that clicked with me. Betty was originally a singer. She would sing in my lessons… something for me to play and imitate. She had a nice sounding soprano voice."[286] Former student Shannon Highland (see Appendix C) remembers how Johnson made up lyrics to various orchestral excerpts. "She had words for the last movement of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony and Bruckner's Fourth [Symphony]. It makes sense since she was a singer. She would use peoples' names for the words."[287] Interviewees agreed that sound, tone production, posture, pitch, phrasing, vibrato, and expression were all heavily influenced by her vocal background. Johnson's techniques often stemmed from the belief that the bassoon was an extension of the voice, therefore being a natural process, harmonious with the body. Reed explains:

> She would always sing along and I took that to my teaching. She always felt music should be you're singing with your bassoon, always from a vocalist's point of view. And that permeates my whole way of looking at music. She never looked at bassoon as an instrument as much as her voice.[288]

Playing the bassoon was a simple task when approached properly. Johnson understood how to present bassoon pedagogy to her students in an effective manner.

SOUND AND TONE PRODUCTION

Colleagues and students were moved and amazed by the expressive sound and phrasing Johnson achieved in her own playing. It makes sense that she would pass on this important aspect to her students. Johnson felt that no matter how flawless a person's technique was, if they did not have a sound the audience wanted to hear, it was

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286 Griffith, interview.

287 Shannon Highland, phone interview with author, May 30, 2014.

288 Reed, interview.

all for naught. Sound was the start of great playing. Even when Johnson was teaching phrasing, the sound had to be beautiful in order to carry the phrase. Whitlaw recollects about Johnson's taste in sound:

> Sound was huge with her. She was such a sound snob. What I remember was that she liked it dark with warmth of the vibrato. She would play recordings of [Bernard] Garfield[289] for me. She really liked his sound. Those records are gorgeous. I think I might have had a better sound when I studied with her than I do now! That's how focused she was on that. She, from what I remember, was always about it had to be beautiful and warm. You should never allow yourself to play something that wasn't beautiful.[290]

Musical ideas were not valuable if there was no beautiful sound to transport them. Johnson approached the bassoon as an extension of the human voice. Her most common advice about playing was to "sing through the bassoon." Reed explains:

> She was just so demonstrative in lessons. She would always sing along and I took that to my teaching. She always felt music should be you're singing through with your bassoon, always from a vocalist point of view. And that permeates my whole way of looking at music. She never looked at bassoon as an instrument as much as her voice.[291]

The author of this study notes that Johnson transferred techniques directly from her vocal training to her bassoon performance. These included an open relaxed throat, breathing deep and far down into the stomach, and feeling the air passing through the vocal cords as if singing. Whitlaw also remembers the deep breaths Johnson modeled during lessons. "I can't really do that [breath] as well as she did… I'm always kind of

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289 Bernard Garfield, bassoonist and composer, is a founding member of the New York Woodwind Quintet and played in the group from 1949 through 1957 when he began a long tenure as principal bassoonist of the Philadelphia Orchestra until 2000. He also taught at Temple University (43 years) and the Curtis Institute (32 years). Bernard Garfield, "Biography," Wordpress, 2015. http://www.garfieldbassoon.com/biography/ (accessed July 28, 2015).

290 Whitlaw, interview.

291 Reed, interview.

thinking about that but definitely can't do it the way she does it. I'm convinced it has something to do with her vocal training."[292] Her training as a vocalist transferred effortlessly to not only playing the bassoon, but also teaching it with specific techniques.

BREATHING AND POSTURE

From the author's first meeting with Johnson as a junior high school student in 1991, posture and breathing were presented as the initial fundamentals to establish. Johnson taught students to sit straight with shoulders back and down, feet in front on the floor and the chest lifted, utilizing the Alexander Technique[293] to assist proper spine and neck placement. Whitlaw concurs that the Alexander Technique became important to Johnson:

> Posture was huge with her. I had no idea how progressive she was until she had me down on the floor doing Alexander Technique at the [Quartz Mountain] Summer Arts Institute before it was the Alexander Technique. She took me to a Yoga class once. She was all about the breathing and posture.[294]

In this, one must sit up with shoulders directly above hips, never leaning on the back of a chair. The weight was in the elbows in order to facilitate relaxed fingers and hands. Johnson's hands were large. She reminded her students with large hands similar to hers to always be aware that they must keep the arms, wrists, hands, and shoulders relaxed

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292 Whitlaw, interview.

293 Technique that uses natural movement, breathing, and balance in the body as a framework to heal problems such as back pain, neck pain, restricted breathing, and shoulder problems. Joan Arnold, "Alexander Technique," http://www.alexandertechnique.com/at/ (accessed August 6, 2015).

294 Whitlaw interview.

when playing.[295] According to Reed, once students were beyond the habit-setting lessons, "She did not talk about the position of the instrument unless there was a problem."[296] From the beginning, the adoption of correct posture played an important role in developing a young bassoonist and Johnson made sure to focus on students establishing good habits at the start.

The casual breath of a person was never large enough for a bassoonist. The author recalls that Johnson would have students take the deepest breath possible and hold it for a few seconds. Then, without exhaling, she would have them take another deep breath. Still not content that the lungs had reached their full capacity, she insisted that students take a third breathe. It was only at this point that Johnson was satisfied with the amount of air the student inhaled. Johnson would demonstrate this breathing exercise and often have the student put his or her hand on her lower back so they could literally see and feel her back expanding with the lungs being completely utilized. According to Johnson, it was only at this point the body had enough air to move into the bassoon and create a big full sound. Dustin Seay clearly remembers the coaching he received on breathing:

> Mrs. Johnson said when you take a breath, fill the entire chest cavity and the front, back, and sides of the lungs. She would touch her lower back and say, "take a deep breath from the back of your lungs, blow the air column to the top of your head, and draw your abdominal muscles inward, up, and into the ribcage. Her use of visual language made a difference in my playing. She was also skilled at circular breathing and sneaking in little sips or sighs from the corners of her mouth.[297]

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295 Seay, interview.

296 Reed, interview.

297 Seay, interview.

As with any wind instrument, breathing and understanding how to maximize the volume of air inhaled was an important concept that Johnson instilled in her students. She knew breathing was the first step in producing a beautiful sound and that without proper technique a bassoonist would not be able to move forward.

VIBRATO

Johnson had strong ideas about vibrato and spent quite a bit of time on it with her students. She thought a vibrato should sound natural and never forced like a Billy Goat or the stop on an organ, which is very mechanical.[298] It should be a part of carrying the sound and flow through the vocal cords like a singer. According to Johnson, vibrato was produced from the diaphragm and throat muscle. Former high school and OCU student, Dayna Smith (see Appendix C) stated that Johnson always said to, "Sing through the instrument."[299] She taught diaphragm vibrato and always encouraged an open throat to help bring it out through the instrument. Reed describes his experiences and thoughts on Johnson's vibrato philosophy:

> Betty just had the most singing, beautiful vibrato. You know, it was her voice. I started in Norman [Oklahoma] back in the days of what they called the breath impulse system. I think it was fantastic and did wonders in helping me with my concept of rhythmic stability. It's all about subdivision. That's the beginning of vibrato. Unfortunately, you get into that and your vibrato becomes more rigid. I remember when I was probably a sophomore [in high school] and had been studying with Betty Johnson for a couple of years. I was finally able to release myself from that system of breath impulse for a freer vibrato. A lot of it was just listening to her and we would talk about pushing through and breathe. She also talked a lot about head tones. When a singer talks about head tones, it's releasing the sound rather than talking in the nasal. Her experience as a singer influenced that.[300]

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298 Arthur Grossman, phone interview by author, May 15, 2014.

299 Dayna Smith, written interview by author, September 9, 2014.

300 Reed, interview.

Johnson was able to personalize her vibrato instruction for the individual needs of each student. She understood that every person possesses a different body, and something as internal as vibrato production requires different methods of bring each person's vibrato to fruition.

PITCH AND INTONATION

Students, colleagues and bystanders have commented on Johnson's sound, including the intonation. Dayna Smith explains:

> Just listening to her wonderful "unmatched" tone would inspire you to try to imitate her tone. Intonation came when you played with a tuner and memorized the pitch to have in your head. She would always say to think about the pitch before playing the note.[301]

She believed that if one could hear or sing a pitch, then it could be played in tune. Johnson preferred a medium-dark Germanic bassoon tone. According to Seay, "In her opinion, she thought the American bassoonist captured the best, overall bassoon sound. She did not care for the buzzy tone of the French bassoon."[302] Johnson approached pitch much like a singer, letting one's ears guide the player in order to match pitch and blend with the need of the orchestra. Johnson was a master of this concept and her students learned the approach by example when she played with them and for them in lessons.

EXPRESSION AND PHRASING

Johnson's musicianship, vocal training, and natural ability remain constant

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301 Dayna Smith, interview.

302 Orchestras in the United States use a German bassoon. The French Bassoon is a different variety of bassoon, which is known for a brighter, more nasal sound than its German cousin. It uses a different reed and fingerings, as well as different size of instrument to create its characteristic sound.

themes throughout interviews with her former students, colleagues and associates. She worked diligently to pass on her ideas about musicality and expression. Johnson often played along in lessons, providing an example of lyrical playing. Whitlaw recalls the enormous amount she learned because of the way Johnson played in lessons, often striving to imitate Johnson and always valuing Johnson's singing as well as playing:

> Another huge lesson I learned from her is to sound like a vocalist. I wish we had recordings and equipment like we do today to really listen to what she sounded like, but the way I remember her sound is that she sounded like a soprano: Glorious phrasing and melodic singing. Singing through her instrument. One of the things I appreciated about my lessons was that she always played in the lessons, even up to the point where she was so sick and weak that she couldn't. But she would still try. Even when she was really far gone, she was still playing. In the younger years, and she was 68 when I first started studying with her, she played and modeled that beautiful sound in the lesson so I really learned my phrasing by following her and mimicking her. It's important to be able to verbally explain what you do and to analyze things from an analytical standpoint, but I really appreciated just learning it by imitation, which is the way I think she really taught.[303]

Johnson would have students pretend they were actors who needed to act out the music to create musical expression. She believed every piece of music should tell a story. According to Seay, Johnson encouraged listening to singers to gain a better understanding of phrasing and expression: "She liked the musical expression of opera legends like Maria Callas, Pavarotti and Fritz Wunderlich. I would listen often to their recordings and apply similar styles and ideas to my own playing.[304] Using vocalists as examples of how to create musical line came very naturally to a singer like Johnson. She passed that insight on to her students so they might learn the power of literally singing through the bassoon.

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303 Whitlaw, interview.

304 Seay, interview.

ARTICULATION

From the author's experience, Johnson played with excellent articulation and demanded extreme efficiency in the technique. Air pressure propelled the articulation. When a bassoonist chewed or moved their jaw or mouth when tonguing, the embouchure changed and air had a hard time being focused into the instrument. She worked to teach the student to keep a relaxed and motionless mouth. Students practiced articulation with various tonguing exercises. Seay recalls specific instructions about articulation:

> She [Johnson] said to use syllables like "doo" and "doh" when articulating. Use the vowel "ee" when playing "E" above middle-C she would say. Double tonguing uses a too-koo syllable and must be practiced very slowly. "too koo too too, too koo too too" is a good pattern to build endurance.[305]

Many times, articulation was practiced with just the reed, or reed and bocal, providing an opportunity to work without the distraction of the instrument. Dayna Smith explains. "We would practice articulation so much with different tonguing exercises. Many times she would have me take the bocal off the instrument and just practice tonguing with the reed on the bocal without having to focus on the instrument."[306] Because of her instruction and persistence, Johnson's students were very cognizant of and proficient at articulation.

RHYTHM

Johnson was very insistent on accurate rhythm. Seay remarks that Johnson said "the ability to sustain a steady tempo and accurate rhythm was crucial to giving life to the notes on a page." She used many different methods to train students. Repetition was

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305 Ibid.

306 Dayna Smith, interview.

important to develop great rhythm. She suggested taking phrases apart by four or five beats. At Whitlaw's first lesson, Mrs. Johnson sent her out to buy a metronome. Whitlaw recalls the rhythmic instruction Johnson provided for her:

> Another thing I really enjoyed about my lessons was her rhythm training. It's such a simple thing. She would make us mark beats. In my own teaching [at the Army school], it is kind of shocking how many people come in not truly understanding the written rhythm and kind of faking things. It's just math. And she taught me that. That visual cue of marking those beats was something she was really big on. That was one of the big things I took from her.[307]

Reed confirmed that Johnson was "a stickler for rhythm." He relates an educational story to illustrate the importance she placed on it in which he was called upon to play for conductor Victor Alessandro who was then visiting the orchestra from San Antonio, where he then lived: "I was scared to death. … I remember there was a light bulb and I was the only one on stage. I played and she stopped me and said, "That's very good, but you're rushing." Rhythm was a big deal for her."[308] Johnson used every opportunity available to give students an educational experience, including correcting one in front of a well-known orchestral conductor. It was more important to her to enable the student to learn, than to give the conductor the impression of a flawless performance. She also understood the importance of impeccable rhythm when playing in a group. Without perfect rhythm, a career as a performer was not possible. Johnson had internalized this fact into her own playing and worked assiduously to impress this upon her students its importance.

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307 Whitlaw, interview.

308 Reed, interview.

PRACTICE

Johnson's approach to practice was logical from the early days of her teaching career. According to former student, Arthur Grossman (see Appendix C):

> She insisted on practicing with a metronome, starting slowly and being sure that you did everything evenly. Another thing about practicing that I found very interesting is that she said never start your session with reed making…always practice first and get the practice out of the way and done before you start with reeds. If you start with reeds, you will never get your practicing done. I remember that specifically.[309]

This philosophy continued through the years and was a common reoccurring theme to many interviewees.

REPERTOIRE

Johnson taught every student according to his or her level, capability and goals, including a diverse repertoire. Her own teaching style and method changed throughout the six decades during which she taught, however some consistencies occur in the kinds of music she had students play. Like many other bassoonists, she started her students with the *Julius Weissenborn Method for Bassoon,* commonly referred to by most bassoonists as "*The Weissenborn*." The book begins with 25 lessons that lead a bassoonist from the first day of playing; it includes scale studies and exercises after the initial lessons. Weissenborn also composed 50 Etudes, which are included in the most editions of the book. Once students finish with those standards, the program varies. Larry Reed describes his curriculum with her and reveals that she knew another great teacher and pedagogue at the time, Norman Hertzberg:[310]

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[309] Grossman, interview.

[310] Norman Hertzberg (1916-2007) played principal bassoon in the St. Louis Symphony, was a founding member of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and played

> She had a very detailed curriculum... The Weissenborn book was the Bible. That's where we began. Then we would get into the Milde Scale Studies. The [Milde] Concert Studies came later and she communicated there was a famous teacher named Norman Hertzberg who had that at the end of his curriculum. Most teachers teach the Concert Studies a little earlier on. I went and studied with him for a summer when I was at Baylor. I found out what a wonderful teacher he was. He was even more strict [with the curriculum]. Johnson was a little more flexible.[311]

Reed was lucky enough to experience and offer a legitimate comparison between two prominent 20th century teachers. After the Milde *Concert Studies*, Reed recalls working on the Almenraeder[312], Ozi[313], and Gambaro[314] Etudes. After those technical studies, she introduced him to the Giamperi Etudes.[315] They also spent a lot of time on the old Simon Kovar Studies.[316] Reed explains:

> We also spent a lot of time on sound production. The old Kovar Studies. Those are very much in the style of Tabuteau[317] tone production. He's the famous oboe teacher. They are good as far as developing mostly attacks, crescendo, diminuendo, and releases… So tone control. That, in conjunction with the other

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for Warner Brothers Studio from 1954-1991. He was also the professor of bassoon at the University of Southern California from 1953-1991. He is also known for his innovations and developments in reed-making equipment. He is considered one of America's greatest bassoonists. Lowe, Carol Loraine Cope, Preface of "Norman Hertzberg: An Icon of Bassoon Pedagogy" [DMA Document, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2008].v-vi.

311 Reed, interview.

312 *Scale Exercises in All Keys* by Carl Almenraeder.

313 *42 Caprices for Bassoon* by Etienne Ozi.

314 *18 Studies for Bassoon* by Giovanni Battista Gambaro

315 *16 Daily Studies for the Perfection* by Alamiro Giamperi.

316 *24 Daily Studies for Bassoon* by Simon Kovar.

317 Marcel Tabuteau (1887-1966)

things, was the basis of my studies.[318]

Seay describes a similar pattern in her curriculum three decades later, with a few changes:

> We'd start with a 10-minute warmup for our chops and wind (Kovar, Giamperi, Oubradous[319], Weissenborn). Then we would work on 1-2 etudes (Milde, Pivonka[320], Bozza[321], Piard[322], Flament[323], Orefici[324], [George Phillipp] Telemann Sonatas, [Johann Ernst] Galliard Sonatas, [Johann Sebastian] Bach Cello Suites) for 20 minutes. The last 40 minutes was for solo and/or orchestral excerpts. Bassoon lessons were usually 70 minutes long. We worked on reeds and played as a bassoon ensemble on a different day of each week.[325]

Even though she utilized certain books and methods, Johnson was still tailoring her curriculum to fit individuals throughout the decades. Johnson liked the Stadio Excerpt book[326] and encouraged students to work on orchestral excerpts. In addition to the Stadio, Arthur Grossman also recalls specific books for Tchaikovsky and Strauss. "We did exercises, Weissenborn or Milde and orchestra studies in every lesson."[327]

She had a very motivating method of introducing new books and concepts to

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318 Reed, interview.

319 *Scales and Daily Exercises* by Fernand Oubradous.

320 *Little Etudes for Bassoon* by Karel Pivonka.

321 *15 Etudes Jouranlieres for Bassoon* by Eugene Bozza.

322 *16 Characteristic Studies for Bassoon* by Marius Piard.

323 *15 Etudes for the Bassoon* by Edouard Flament

324 *Bravoura Studies for Bassoon* by Alberto Orefici.

325 Seay, interview.

326 *Difficult Passages and "Solos" for Bassoon* by Ciro Stadio.

327 Arthur Grossman, phone interview by author, May 15, 2014.

students. When presenting the Giamperi Studies[328] to the author of this study as a high school student, Johnson stressed that "If you play all of these every day, you can get into the New York Philharmonic." She encouraged students to set high goals and gave them tangible avenues to do so using her repertoire choices.

REHEARSAL ETIQUETTE

Johnson provided an example to her colleagues during rehearsals. According to many colleagues, she was the consummate professional, prepared and respectful, who arrived early to warm up. Johnson said to let the bassoon talk for the musician and play your part. She also encouraged students to always have a high note reed for excerpts in a higher register like *Bolero*. Reed states, "She joked around during breaks, but was very serious as far as her art is concerned."[329] He remembers the guidance she gave him as he was beginning to play professional jobs:

> I started playing gigs in 1971 when I was a sophomore [in college] and she said, "Now this is what you do when you go to gigs. You show up no later than 30 minutes before the downbeat." I've always tried to do that to this day. "You come prepared, you practice your part. They are paying you good money. They don't want to hear you practice or fumble over your part. You be ready to play. That's what professionals do." She was very strict about that.[330]

Numerous colleagues remarked, as reported in earlier sections of this study, that she was quiet and attentive in rehearsals.

After spending three years in the Oklahoma Symphony with her from 1967-1970, Eastman Oboe Professor, Richard Killmer, used Johnson as the standard by

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328 *16 Daily Studies for Bassoon* by Alamiro Giamperi.

329 Reed, interview.

330 Ibid.

which he measured himself, as reported earlier. Her colleague at the University of Oklahoma and trombonist in the Oklahoma Symphony and Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Irv Wagner, met Johnson shortly after he arrived in Oklahoma around 1969. He recalls Johnson's rehearsal etiquette and encouraging attitude:

> She was a consummate professional. Always on time, prepared. Reed, music, being able to play the music. Never gave us [brass section] dirty looks. They were all of encouragements. After concerts, she was always encouraging. "That was easy and great to play with you guys." ...Always very positive. She would encourage people after concerts. It was a real nice genuine atmosphere.[331]

Throughout her long tenures in both performance ensembles and universities, Johnson led by example, acting as the consummate professional for her colleagues and students.

Johnson also provided guidance about the role of the bassoon in an ensemble setting. Seay recalls her specific instructions as well as a story about a time when she was not prepared for a performance:

> She taught that if a bassoonist is the first person to begin a piece of music with an ensemble, he or she should take a "visible breath" and give the downbeat/tempo with the bell of the instrument like a conductor's baton. Mrs. Johnson also reminded me to always make sure to have your reeds with you when heading to a performance. Once, with the Oklahoma Symphony, she sat down on stage ten minutes before a big performance and realized that she did not have her bassoon reeds! The conductor, I believe it was Guy Frasier Harrison, delayed the concert for half an hour while Mrs. Johnson drove home to fetch them! She described these experiences as mortifying.[332]

She used her personal stories of unpreparedness to motivate students to show extra diligence. Reed recalls her instruction to him when he started playing second bassoon with her:

> She told me the second bassoon was the foundation of the winds section and it's

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331 Irv Wagner, interview by author, Oklahoma City, OK, May 21, 2014.

332 Seay, interview.

> important for me to be solid technically as well as intonation. Then, my natural inclination to match her sound quality and volume balance-wise, I think that was something that really clicked with me. It was so cool to play a Brahms Symphony with the first bassoonist. I was a scared little kid. I was so intimidated but she said, "All you have to do is have a light enough reed to be able to play dynamics and you have to play in tune." I really focused on that. I think that probably strengthened my technical abilities. You have to be able to blend but you also have to be solid.[333]

Reed also received advice on playing in a woodwind quintet setting when she was instructing him in college: "Many times she was the coach. I don't think [she said] anything out of the ordinary necessarily. It's something you kind of pick up. But again, you're the bass of that ensemble as well so you're setting the level of pitch. She impressed that upon me.[334] Her wisdom and life experience made a strong impression on students and Johnson used these personal stories to teach them what to do, and more importantly, what not to do regarding rehearsals.

AUDITIONING

Although Johnson never auditioned for an orchestra after she started playing in the Oklahoma Symphony, as a professional she knew how to prepare students for the rigorous process. Seay remembers her instruction to him: "We would practice auditioning twice per month. Whether I was to play a solo or a series of excerpts, Mrs. Johnson, and sometimes other OCU faculty members, would listen/record me, and give me notes at the end. This helped auditioning to be less nerve-wracking and more focused.[335]"

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333 Reed, interview.

334 Ibid.

335 Seay, interview.

Seay continues with more specific methods that Johnson used while helping him to prepare for his auditions:

> Mrs. Johnson wanted me to listen to at least two different recordings of each piece I had to play. Then, we would dissect every note and measure carefully. First, establish the tempo/rhythm. Next, we removed the passing tones/ornamentation to find the basic, underlying "fixed song." Finally, she would perform the passage, followed by me. I was mesmerized at how much self-control, sensitivity, and musical expression that she could put out of a bassoon.[336]

Johnson advised students on how to prepare reeds and one's mind for an audition. Seay reminisces on the process:

> Mrs. Johnson instructed me to put my best reeds aside, so as to not wear them out, and continue making new reeds. She said it was important to practice slowly and accurately, so I could have time to hum, ponder, and learn to love the pieces for which I was preparing. One week before an audition, she would have me play through everything from start to finish.[337]

Other students retained handwritten note cards from Johnson with a list of excerpts to learn and memorize. She would give them the summer to master the list and then audition them once they had completed the task. Reed clearly remembers her instructions on audition preparation.

> I still have the 4x6 card where she wrote down all the excerpts she wanted me to memorize over the summer. I was expected to know them from memory. It's got 15 to 20 standard excerpts that you need to know for any bassoon audition. I can probably play most of those from memory to this day. That was the starting point. We studied the Stadio book and then the Schoenbach 20th Century Excerpts[338]. Those were the two excerpt books that I studied. She made me memorize those excerpts. Sometimes she would bring a whole part and we

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336 Ibid.

337 Ibid.

338 *20th Century Orchestra Studies for Bassoon,* compiled and annotated by Sol Schoenbach.

would play through it together.[339]

The excerpt training she provided to Reed and her other students enabled them to be more prepared for a professional career in the music industry.

REED-MAKING

According to Arthur Grossman, before World War II, American bassoon players ordered their reeds from Germany. Once the war started in 1939, access to German-made reeds was impossible. This shortage accounts for the wide variety of reed-making styles in the United States. Bassoonists had to figure it out for themselves. Johnson was no exception. She ordered reeds from any bassoonist with whom she could contact. Then, she dismantled them to figure out how they work.[340] Ultimately, she taught herself how to make reeds. Johnson did receive documented assistance throughout the years. In addition to receiving help in the summer of 1939 from Goslee, she attended reed-making clinics with Louis Skinner[341], and spent a month with Vincent Pezzi, the bassoon professor at the Eastman School of Music, as mentioned in comments by Hap Apgar, earlier. Over time, she developed not only a unique style of making reeds, but a knack for discovering new and creative ways to do so, looking for inventive ways to

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339 Reed, interview.

340 Grossman, interview.

341 Louis Skinner (1918-1993) is considered one of North America's greatest reed-making teachers. He gave clinics and reed-making lessons to countless students. Students would come to his home in Jonesport, Maine. Standard lessons lasts from 3 to 5 days with four hours in the morning and there or four in the afternoon. He also taught reed-making clinics, including Symposiums in Towson, Maryland from 1984-1987. It is unclear when Betty studied with him. James R. McRay, "The Life and Times of Lou Skinner," in *The Bassoon Reed Manual: Louis Skinner's Theories and Techniques. (*Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), xxi-xxviii.

make reeds better and more efficient. Reed sums up her constant reed-making quest, noting that, "She was always finding the latest, greatest way to do things. She discovered new ways of making bassoon reeds. It was pretty quirky when she would talk about using a coffee pot and a steamer. She loved gadgets."[342]

Throughout the years, Johnson continued to discover new methods and pass those on to her students. In addition to her standard method of making reeds, Johnson was always experimenting with new tools and ideas. The author of this study remembers a lesson overshadowed with the excitement of an ongoing reed experiment:

> She had an extra sparkle in her eye. After we sat down in her music room, she excitedly asked me if I had any "old, really gross and moldy reeds." I had a few old reeds and gave them to her. She explained that she had a new denture cleaner that worked using sonic waves through water. She wanted to see how it would act with reeds and if it would regenerate and clean them, thus giving them new life. We put the reeds in the water and left the contraption on the shelf she had below her stand. Periodically during our lesson, which lasted more than two hours, we checked the reeds. She giggled with delight right along with me as we watched "gunk" float out of the reeds and on to the top of the water.

Other students have revealed watching similar experiments. Johnson also experimented reed-making from scratch, without the convenient tools like profilers and shapers. The author remembers that at the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute, she would have students put a gouged and shaped piece of cane[343] on a wooden dowel. Students would then learn how to hand profile the cane. Using files or knives, they would practice making reeds

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342 Reed, interview.

343 In the reed-making process, cane begins as a hollow tube. It is then split into three or four pieces. The inside of the cane is then gouged out with a specially shaped sharp blade which scrapes the pulpy cane found on the inside of the tube down to a desired thickness of cane. A gouged piece of cane is then folded over, or between a mold which designates the flared shape of the reed. The excess cane is carved off by a razor blade leaving a piece of cane with bark on one side and shaped into the proper dimensions to continue in the process.

and preparing cane the way it was accomplished before engineered profilers[344] made the job much easier. Brewer recalls similar techniques thirty years prior, where they would split cane and profile by hand using a dowel.[345]

Johnson discovered another way to improve her reed-making process. Jerry Neil Smith remembers Johnson using a new gadget called a ReeDuAl (pronounced Reed Do-All), machine that reproduces the thickness of the piece of cane of the user's choice onto a blank piece of cane.[346] Smith describes how Johnson would use the tool:

> She had one that she used at OU [University of Oklahoma] all the time when she was here. And she was here a lot. She did that for the cut on her bassoon reeds before she did the final finish work by hand. She saved herself a whole lot of trouble by using it. It saved her a lot of work. She didn't do finished reeds on it, but it did all the dirty work. It's a form of profiling.[347]

The ReeDuAl was first sold in 1963. Johnson was a seasoned reed maker by the time this machine was available for purchase. Other notable bassoonists who also have used this machine include Louis Skinner[348] and Bernard Garfield, the solo bassoonist with the Philadelphia Orchestra.[349] Johnson was always looking for new ways to make reeds, including methods to streamline and simplify the finishing stages. In addition to her

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344 A profiler is a reed-making tool that scrapes off cane to specific dimensions on the outer side (bark side) of a piece of cane. It essentially takes cane off the outside part of the cane much like the gouger takes cane off the inside.

345 Brewer, interview.

346 Friends and Supporters of World Clarinet Alliance, ReeDuAl, www.reedual.com (accessed May 16, 2015).

347 Jerry Neil Smith, interview.

348 According to a letter in 1986 provided by the ReeDuAl Company.

349 Bowen, Glenn, "A Tribute: Sol Rabinowitz. 1919-1982," *The Clarinet* 21, no. 4 [July-August]: 44.

discovery of the Dial Indicator, mentioned in detail later, the ReeDuAl proved to be a capable tool for Johnson to use when making reeds.

Johnson's students approached reed-making in a positive, pragmatic way. She knew how important attitude counted when it came to the arduous and stressful task of making reeds. Seay recalls his reservations and discontent with reed-making and how his teacher helped him through the process:

> When I first started studying with Mrs. Johnson, she told me that she had lost some very talented bassoon players over the years because reed-making was time-consuming and frustrating to them. This statement annoyed me for a long time because I wanted to PLAY the instrument, not waste time becoming a reed master. I felt like I had signed up for two full time, lifelong jobs! Eventually, I got over being so inconvenienced and have learned to be patient, and enjoy exploring one reed at a time. Mrs. Johnson had me make 3-5 reeds per week. I tended to take too much out of the channels, too early, and scrape the sides too thin. Mrs. Johnson made reed-making fun and light-hearted. She occasionally gave her students little gifts like some sand paper here, a file there, or a home-made knife, etc. She told me to use sand paper, reed rush, and files because I scraped hard and removed too much cane too soon.[350]

Dayna Smith summed up her experiences with Johnson's reed expertise:

> Oh I wish I still had her close by to help with reed-making! There is so much to say on this subject. I don't know where to start. Her thing was, "You can always take away more, but cannot put anything back." She was always saying to take it slow. Only shave off a little at a time, test the reed, and then do more if needed. Always be patient, which was not my strong point.[351]

Smith explains more specific details about how many reeds she was required to make, as well as how reed-making was approached:

> At first, she wanted at least two reeds per week and then just as needed. It was a positive activity. We had many gatherings at her house with other bassoon players and had reed-making sessions for several hours on Saturday afternoons. She had that special touch in making a reed work, which I don't think I ever

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350 Seay, interview.

351 Dayna Smith, interview.

attained.[352]

Johnson respected reed-making and saw the importance in teaching how to do it. She considered the craft of paramount importance right from the beginning. Whitlaw describes the difference between Johnson's philosophy and approach compared to other people she has encountered.

> A reed can make or break your playing. I've met, later on in my career, so many people who know so little about reed-making. I had no idea that was unusual. Or they had to pay separately for reed-making lessons later on. I think a lot of teachers look at that [reed-making] as an advanced skill. Her philosophy was that it should start the minute that you learn to play the bassoon. I think that was really important.[353]

Johnson insisted that students make reeds from a very early age. From the first lesson forward, she was showing students how to construct, adjust and eventually experiment. Whitlaw describes her first memories with reed-making, recalling that it began with the first or second lesson: "She started me out on reed-making basically from day one. And she made me play on my horrible reeds. They were really horrible."[354]

Fortunately for Whitlaw, she had a patient teacher and her reeds dramatically improved. Johnson, who believed that reed-making was important enough to start learning from the beginning, found a way to make it exciting and enjoyable. Her instruction resulted in students who could meet the demands of reed-making on their own.

Each bassoonist has his or her own dimensions, methods and ideas about reed construction. Johnson believed standard dimensions were too long, thus making her

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352 Ibid.

353 Whitlaw, interview.

354 Ibid.

own reeds quite short.[355] In the interviews, students provided Johnson's step-by-step reed-making instructions, troubleshooting ideas, and dimensions, much of which were typed on her typewriter or handwritten. As her personal reed-making evolved, these instructions changed through the years, a fine example of how her teaching also evolved. Illustrations 13 a through d are the first four pages of a set of instructions provided by Barre Griffith, who received them from Johnson in 1967 (also see, Illustrations 14 through 18).

[355] Grossman, interview.

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1967 ADDITIONS TO REED MAKING

1. Forming tube with steam:

A small coffee pot with the glass top taken out so the hole in the lid can be used to steam tube.

a. Put top wire on unsoaked reed. (Reed has been sanded and beveled.)

b. Drop reed in hole tube side down, with the wire extending out in order to keep reed from sliping into water. Let steam for about a couple of minutes.

c. Take from pot scoring from wire down to end of tube.

d. Return to steam.

e: Take out of steam and insert mandrel.

f. Return to steam. Then back out to form mandrel. Do this process several times until tube takes shape and mandrel is clear to reed pu to wire. Always help for tube with fingers.

g. Put on 2 wire and pull up tight.

h. Put on 3rd wire.

WIRE PLACEMENTS

Top wire: 1 inch from bottom of tube to bottom of top wire

Middle wire: 9/32 nds from bottom of top wire to top of middle wire.

Bottom wire: 4 to 5/32nds from bottom of tubeto bottom of bottom wire

2. When wrapping reed dont make too big a ball in order to leave room on the bottom of tube for a three strand wrap of wire. Put on right after reed has been wraped and before the second coat of glue is put on.

Put this wire on reed with reed on bocal!

SHOULDER SCORING

1. Cut shoulder 3/32nds from top wire, using exacto knife , 22x blade.

2. Peel layer of cane very evenly, starting 1/3 up on blade peeling toward shoulder. This should break of cleanly at shoulder line.

Illustration 13 a

This should be cut to a thickness of .0035 measurered on the dial indicater.

3. Smooth out knife work with emery boardor file, checking reed under light to make sure the light shows through evenly.

FROM HERE ON OUT NO MORE WORK SHOULD BE DONE ON REED WITHOUT CHECKING EVERY SCRAPE, SANDING, OR FILING PROCESS UNDER LIGHT. TAKE GREAT CARE NOT TO SCRAPE TOO MUCH OUT OF MIDDLE.

4. At this point the reed thickness should measure

35 near shoulder tapering down to 25 for full length of reed.

5. Cut tip: 1 6/32nds from top wire to end of reed, this should give 2 to 3/32nds leeway on tip.

6. Check thickness of blade with Dial Indicater.

A finished reed should measure 30 to 25 at back near shoulder tapering to 22 to 20 ~~MEIDING~~ about half way , nolding that thickness to end of reed.

AT THIS POINT WE ARE ONLY CONCERNED WITH GETTING THE BLADE TAPERED EVENLY AND ~~OF~~ THE SAME THICKNESS FROM MIDDLE TO EDGE DONT TRY TO DO ANY TAPERING FROM MIDDLE TO SIDES YET.

DONT SCRAPE TIP YET IT GOES PAST THERE.

8. Cut reed off to proper length. This varies with the instrement.

A starting point i 1 4/32nds

8. Taper tip . Measure: 3/32 20
2/32 18
1/32 18

9. Taper sides and corner.

HOLDING REED UP TO LIGHT THE HEART SHOULD BE CRESCENT OR MOON SHAPED STARTING APROX. ~~XXX~~ 1/3 from tip of reed at edge CURVING TO TIP AND BACK TO OTHER SIDE AT EXACTLY THE SAME HEADE. The evenness with which you have made this crescent shadow will effect the opening. The sides should stay open clear to edge., then come together to seal edge and sides.

Illustration 13 b

9. Adjust tube:

Hold reed by bell examining the side view. The top wire is usually not as round as the middle wire. This should be remedied.

Raise 2 top wires up. Squeeze with pliers on top and bottom of tube both in front of ~~it~~ and back of middle wire.

Next squeeze on sides of reed in front of and behind 1st wire.

Put reed on mandrel, squeeze on top and bottom of wrapping.

HOW TO ORDER BRASS EN LAME:

SHAPE - HECKEL NO 3

SCRAPE OR PROFILE - THICK

Cost: from 5. 28 to 5.40 depending on how much is ordered.

A. Glotin
15 Rue Des Progress
Ezanville, France

HAVE SENT AIR MAIL.

Illustration 13 c

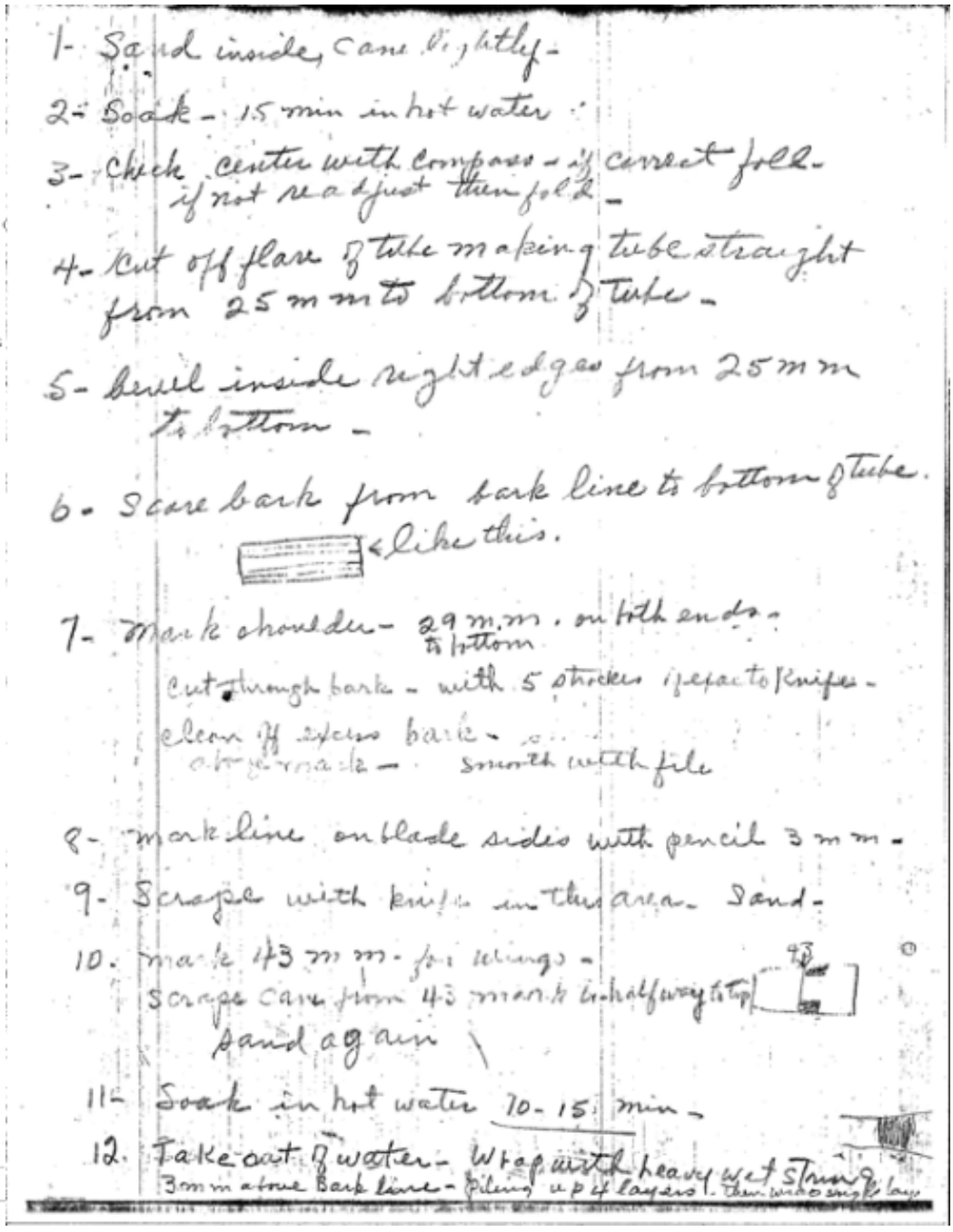


Illustration 13 d

Illustration 13 a through d: Instructions on Reed-Making

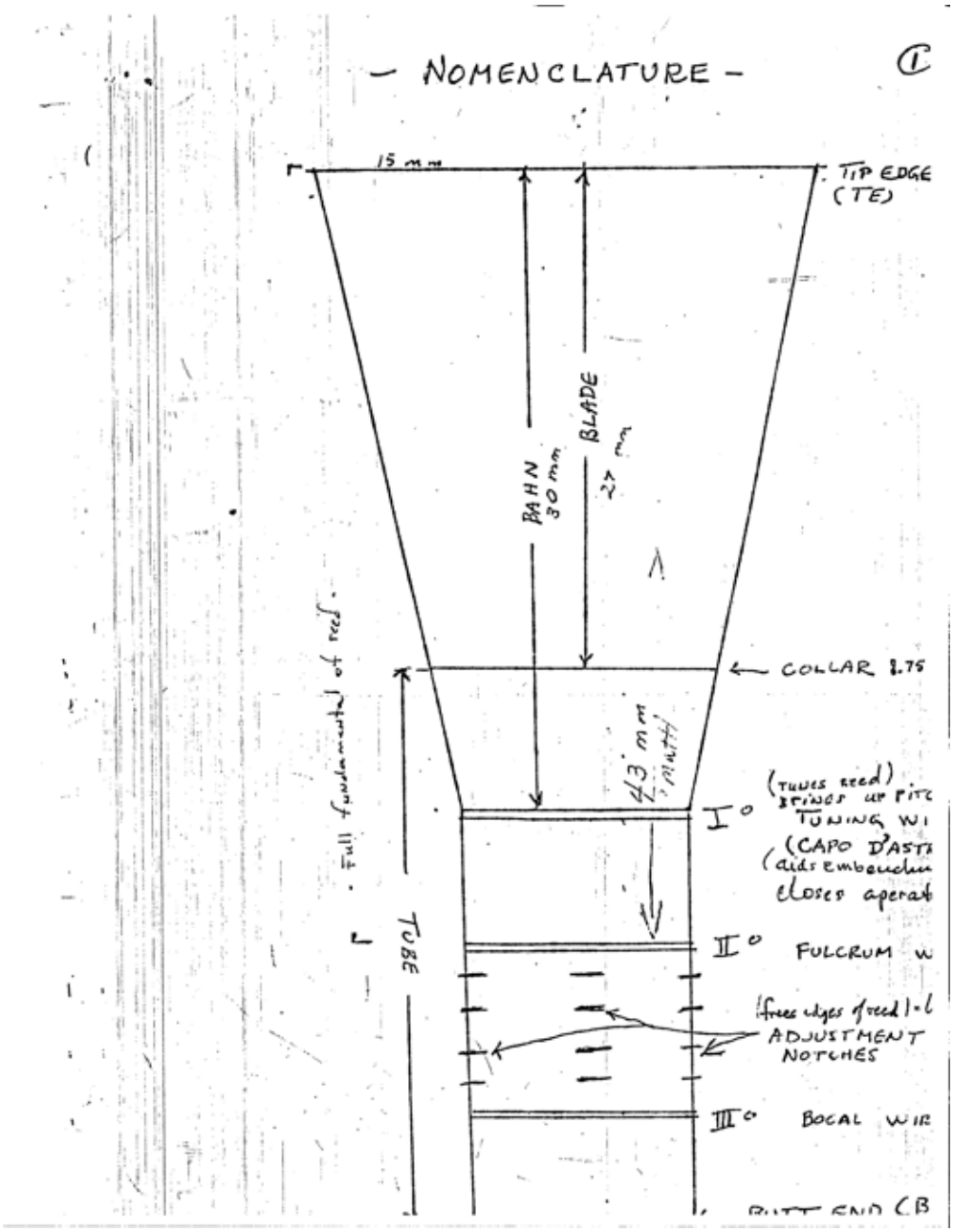


Illustration 14 a

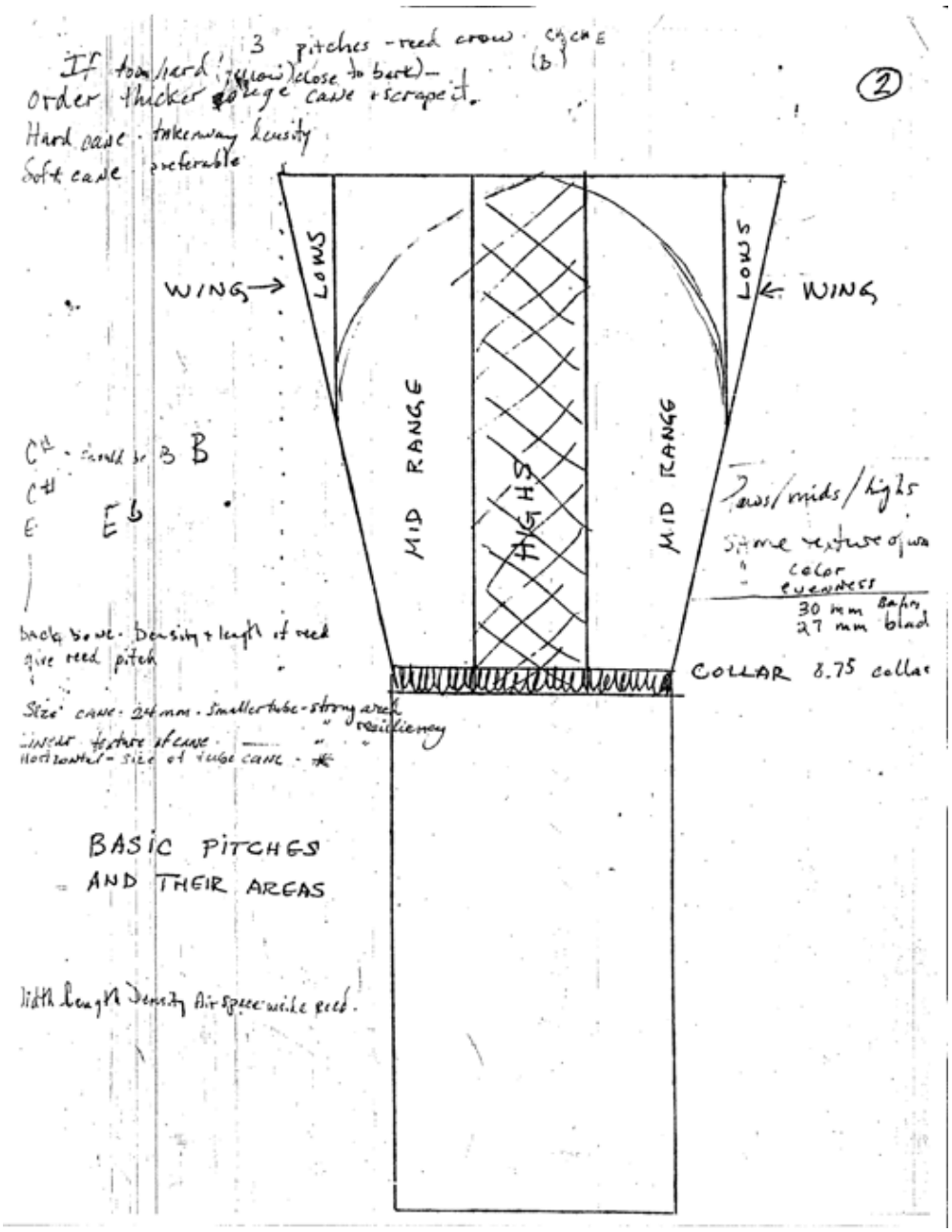


Illustration 14 b

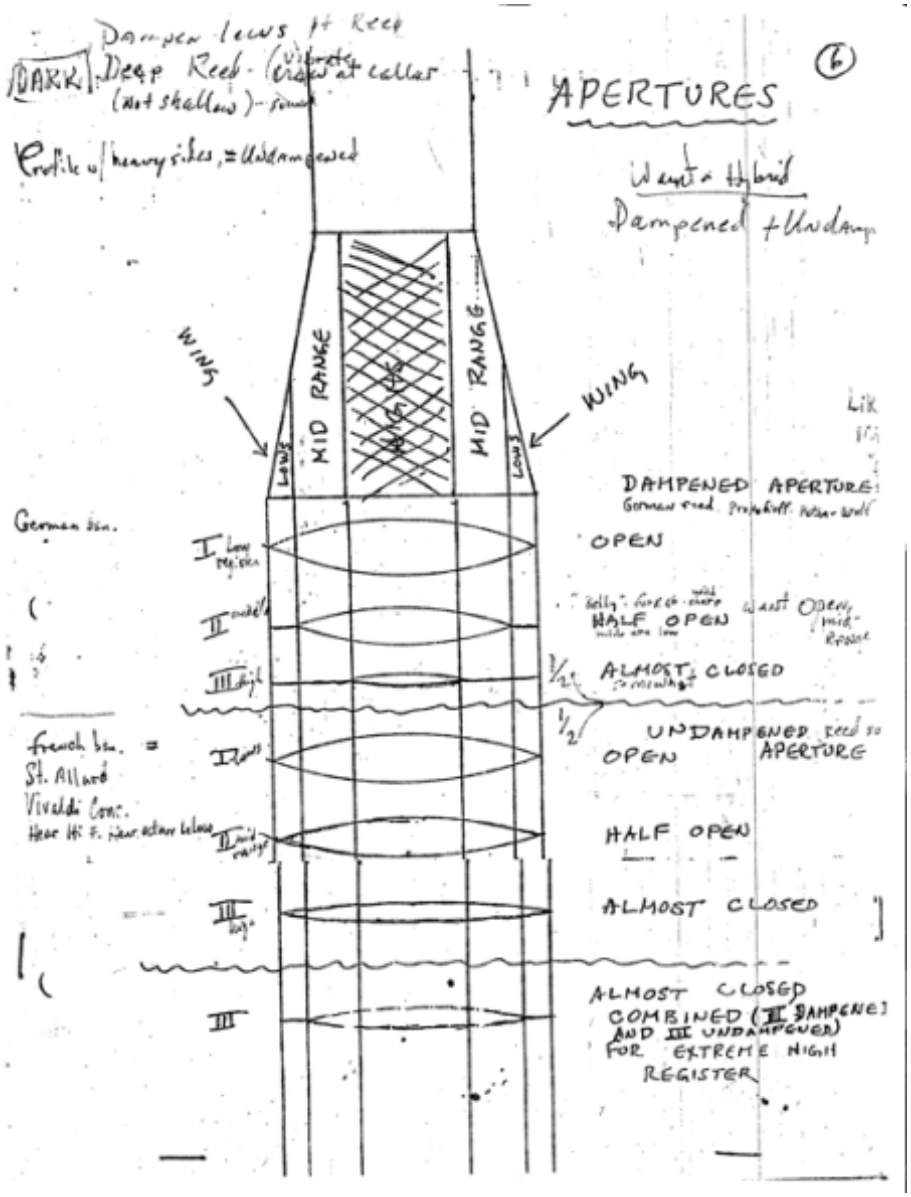


Illustration 14 c

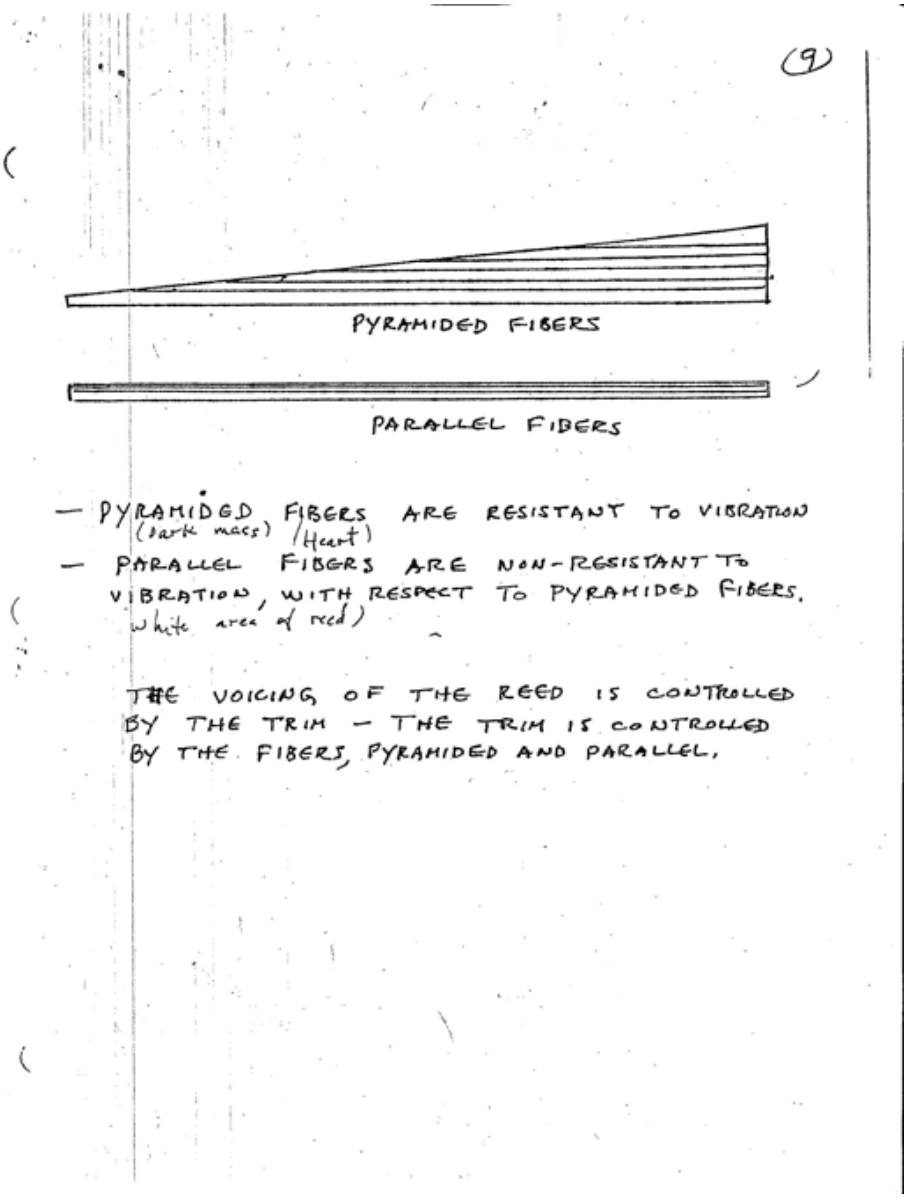


Illustration 14 d

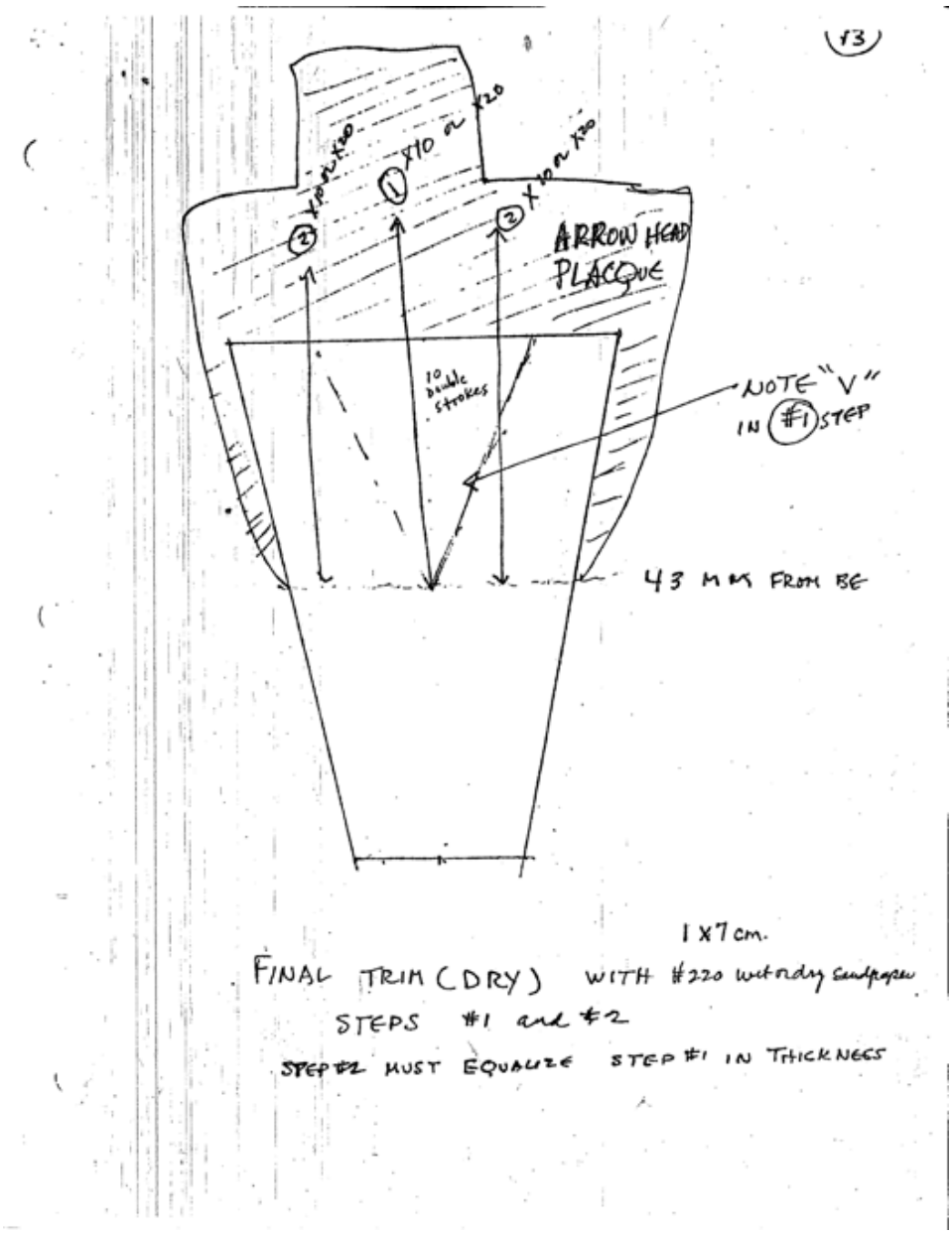


Illustration 14 e

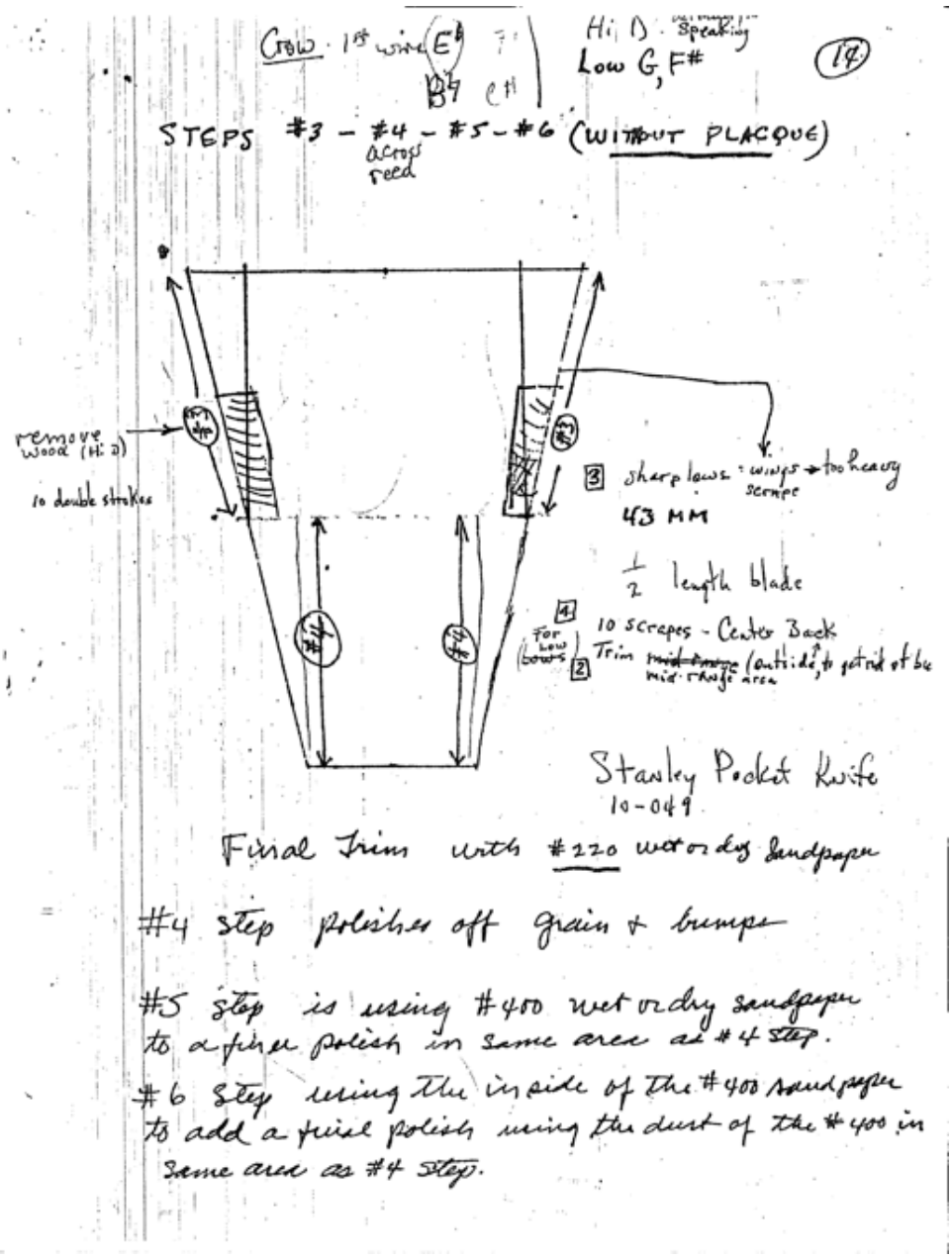


Illustration 14 f

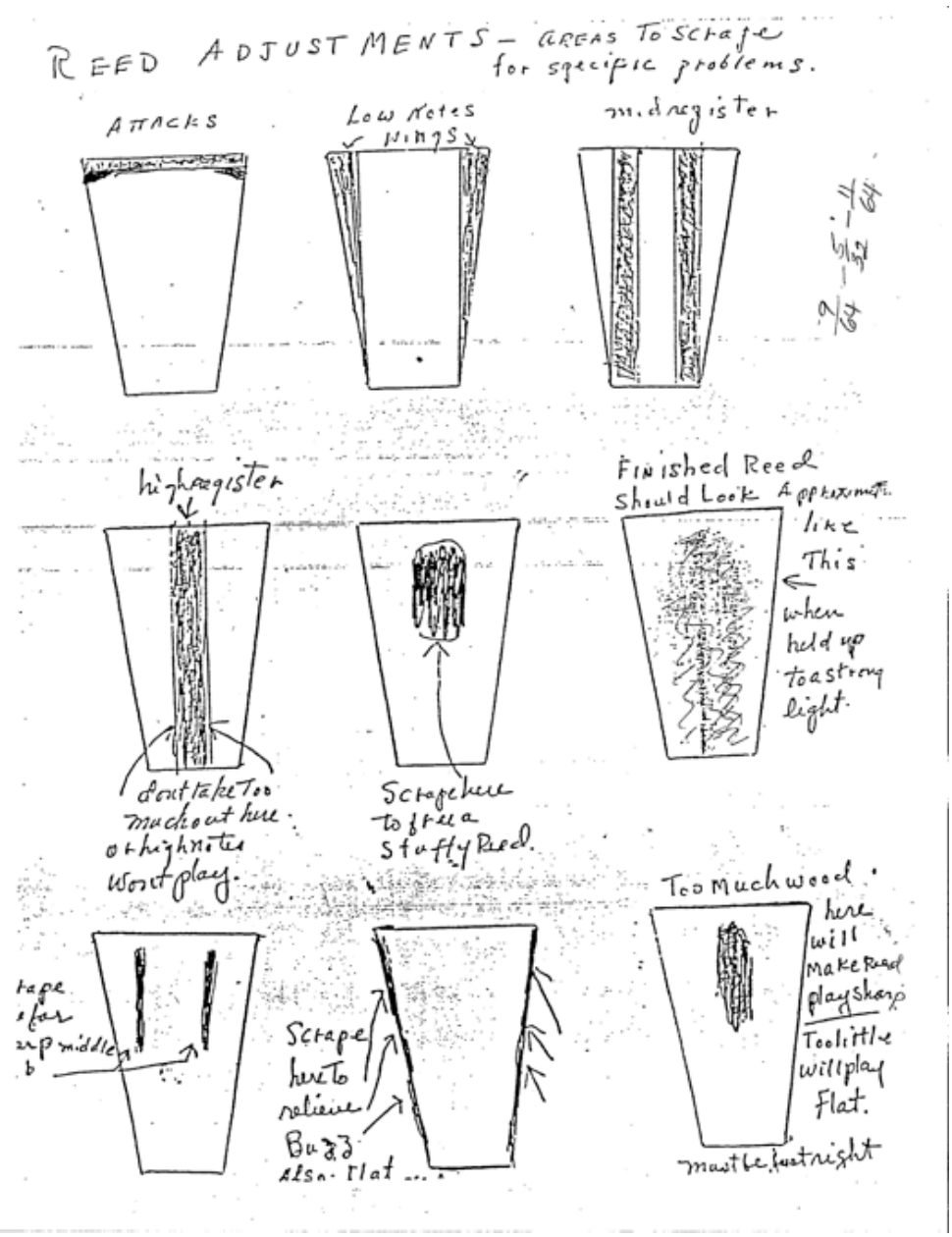


Illustration 14 g

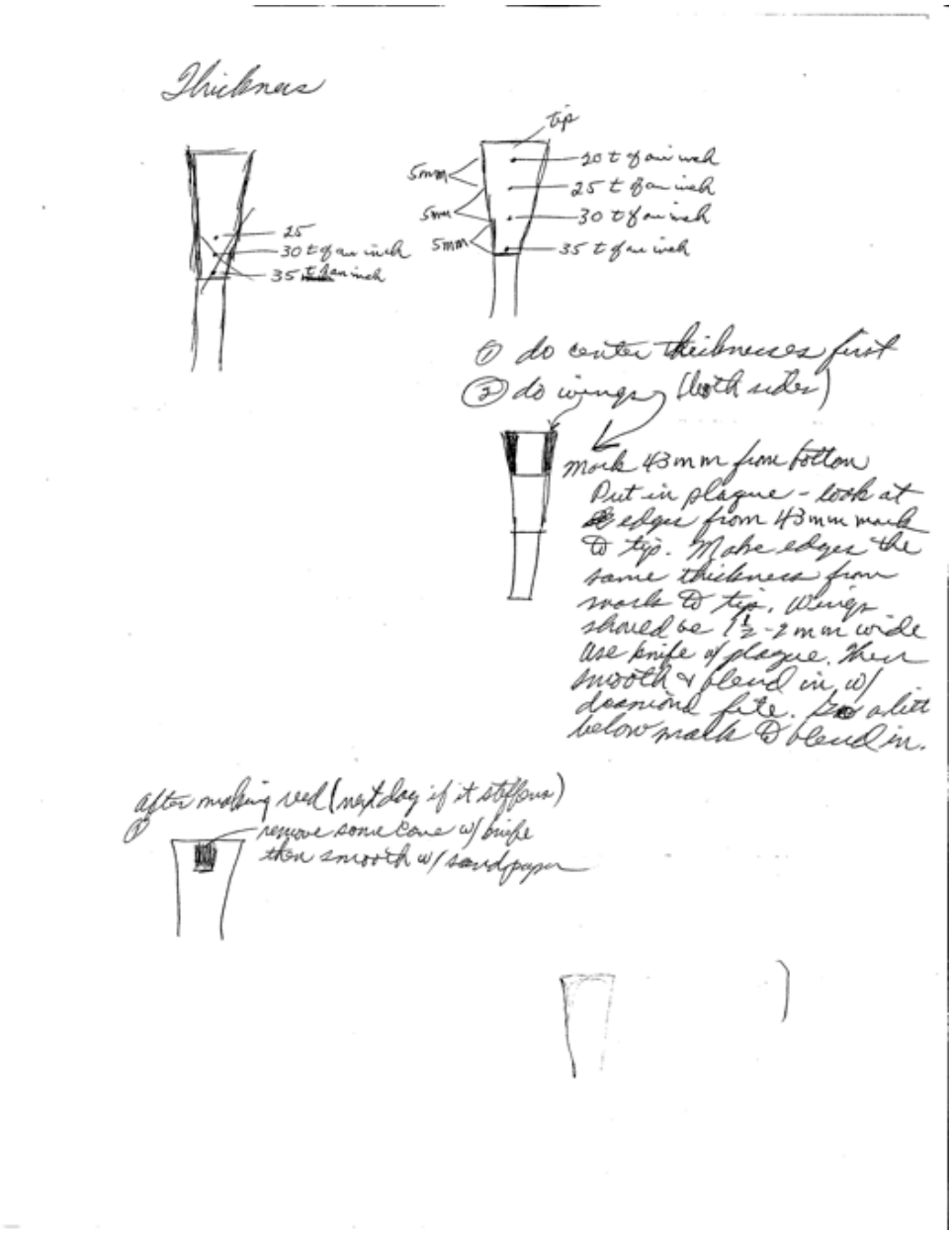


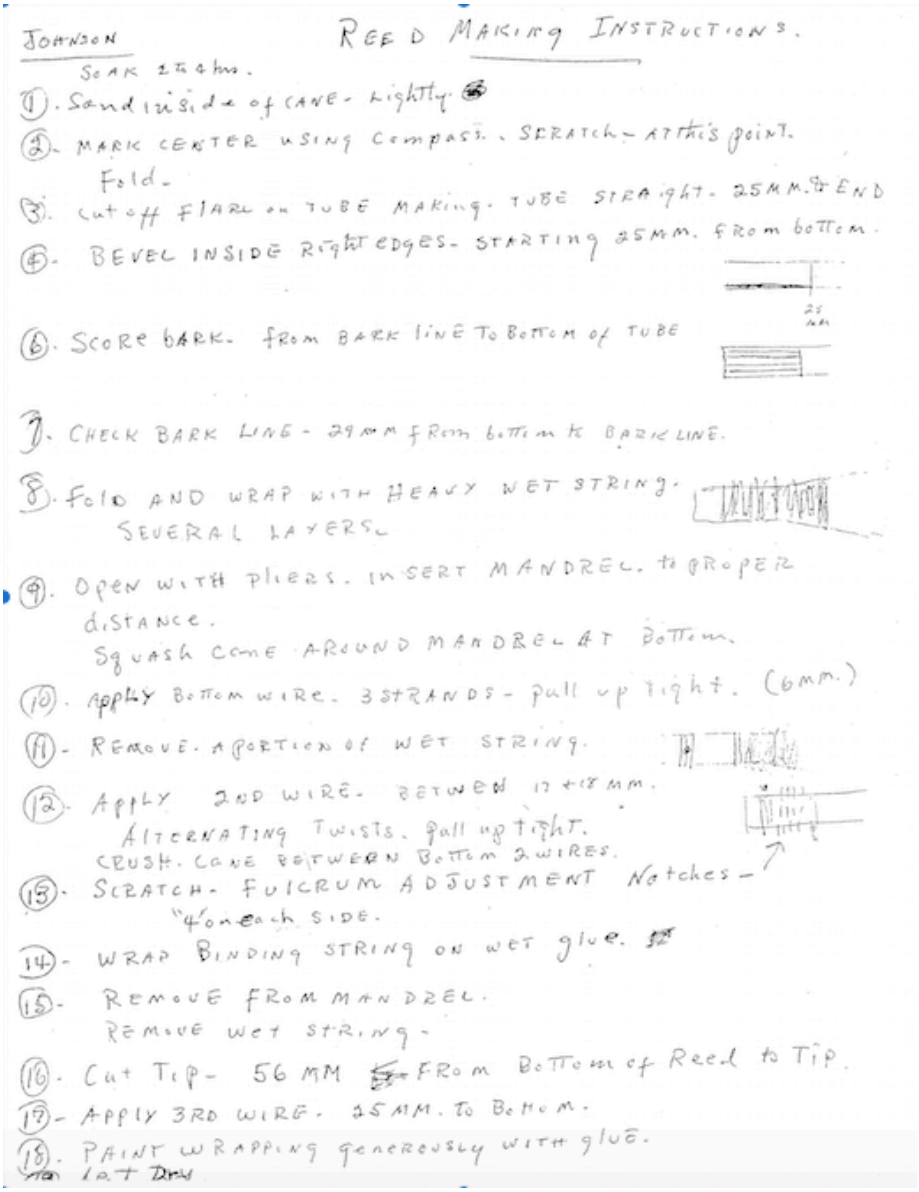
Illustration 14 h

Illustration 14: Reed diagrams.

In Illustrations 13 and 14, Johnson instructs the students to soak the cane for 15 minutes before the first steps of construction. She marks the shoulder at 29mm from the bottom of the reed. She also diagrams the different areas of a reed and explains what

part of the bassoon ranges they influence. The shape of the inside of the reed at various points is also explained. The reed adjustment page offers diagrams and places to scrape depending on the problems the reed may be experiencing including attacks, low notes, middle register, high register, stuffy or buzzy reeds, and flat reeds. Johnson also relied on the crow of the reed to assist her in adjustment. Many students noted that when she crowed, or played the reed without the instrument, she knew exactly what needed to be done to make the reed better. Her enthusiasm about reed-making aided her in becoming an extremely effective reed technician and teacher.

Johnson taught for many decades. Her instructions changed as she developed her own reed-making, observed other methods, and worked with students. Illustration 16 presents three pages of her last revelations about reed-making.


JOHNSON

REED MAKING INSTRUCTIONS.

SOAK 2 to 4 hrs.

1. Sand inside of CANE - lightly.
2. MARK CENTER USING Compass. SCRATCH - AT this point. Fold.
3. cut off FLARE on TUBE MAKING. TUBE STRAIGHT. 25MM. @ END
4. BEVEL INSIDE RIGHT EDGES. STARTING 25MM. FROM bottom.
6. SCORE BARK. FROM BARK LINE TO BOTTOM of TUBE
7. CHECK BARK LINE - 29MM FROM bottom TO BARK LINE.
8. Fold AND WRAP WITH HEAVY WET STRING. SEVERAL LAYERS.
9. OPEN WITH PLIERS. INSERT MANDREL. to PROPER distance. Squash CANE AROUND MANDREL AT Bottom.
10. Apply Bottom WIRE. 3 STRANDS - pull up tight. (6mm.)
11. REMOVE. A PORTION of WET STRING.
12. APPLY 2ND WIRE. BETWEEN 17 + 18 MM. ALTERNATING Twists. pull up tight. CRUSH. CANE BETWEEN Bottom 2 WIRES.
13. SCRATCH - FULCRUM ADJUSTMENT Notches - "4" on each SIDE.
14. WRAP BINDING STRING ON WET glue.
15. REMOVE FROM MANDREL. REMOVE wet STRING -
16. Cut TIP - 56 MM FROM Bottom of Reed to TIP.
17. APPLY 3RD WIRE. 25 MM. To Bottom.
18. PAINT WRAPPING generously WITH glue.

Let Dry

Illustration 15, page 1

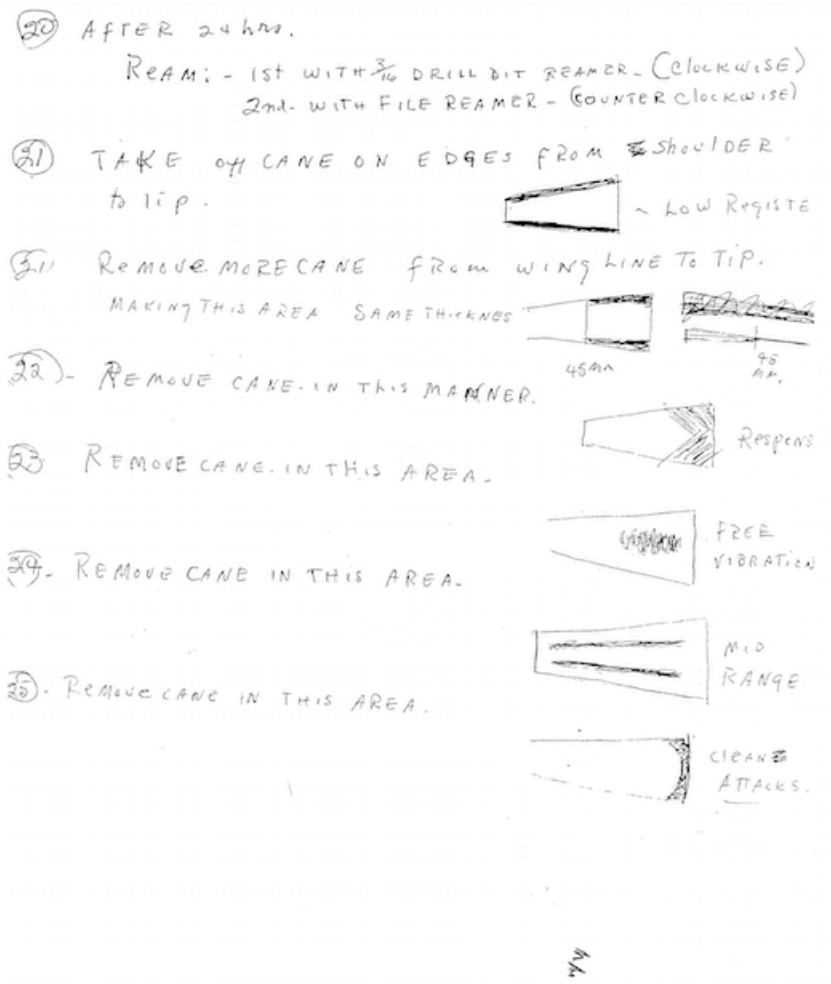


Illustration 15, page 2

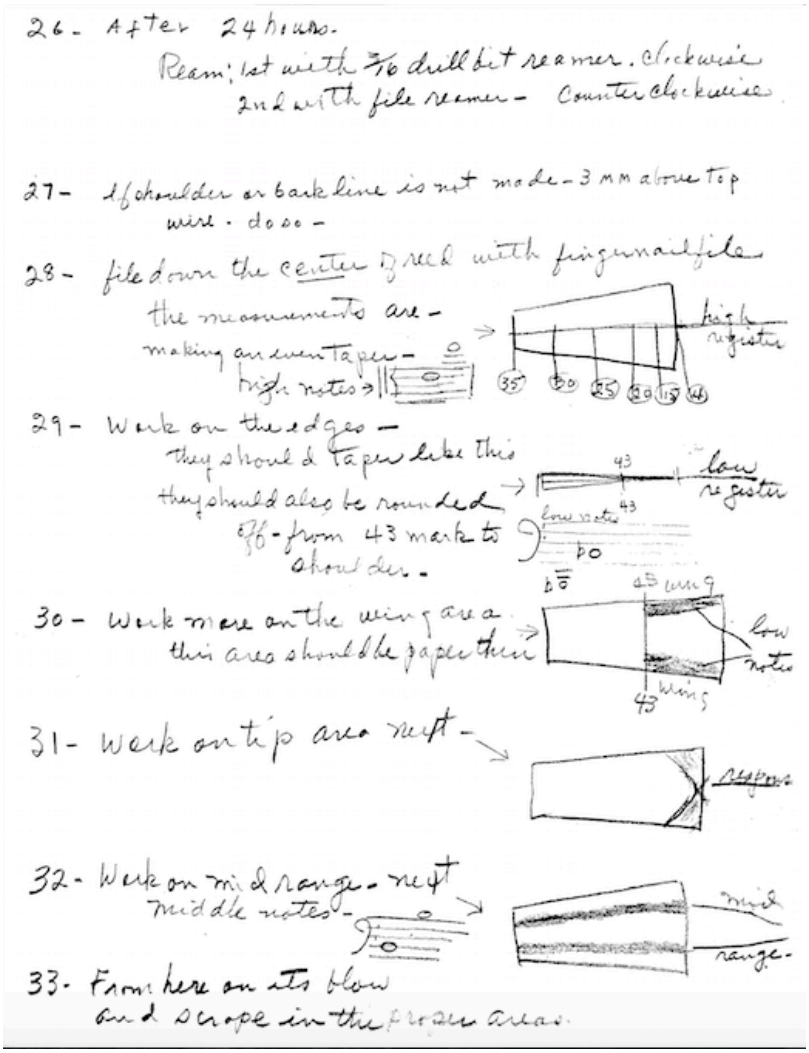
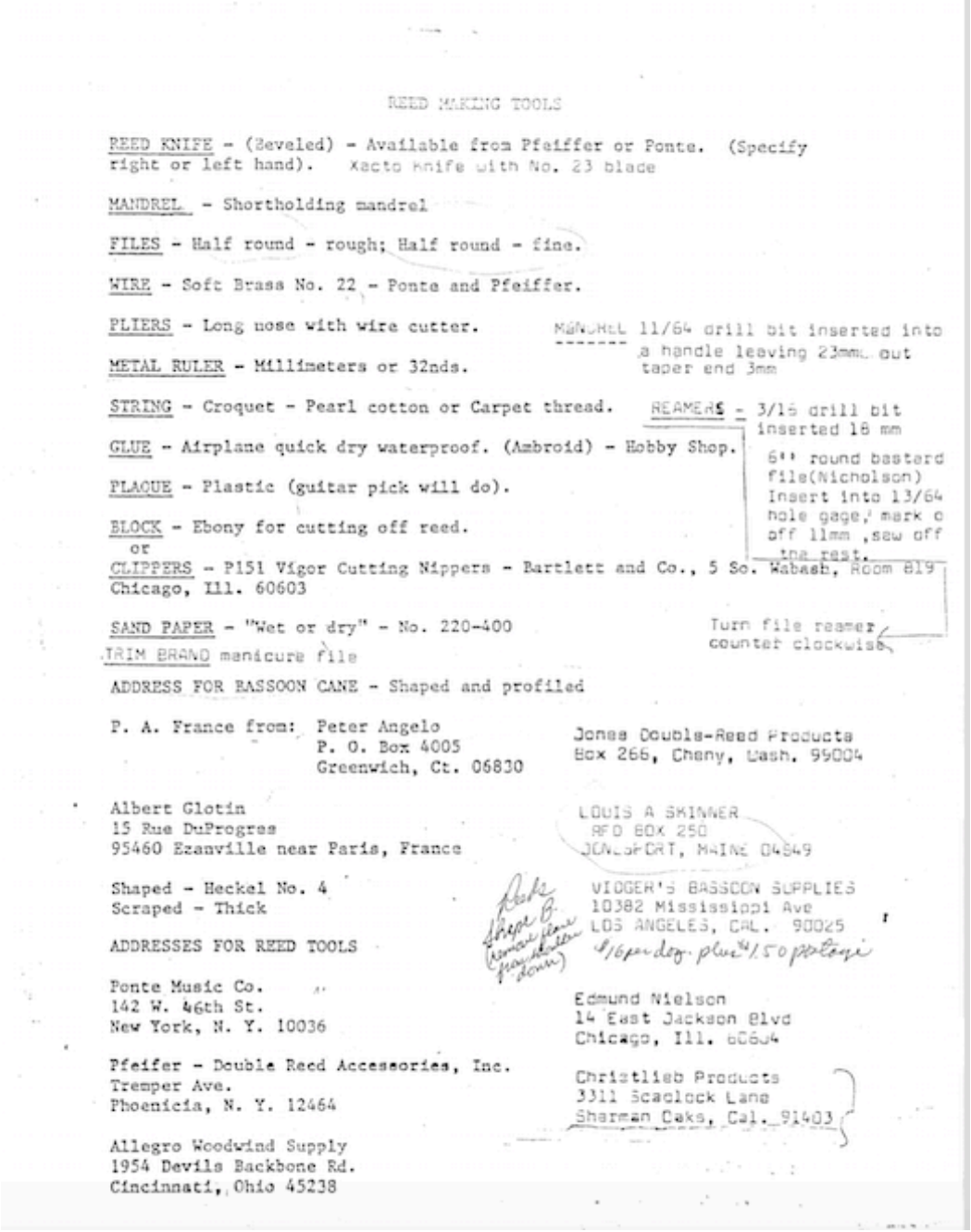


Illustration 15, page 3

Illustration 15: Additional Instructions on Reed-making (3 page list)



REED MAKING TOOLS

REED KNIFE - (Beveled) - Available from Pfeiffer or Ponte. (Specify right or left hand). Xacto knife with No. 23 blade

MANDREL - Shortholding mandrel

FILES - Half round - rough; Half round - fine.

WIRE - Soft Brass No. 22 - Ponte and Pfeiffer.

PLIERS - Long nose with wire cutter.

METAL RULER - Millimeters or 32nds.

STRING - Croquet - Pearl cotton or Carpet thread.

GLUE - Airplane quick dry waterproof. (Ambroid) - Hobby Shop.

PLAQUE - Plastic (guitar pick will do).

BLOCK - Ebony for cutting off reed.
or
CLIPPERS - P151 Vigor Cutting Nippers - Bartlett and Co., 5 So. Wabash, Room 819 Chicago, Ill. 60603

SAND PAPER - "Wet or dry" - No. 220-400

TRIM BRAND manicure file

ADDRESS FOR BASSOON CANE - Shaped and profiled

P. A. France from: Peter Angelo
P. O. Box 4005
Greenwich, Ct. 06830

Albert Glotin
15 Rue DuProgres
95460 Ezanville near Paris, France

Shaped - Heckel No. 4
Scraped - Thick

ADDRESSES FOR REED TOOLS

Ponte Music Co.
142 W. 46th St.
New York, N. Y. 10036

Pfeifer - Double Reed Accessories, Inc.
Tremper Ave.
Phoenicia, N. Y. 12464

Allegro Woodwind Supply
1954 Devils Backbone Rd.
Cincinnati, Ohio 45238

MANDREL 11/64 drill bit inserted into a handle leaving 23mm. out taper end 3mm

REAMERS - 3/16 drill bit inserted 18 mm 6" round bastard file(Nicholson) Insert into 13/64 hole gage, mark o off 11mm, saw off the rest.

Turn file reamer counter clockwise

Jones Double-Reed Products
Box 266, Chany, Wash. 99004

LOUIS A SKINNER
RFD BOX 250
JONESPORT, MAINE 04649

VIDGER'S BASSOON SUPPLIES
10382 Mississippi Ave
LOS ANGELES, CAL. 90025
$1/6 per doz. plus $1.50 postage

Edmund Nielson
14 East Jackson Blvd
Chicago, Ill. 60604

Christlieb Products
3311 Seaclock Lane
Sherman Oaks, Cal. 91403

Illustration 16: Reed-making Tools and Companies

Some highlights of her final reed-making instructions, shown in Illustration 16, include soaking a piece of gouged, shaped, and profiled cane for two to four hours, scoring bark from the bark line to the bottom of the tube, wrapping it with heavy wet

string, and adding fulcrum adjustment notches (mentioned later). Her bottom wire was placed at 6mm from the bottom of the tube. The middle wire was placed between 17 and 18mm from the bottom, and the top wire was at 25mm. She also states that the shoulder line should start 3mm above the top wire. Johnson insisted on keeping the top wire either completely off or loose, until after the reed had been reamed and the tip was clipped. Her purpose for this was to ensure that the reed was able to produce an open round sound. If the top of the reed was already constricted by the wire, it was unable to be open enough to produce the full sound she insisted her students strive for. Like many other professional bassoonists in the United States, Johnson borrowed techniques from some and developed her own through experience, thus creating her personalized style of making reeds.

Because of her growing reputation, bassoonists from other parts of the country sought guidance from Johnson. Denise Reig Turner, current bassoon professor at the University of New Mexico and assistant principal/2nd bassoonist of the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra, only studied with Johnson during two summers in the 1980's for a total of about six weeks. That time was extremely influential and beneficial to Turner, then a student at the University of New Mexico. She was from Chicago and her style of making reeds was not conducive to the climate of the desert southwest; her reeds fell apart in the arid, higher elevations of New Mexico. Her bassoon teacher at the time, Artemis Edwards, used plastic reeds. Turner tried plastic reeds for a year and a half to no avail. Finally, the oboe professor at New Mexico, Darrel Randall, suggested she contact Betty Johnson, with whom he played with at the Peninsula Music Festival in the summers. Turner ended up spending time in Oklahoma City learning how to make

reeds.

Turner has fond memories about her time with Johnson. She stayed in a hotel, would have lessons twice a day for six days, and then pay Johnson for the week. Johnson would give Turner rides to and from the hotel and share coffee with her. Turner recalls Johnson's generosity and warmth of spirit. "She was very generous with her time… We had a great time. She was just very warm and kind. … I relearned how to make reeds with her. I would chat with her husband... We would have coffee sometimes. It was a very pleasant nurturing environment, conducive to learning."[356] Johnson provided an excellent atmosphere to learn. Turner appreciated the opportunity to study with Johnson. She explains the general aspects about making reeds that she acquired from Johnson:

> The main things I worked on with her were finishing: Channel, heart balance, measurement, and ratio of the channels to the heart. She was always about improving the ratio of good reeds to the bad ones. She taught me about consistency and method. Always doing everything the same way and being more consistent. My reed-making was really messed up. I used to put my wires, glue and thread on, all at the same time. She encouraged the prepping thing, letting things set longer, readjusting. She still did stuff with wires, string and glue. She did it the traditional way when I studied with her. It was very methodical, step-by-step on how she did things.[357]

The concepts Turner learned aided her greatly in negotiating the required difference of making reeds in the humid, sea level Chicago climate, and her new higher elevation home in the desert southwest.

Turner remembers specific reed-making tips, as well as some origins of Johnson's reed-making. Although Johnson was in many ways self-taught, she revealed

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356 Denise Rieg Turner, phone interview by author, May 30, 2014.

357 Ibid.

to Turner some instructions that she had from Louis Skinner. According to Turner, "She [Betty] had shared with me his notes on reed-making which is basically the stuff that is now in Skinner's book."[358] Turner still uses the fulcrum adjustment notches that she says Johnson had learned from Skinner.[359] According to his book, "Adjustment notches are essential for later alterations to the tube between wires II and III, which will affect response and pitch."[360] The author of this study recalls Johnson saying the notches help the bottom two wires work together. Skinner's instructions on how to file in the notches are also relayed in his book much like Johnson explained to her students. "With the knife-edge file, cut in adjustment notches (four or five of them) between wires III and II, on the center panels, and on the sides of the tube."[361] Further instructions from Johnson specified that the notches should begin slightly above halfway from the bottom between the two wires and that they should be exactly the same length apart from one another and even with the other three sides. Johnson was very aware of Skinner's reed-making discoveries. Demonstrating her passion and affinity for discovering new tools to make the process easier and more systematic, Johnson introduced the use of the dial indicator to Turner:[362]

> I had never heard of it. None of my other teachers had taught with a dial indicator. I learned about the dial indicator from her. I had already learned a lot about balancing the reed on my own. You know, look at it through the light,

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358 McRay, James R., *The Bassoon Reed Manual: Louis Skinner's Theories and Techniques.* [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000.]

360 McRay, James R., *The Bassoon Reed Manual: Louis Skinner's Theories and Techniques.* [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000], 33.

361 Ibid., 105.

362 A dial indicator is a tool used to measure the thickness of the cane or reed.

> look at your shadings, the darker areas, how the crow sounds. All that stuff is relative. But the dial indicator was a huge thing for me, and a huge investment at the time and I still have that one [dial]. It helped level the playing field. It helped with what you can't see.[363]

Numerous students credit Johnson as the first person to teach and encourage the use of this essential tool. Another important concept in reed-making is working with the channels, the area of the reed between the spine and the rails (sides). Turner recalls the skills that Johnson relayed to her for successful channel scraping: [364]

> She always scraped the channels backwards from the collar to the tip. She would cradle it in her thumb and scrape backwards. I didn't do that before. She would scrape upside down towards gravity, which makes perfect sense. She flipped it. I have learned scraping up and fanning out, but that was in Chicago. This was significant. It was the opposite and I liked it. In fact, I still do it.[365]

Regarding this specific area of the reed, the author of this document has a vivid recollection of a special tool Johnson adapted for channel scraping. At some point, Johnson discovered an old dental instrument at an estate sale that had an outstanding shape for perfectly scooping cane out of the channels. She had it professionally sharpened and used it often during lessons with pride. According to Johnson, channel scraping was an important part of creating a warm, rich sound desirable for a bassoon.

Like many bassoonists from her generation, Johnson made many of her own reed tools. She looked in creative places to develop them, a practice that this author recalls during her studies with Johnson. She discovered that a drill bit that was glued

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363 Turner, interview.

364 The channel of the reed is the area between the middle of the reed (spine) and the sides of the reed (rails).

365 Turner, interview.

into a wooden handle made a terrific reamer[366] and placing a large nail of an appropriate size placed in that same wooden handle worked as a mandrel.[367] Johnson also used straight-edge shaving blades with wooden handles to make a reed knife. She made sure her students had the same equipment, either giving the tools to her students or letting them pay her for the cost of the materials; just three dollars for mandrels and reamers. Dustin Seay described the Dutch Rush that Johnson discovered growing locally - as close as her own backyard. She called it Reed Rush. "I remember when Mrs. Johnson gave me Dutch "Reed" Rush for the first time. You insert a wooden dowel inside the rush stalk, wet it with water and sand the blades of the reed. The grooves in the Dutch Rush pull the cane fibers out. Such a clever and effective technique![368] In addition to using a wooden dowel, Johnson also used a hot glue gun to fill the inside of the hollow stalk, thus providing a seemingly endless supply of natural sandpaper for bassoonists to use. Whitlaw reports that she still regularly uses the tools Johnson made and admitted that she would be completely lost if they were ever lost. Many of her former students interviewed still have and use the tools that Johnson provided for them.

Betty Johnson had a talent for finding instruments for her students to purchase. In addition to securing instruments for OCU, she was able to use her connections to find students their personal bassoons. Musicians would also contact her when they had a bassoon to sell. Whitlaw describes how Johnson helped her to receive a great deal on a one-of-a-kind instrument:

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366 Tool used to make the opening of the reed which goes onto the bocal, larger; works like a drill bit.

367 Tool used to hold the reed while adjusting it.

368 Seay, interview.

> My bassoon came from a former student of hers who had a repair shop somewhere in Oklahoma. It was apparently a former school-owned bassoon. It's Heckel 5802. Apparently the school system in Oklahoma during a period of time bought a lot of Heckels... I think he might have just given it to her. Anyways, it was not in good condition, but she knew I had very little money and that I needed a bassoon. I was going to graduate [from college] and I had nothing to play. She sold me the bassoon for 600 dollars. Then she called Jim [James] Keyes in Memphis and asked if he could make room in his schedule to see her student and fix up this instrument for her where it can at least play... He did 600 dollars' worth of work, mainly on the butt joint, and suddenly the bassoon was in working condition. I bought a bocal for 600 dollars as well. So, a Heckel bassoon for $1,800 essentially, which I've basically played for everything.

Others appreciated Whitlaw's new treasure, and an examination by some raised the question, still a mystery, that asks who was the original owner of this unique bassoon:

> When Chris Millard[369] first played it, he said, "You realize you have basically won the lottery with this instrument." And then Clouser[370] played it once 6 or 7 years ago and said, "Oh my gosh, this feels exactly like my 7000." So this is not a normal 5,000. I just got it restored last year [2014] and he said that's it's a short bore, which most 5,000's are long bores. He thinks it was custom made for somebody in Vienna. How it got to Oklahoma, I would love to know. I just felt that basically she gave me that instrument. It plays beautifully.[371]

Because of her reputation throughout the country, Johnson was a point of contact for someone who had a bassoon to buy or sell. She knew people with a supply and had students with a demand for instruments.

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369 Chris Millard studied with Sol Schoenbach and played principal bassoon in the Vancouver Symphony and the CBC Radio Symphony Orchestra for 28 years. For 20 years, he was the bassoon professor for the National Youth Orchestra in Canada. "Christopher Millard," *Arts Programs at the Banff Center,* http://www.banffcentre.ca/faculty/faculty-member/3533/christopher-millard/ (accessed July 29).

370 John Clouser has been the principal bassoonist of the Cleveland Orchestra since the 1997-1998 season. He is also the head of the Bassoon Department at the Cleveland Institute of music. "The Cleveland Orchestra: John Clouser," *The Cleveland Orchestra and Musical Arts Association*, 2015, http://www.clevelandorchestra.com/About/Musicians-and-Conductors/Meet-the-Musicians/A-L-Musicians/Clouser-John/ (accessed July 29, 2015).

371 Whitlaw, interview.

In summation, Johnson worked hard to develop her own skills as a bassoonist. In addition, she took her knowledge and broke it down into pedagogical lessons to give to others. She was able to reach them through a variety of ways and discover the different methods and styles that worked for each individual. Because of her talents as a teacher, positive attitude, work ethic, and love for the bassoon, she developed effective methods to pass on essential ideas and concepts through specific instruction, metaphor, example, and application. Johnson's teaching method lives on through generations of her students; those interviewed in this study appear eager to carry her style of instruction to their own pupils.

CHAPTER FIVE: LEGACY

Betty Johnson made a strong and lasting impression on a substantial number of people in her field and through the music world. Her influence and instruction started the careers of many bassoonists, and her dedication seemingly carried forward an orchestra. Upon learning that Johnson's life and pedagogy would be documented, most of the potential interviewees remarked how happy they were that her story was being told. Even those who only knew Johnson by reputation or name recognition, and thus declined to participate in the interview process, were eager to learn more about her life and methods; she garnered much admiration from them. OCU Dean, Mark Parker, feels that Oklahomans admired and spoke of her with respect, even though they did not know about her broad reputation:

> I think she was much better known across the country and music world more than the people in Oklahoma knew about. She never brought it up. She was a big player. The long-standing public school teachers, everybody respected her. But they didn't know that across the country she was as big as she was. She didn't tell people.[372]

Parker believed that one of Johnson's most unusual qualities was her humility as she was not one to talk about her own reputation and popularity.

One of her most successful students was Arthur Grossman, who began studying with Johnson in 1945 at the age of 11. His mother, Anna Grossman, played First Violin in the symphony with Johnson from 1943 to 1961.[373] After his first two lessons with the second bassoonist in the Oklahoma Symphony, his mother decided he should study with

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372 Parker, interview.

373 Grossman, interview.

Johnson. He continued weekly lessons with her throughout junior high and high school.

As previously mentioned, Johnson believed that the best way to learn how to play was to be thrown into the middle of a performance setting and just do it. When Arthur was 13, the orchestra needed a third bassoonist to play Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* for the next season. She gave him the third part in the spring and told him if he practiced it every day for three hours for the entire summer she would get him into the orchestra to perform it. He was successful and continued to play with the Oklahoma Symphony whenever they needed a third bassoon or contrabassoon part covered. When asked why he was chosen, Grossman said, "I guess I was the most promising of her students at the time. It was a wonderful opportunity for me… the young man who had held that role previously had left town. I guess I was next in line."[374] Johnson also encouraged her students to audition for everything they possibly could and did her best to open the world up to them. Whitlaw recalls the encouragement she received to try for everything:

> Before her [Betty], my summer consisted of playing outside in my neighborhood… The minute I walked into her house, she was like, okay, you need to sign up for the Oklahoma Youth Orchestra. If you don't have the money, I'll help you fill out a scholarship form. If you don't have a ride, I'm gonna help you find a way to get there. You have to apply for the Oklahoma Summer Arts Institute. Here's how you do this application. You WILL audition for every single camp nationally. This is the way she worked. And so she just broadened everybody's world big time. It was because of her that I went to Australia with the youth orchestra.[375]

Whitlaw credits Johnson with opening the world up to her and positively shaping the course of her life. Johnson knew that experience was the best foundation for

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374 Ibid.

375 Whitlaw, interview.

improvement. She not only encouraged her students to be as involved as possible, she did everything she could to help them achieve lofty goals.

The personal relationships Johnson had with her students played a significant role in their lives. Grossman, for example, viewed Johnson as a second mother. She fulfilled the role of not just a bassoon teacher, but also a real mentor for him. He would write her letters from college at the Curtis Institute and often came to Oklahoma to visit the Johnsons; they became close friends as the years went by. Upon settling into his position in as a Professor at the University of Washington, he even made special trips home to Oklahoma to see Betty and make sure she was doing well. She joined him in Seattle for a Bassoon Bash. An alumnus of Classen High School, Grossman had performed under Art Johnson, then his band director, so they were very familiar as well. When asked about Betty Johnson's lasting influence on him, Grossman responded:

> As a bassoonist and musician, she influenced me a lot by repeating the focus on the beauty of the sound and using that to carry the musical idea. Personally, she was almost like a substitute mother for me and we became very close and just the things she said to me about life and how to get along, were very, very valuable. She taught me not to focus on the negative things so much as to focus on what you could do to get better yourself.[376]

Because of her commitment to her students, her belief in their ability, and knack of guiding young players, Johnson gave Grossman his first start and the tools he needed to develop into one of America's most renowned and outstanding bassoonists.

As another student who became successful, Larry Reed explains how Johnson has influenced him as both a musician and person:

> I thought of her as one of the most significant influences on my entire quality of life really: my parents, my grandparents, and Betty Johnson. She instilled in me

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376 Grossman, interview.

> a true love for music that already existed but she took it to the next level because of her love for the bassoon. And I was in awe of her as many young kids are. She was patient, kind, joking, and played right along next to you. That made me want to sound like her and that obviously had a dramatic influence on my concept of playing. She could be tough, and it kind of shook me. I remember it to this day and I went home and practiced. She knew what it took to succeed, probably because of her own experience. She was largely self-taught, especially in the early years.[377]

Reed later added, "The most important thing was the passion she instilled in me on bassoon. And of course I followed her model as far as teaching. I had a rough idea and wrote it down in my syllabus that I used to teach."[378] Few people got to know Johnson as a teacher, friend, and colleague as well as Larry Reed. His insight into her life and the obvious rapport the two shared made a lifelong impact on him:

> The things that made her shine as a teacher: she was someone special and someone you would recommend a student of yours to go study with. She loved it. She was not a slave driver. She was not one to sit back and try to dictate how it should go. She was always in on the lesson experience. She would sing to you. She would laugh. She would play along. She would sing how she thought it should go. It was always a great experience to go to a lesson. I was motivated to be prepared because of that. I knew I would let her down if I wasn't…and I let her down a few times. You know how that goes. It's all about love for the music and everything music and the bassoon is in particular.[379]

The impact that Johnson made on Reed's life is apparent. He continues to rely on her advice today and pass on her wisdom to his students.

The instruction that Denise Reig Turner received during those summers in Oklahoma with Johnson provided her with a lifetime of knowledge. Turner reflects on the various aspects that made Johnson an outstanding teacher:

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377 Reed, interview.

378 Ibid.

379 Ibid.

> She took the time to work with me and didn't charge me an arm and a leg. She knew I was spending all I had to fly out and get a hotel. That aspect was to be a human being with kindness because there's someone who really wants to learn and I was willing to save up and so what I could to pay her. And she would always give more time. She would give as much as I needed or she thought I needed, which is what I do with my own students. If they need more time, I stick in extra stuff because people did that with me. Because of that, I think I'm a little more flexible. She was very generous with her time and she was very patient. That's something I also respect because you can't be in a hurry when you play or teach the bassoon. It's not a cramming instrument. You have to be patient with reeds when you screw them up. When she talked about reeds, you made sure you work on one blade. You try it and then you work on the other blade. You don't scrape, scrape, scrape on each and hope that's the right thing to do. She was very systematic in doing things. I learned that from her.[380]

Turner reflects on the aspects of Johnson's personality that are just as important as her expertise in playing and teaching the bassoon:

> She was a nice person. She was a kind person. She was the kind of person you wanted to be around. She was always positive. No rainy dark clouds there. No mood swings. None of that temperamental stuff. Even if I had trouble learning certain concepts, she was always patient and reiterating. I learned from her in that aspect. They were all good qualities. They are things we all strive to be in life. She had those qualities and she passed them on by example. Musicians are not all like that and it's unfortunate. In a field that is highly competitive, where you're always striving to improve and do your best in a constantly changing field, you need to stay on top. She was great at all that stuff.[381]

The example in her playing, teaching, and general personality even provided a solid example for students who generally spent minimal time with her. It did not take long for Johnson to make a long-lasting impression on Turner.

Johnson's teaching personality, reputation, and her reactions during lessons also made a lasting impression on Dustin Seay, too:

> Mrs. Johnson was kind, light-hearted, patient, encouraging, proud, and funny. She was in her 70's when I studied with her. Betty was a well-respected,

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380 Turner, interview.

381 Ibid.

> talented and famous musician! She had a lifetime of stories to teach with and to share. Every lesson we had, was a vital experience for me. I liked it when she played for me, and when we would play duets. "[382]

Johnson's instructions permeated other areas of her students' lives. Seay continues describing how she has influenced him personally in his music and beyond:

> Mrs. Johnson taught me how to work hard, how to think like a musician, and how to get creative. She showed me how to get around and work through a difficult musical passage or stubborn reed. Mrs. Johnson laid the groundwork for how I operate, function, and think about music, bassoon and everyday-life routine. Whether I work on a reed, cook a meal, or exercise, she taught me to "never give up and see things through to completion." Like a musical phrase, see your breath through to the every end. Never clip the ends of notes and phrases. Push through with you wind and your thinking to what is next. Thinking ahead and staying calm without losing focus and concentration while playing has been a major challenge of mine since I was young. It has taken me years to harness, but I have much better self-control and focus when I play than I've ever had before in my life. Mrs. Johnson was a major part of my success![383]

Johnson played a major role in many of her students' lives beyond the scope of lessons. Tracie Whitlaw remembers the influence Johnson had on her exposure to chamber music. Johnson was a champion of small ensembles. She loved to coach her students of all ages. During college, she coached Whitlaw throughout her time at OCU. After college, she recalls a trio she played in and a funny anecdote involving Johnson's music:

> After college, I lived in Kansas for a year doing a National Endowment for the Arts rural residency program with a woodwind trio. She coached us a couple of times and gave us some music. She had some really interesting old French woodwind trios. They had car tire marks on them. I very specifically remember the woodwind quintet Five Easy Dances she gave me another time that also had tire marks on them. She told me the story. She was quite absent-minded and she would put her music on top of her car while getting other things in and drive off. She always had *Property of Betty Johnson* marked on her stuff. That paid off in

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382 Seay, interview.

383 Ibid.

> more than one instance. This was pre-photocopier days. People would actually find the stuff and mail it back to her. She would drive over her music and then people would find it and send it back.[384]

Music with tire marks and a good story were not the only impressions Johnson left on chamber music.

Johnson shaped the Oklahoma City Philharmonic through her longevity and lasting influence. When she finally retired from the symphony, she had played under every conductor, including the current one Joel Levine, starting with the formation of the Oklahoma Symphony in 1937. She showed respect to everyone and had, at the least, amicable relationships with her conductors. Reed describes her feelings about the conductors she played under, noting that Johnson had "great respect for Guy Frasier Harrison and for Victor Alessandro. Her relationship with Herrera de la Fuenta was mixed, but I think they generally had a good relationship. She loved Ray Luke."[385]

The only conductor whom Johnson had any tension with was the final one with whom she worked with, undoubtedly due more to circumstance than personality. Even through the difficult and controversial times when her sickness and retirement became an issue, Johnson was outwardly respectful to the position of musical director. She showed enormous poise and grace dealing with potentially one of the most difficult and times of her life when she had to accept retirement from performing with the orchestra.

Johnson made lasting impressions on colleagues in other instrument sections. Richard Killmer has strong feelings about Johnson and her contributions:

> People around the bassoon know about her. There was a famous bassoon

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384 Whitlaw, interview.

385 Reed, interview.

> concerto that Ray Luke wrote for her. Somehow that recording of her performance got out into the bassoon world and she is known for that recording. People say, "Oh yeah, Betty Johnson. I've heard her play that Ray Luke Concerto. That's really something." So she is known around the bassoon world. She didn't have a lot of students who went out to big jobs, but they know her. I think one of the things she did after I left the orchestra was playing in Fish Creek, Wisconsin with Thor Johnson[386]. I think her playing was starting to be recognized by people who then ran into her. She was gaining even more notoriety around the world of bassoonists. There's no one I've talked to who has any age at all on them when I say Betty Johnson, they say, "oh yeah, we know all about her. She's a legend! Oh, she's a legend!"[387]

Killmer felt it was sad that Johnson did not make recordings and that her reputation with the general public faded as radio broadcasts deceased in popularity:

> I think it's just unfortunate that she didn't make recordings, that more people don't know her by her recordings. I think that Ray Luke Concerto might be the only thing out there. I don't know that for a fact, but that's the only thing. I think that especially as the memory fades. That's why it's so wonderful what you [the author of this research] are doing to keep the memory alive. I think that the other problem is that once the national broadcasts stopped, the national attention to her was not there. A lot of people heard her in those broadcasts. That could be where people heard her play the concerto.[388]

He believes that her spirit lives on through her students:

> Through her students and people who know her playing, but mostly through her students, her spirit will live on: The spirit of being generous, a good person, and a good soul. That's going to live on. Anybody who knew her and understood what she had can't deny it. It has to become a part of you.[389]

Although they spent only three years playing together, the friendship they developed and the wisdom and example Killmer gained from Johnson's influence helped him

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386 Thor Johnson (1913-1975) was the youngest American born and trained conductor of a major symphony when he began to conduct the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra (1946). He also founded the Peninsula Music Festival.

387 Killmer, interview.

388 Ibid.

389 Ibid.

become one of the leaders in his field, and instilled in him concepts to pass on to his students.

People have given Johnson direct credit for changing their lives, or even saving them, in very specific ways. Barre Griffith explains how Johnson changed the course of his life during the war in Southeast Asia.

> The bassoon probably ended up saving my life because when the Vietnam War came around, I was very eligible to be drafted. To make a long story short, I went to school at Arizona State University so I didn't take from Betty Johnson in college because I was out of state… On August 8th, I'll never forget it, my father called and told me I was drafted again and he couldn't get me out. By providence several months before that, I had heard there was a bassoon opening in the Navy Band. So I sent a tape, called them and asked what I needed to do. They said send a tape of your playing. I sent them the best parts of my junior and senior recital. They said yes. Be here Monday. We like your tape.[390]

Griffith arrived in Washington, D.C. and played an audition, sight read and listened to the band. They accepted him into the ensemble. However, the deadline for him to officially enlist without being drafted was shortly upon him. Fortunately, Griffith was able to get all of the requirements for physicals completed in time to join voluntarily. He was not deployed to Vietnam. He describes his gratefulness to Johnson. "It was because of Johnson's teaching that I was able to do as well on the bassoon, and the bassoon probably saved my life. If I had gone to Vietnam, I probably would have been killed by the enemy." Although there is no way to predict whether or not Griffith would have been a casualty of war, one thing is certain: The instruction he received from Johnson during his junior high and high school years provided a foundation of playing which was able to prevent him from seeing combat on the dangerous front lines. Griffith's feelings of gratitude, indebtedness, and genuine love for the lady who, in his

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390 Griffith, interview.

eyes, saved his life, is undeniable and has remained with him throughout his adult years.

Griffith benefitted from Johnson's contacts and reputation throughout the country. He explains how her reputation resulted in a college scholarship that not only paid for his education, but resulted in a job in a professional orchestra:

> In the summertime, Betty Johnson would go to Wisconsin to Fish Creek and she played under a conductor named Guy Taylor. He was the conductor in the Phoenix Symphony in those days. Right before I graduated and had made a decision about where to go to college, he called Betty and asked her if she had a student who would like to come to ASU and play in the Phoenix Symphony as a second bassoonist. She told him she had one who was graduating and he asked me if I would come out and I said why not. So I got a scholarship from ASU and a salary to play in the Phoenix Symphony. It was great spending money and the tuition covered my out of state fee. It was because of Betty; because I knew her. Guy Taylor trusted her word. I didn't have to audition.[391]

Barre has never had to audition for any group except the Navy Band thanks to Johnson. "Everything else I've gotten in has been because of Betty. I'm the Third Bassoonist and Contrabassoonist of the Oklahoma City Philharmonic because of Betty. She told them I could handle the part." Other students, including Arthur Grossman, indicated that they benefitted from her reputation as a musician and teacher. When Johnson spoke, people listened closely.

During her life, Johnson had a reputation as an outstanding player and teacher. In addition to her position at the Oklahoma Symphony, the summer festivals exposed people from all over the world to her playing. Even more influential were the weekly international broadcasts, according to Grossman who recalled that Johnson was known as a "fine bassoon player." Commenting on the ability of popular media of her times, Grossman added that "before the days of abundant recordings and internet, people knew

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391 Griffith, interview.

of her reputation because it had gotten around the grapevine, but very few people had heard her."[392]

Close friend and colleague Robert Weiner had both a local and national perspective about Johnson's influence and legacy. He explains her reputation in the Oklahoma community and beyond:

> She had many fans. Betty was a fine musician: always musical with a beautiful singing tone, wonderful sense of phrasing. Her reputation was quite large back then, as the symphony broadcasts were widely heard. Additionally, she played with many fine and well-known musicians at music festivals around the country. She was the "Queen of Bassoon" in Oklahoma and virtually everyone studied with her. She taught students from early levels to professional. Music educators around the state greatly respected her. There were bassoon and chamber music works written for her. I would guess that the Ray Luke Concerto might have been the most notable.[393]

Betty Johnson's influence on others and their respect for her was evident when composers, in addition to Ray Luke, paid tribute to her during her lifetime and in memoriam with pieces written in her honor, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: List of Works Composed for and Dedicated to Betty Johnson

Composer	Title	Composed	Year Premiered
Ray Luke	Concerto for Bassoon and Orchestra	1965	Premiered in 1965 by Betty Johnson
Beverly McClary	Edgar Allen Poe Songs for Voice and Piano	1985	Premiered in 1985 by Betty Johnson
Ray Luke	Contrasts for Bassoon and Piano	1993	Premiered in 1994 by Betty Johnson
Thomas Sleeper	Melody for Betty Johnson (solo bassoon)	1998	Premiered in 2000 by Kathryn Sleeper

[392] Grossman, interview.

[393] Weiner, interview.

After leaving the Oklahoma Symphony, Weiner continued his professional career in Florida, Mexico City, and finally to his current position, held since 1995, as Professor of Oboe at the Frost School of Music and consistent performer in several South Florida orchestras including the Florida Grand Opera. He describes her reputation outside of Oklahoma as he perceived it:

> I did often have people from other places comment about her when I was away from OKC. She was acknowledged as a bassoonist with fabulous tone and a fine teacher. She had students who went out to major schools and teachers after studying with her. I don't believe I ever heard a negative about her from anyone.[394]

Finally, Weiner reveals his ideas about her lasting contributions:

> She was legendary as a bassoonist and teacher in her era. I think everyone in music in Oklahoma knew and respected her. She was a beautiful player but without wide distribution of the old recordings and concert tapes, I don't know if she is so well remembered now outside of Oklahoma. I think that it is probably through her students that she will be remembered the most. During her career, especially when the orchestra's concerts were broadcast nationwide, she was well-known and revered.[395]

Even with Johnson's humble attitude about her talent, she became a widely-known bassoonist and performer during a time when, compared to today, technology was limited to broadcast performances and recordings.

Dr. John Clinton recognized an important difference between Johnson and other professional musicians. He explains his opinion on her most important lasting contributions, her students:

> When you pass down that kind of sound and you pass down the seriousness of being an excellent musician, that's a great legacy. There are not too many bassoon students of quality who are probably 40 or above who lived in

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394 Ibid.

395 Ibid.

> Oklahoma at that time who didn't feel the legacy of something Betty passed on. And the fact that she was interested in students and was a decent human being. Musicians are a lot better people these days. In a sense, they were more interested in what they could prove in their careers and what they could pass along. There's a story about a French Horn teacher in the 1880's who was at odds with all the other teachers because he believed you should pass along everything to the students. Most of the people at that time held things in reserve for fear that the student might get better than the teacher. Not him. Not Betty. Betty passed everything on with no fear. She was happy where she was and confident about where she was and what she could do. That's the best thing.[396]

Clinton attributed her generosity, contentment, and excellent character as the main reasons Johnson was such an influential teacher and performer. He believes her students will carry on her example through their own lives. No matter what they do as an occupation, their actions will mirror her outstanding qualities, thus propagating her legacy for future generations.

The opinions about the legacy of Betty Johnson are varied for each person that was interviewed. General conclusions indicate that Johnson left a legacy that lives on because of the person she was, the talent she displayed, and her pedagogy and love of teaching and music, as well as a willingness to broadly share her knowledge with students and colleagues. Differences aside, the common thread for each person interviewed indicated that she had a long lasting effect on musicians who crossed her path and interacted with her for any length of time. They agree that she needs to be remembered with her example followed, and passed on to future generations.

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[396] Clinton, interview.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY

Betty Johnson had an enormous effect on her students and colleagues throughout six decades of professional playing and teaching the bassoon. When she began her career with the Oklahoma Symphony Federal Orchestra, she was a young player, not yet out of her teenage years. She had recently begun to play the bassoon with little or no known formal guidance from an experienced teacher. The summer of 1939, she had a few lessons from new college graduate, George Goslee, who went on to achieve great success in the world of the symphony. The fact that she was a female in a professional world often considered as a path primarily for men never interfered with her career plans and accomplishments. The orchestra, with roots in the WPA, was open to and considerably populated with female musicians. In this musical home, Johnson worked hard to become the best bassoonist and musician as possible. By the time any of the interviewees in this study came into contact with her, Johnson was beyond the years of growing pains even the great musicians must struggle through. She was a seasoned musician with much experience, and was considered the premier bassoon teacher and reed-maker throughout Oklahoma and the surrounding region.

One remarkable aspect of her career was that she neither auditioned nor demonstrated a desire to play anywhere else on a permanent basis. Colleagues, many of whom went on to be leaders in great orchestras, understood her choice to remain where she was happy and involved; Oklahoma City was her home, and she had a supportive husband with success in his own music career. As a pair, they believed in the importance of fostering and developing a strong musical community in Oklahoma and

they spent their lives in partnership working towards that goal. Johnson seems to have been fulfilled through her position in the orchestra and at the area universities where she taught. While she was in the Oklahoma Symphony, the ensemble grew from its beginnings as a fledging WPA orchestra into an ensemble with a worldwide audience, playing weekly broadcasts over the radio. She was the principal bassoonist of what many considered an outstanding American orchestra of the time and only one of a few women nation-wide to achieve a principal position in an orchestra of significant reputation. Johnson made a lasting impression on those who heard her in person or on the radio with her sound, phrasing and expression. When asked what he knew or remembered about Betty Johnson, Robert Barris, longtime bassoon professor at Northwestern University, member of the Dallas and Detroit Symphonies and frequent performer with the Chicago Symphony responded, "One of the most beautiful bassoon sounds I ever heard. Every bassoonist of my generation either knew her or knew of her."[397] A constant theme throughout interviews from colleagues was that she could have played anywhere if she had so chosen. The term "great" should be used carefully: Johnson was proclaimed as having "greatness" in every interview for this research study, as well as by potential interviewees who knew of Johnson but felt they did not have enough knowledge about her to be interviewed. There is a sense that, in a retrospective review of her influence on them, the past students felt love and loyalty for Johnson, and seemed to feel that she shared a bond with them. They admire her as a teacher, person and performer. Johnson's joy of teaching and playing her instrument is relayed through their commentaries.

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397 Robert Barris, email to author, July 28, 2015.

During a time before the internet, easily made recordings, and convenient travel, Johnson was known and admired by the more visible bassoonists in the country who had not been her students: Sol Schoenbach, George Goslee, Vincent Pezzi, and Leonard Sharrow. A big part of the reason she did not achieve the reputation of these bassoon colleagues was due to the fact that she lived in the middle of a large country working in a smaller market. Her dedicated focus on playing in her community also prevented her celebrity or professional reputation from growing as fast as it could have had she been situated in a large urban center that provided limelight. However, she received national exposure through renowned radio broadcasts and the music festivals that she participated in the summer, often playing with celebrated musicians from better-known orchestras around the country.

Her teaching techniques were a hybrid of ideas; those she learned from others and developments of her own. Johnson was not afraid to experiment or pioneer techniques to discover what worked. Her vocal training and instincts as a singer played a large part in her approach to both playing and teaching the bassoon. She knew how to guide students and bring out their full potentialities. The dedication she had for her pupils left an impression and was equally reciprocated. No matter what her students ended up doing in their lives, including those who did not seek a career in music, those interviewed give Johnson credit for a role in their success, with many giving critical examples. Johnson's lessons exceeded the scope of playing the bassoon. She touched their lives in both tangible and intangible ways, some reported. Furthermore, when asked about her legacy, the majority of interviewees stated that Johnson's heritage is that she lives on through her students, the successes they have, and the people they have

become. Her legacy also manifests itself through the colleagues who had the privilege of playing or teaching with her. Whether it was one season or twenty, Johnson's colleagues recognized her as an example and many continue to use her as a model for their own playing, teaching and attitude.

The final question all interviewees were asked was whether Johnson would prefer to be remembered as a performer, teacher, or good person. Often, responses were usually that all three were one and the same to Johnson. However, the most common order was good person, teacher, and then, performer. No one asserted that Johnson's life goal was to be famous and well-known. Her contribution to music is a byproduct of being an outstanding player, performer, educator, and human being who treated her students with respect for their intrinsic talents, regardless of age, prior experience, and goals, as long as they were willing to persevere in their studies. Johnson's humanity is what many credit as a root of her beauty as a performer and influence as a teacher. Her life was not void of struggle and she worked very hard to accomplish her goals. The dedication and love she had for music has left a legacy to carry on after her time was finished.

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APPENDIX A

POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

For Former Students:

1. What is your name?

2. When and where did you study with Mrs. Johnson?

3. What is your occupation?

4. Please list any teaching positions, including when, you held them (add lines as needed).

5. Please list any playing positions, including when, you held them (add lines as needed).

6. If possible, can you please include a short biosketch or resume when you return these questions. Knowing more about you will help me to interpret understand your answers and relationship with Mrs. Johnson.

7. How long, how often, and in what manner did you keep in touch with Mrs. Johnson?

8. Please share any personal stories about lessons with Mrs. Johnson.

9. Please share any personal stories of friendship with Mrs. Johnson.

10. What do you think her lasting contributions to the Bassoon/Music/Oklahoma/World community will be?

11. I am interested to know about specific techniques/methods employed and taught by Mrs. Johnson. Please provide any details regarding her approaches. Please include remembrances and personal stories, descriptions, explanations, etc., you think was important. Some topics might include, but are not limited to:

    - Vibrato
    - Posture
    - Sound Production
    - Tone/Intonation
    - Articulation
    - Expression
    - Rhythm
    - Hand Position
    - Reed-making

- Repertoire
- Practice Methods
- Auditions
- Rehearsal Etiquette

12. Please describe how Mrs. Johnson influenced you as a bassoonist/musician/human being. Be as specific as possible.

13. Please describe Mrs. Johnson's personality, both teaching and personal, as you perceived it.

14. How were lessons usually patterned? (duration, frequency, material covered, etc.)

15. Please describe the music you covered with Mrs. Johnson (etudes, exercises, excerpts, solo literature).

16. Please list any of Mrs. Johnson's favorite pieces which she revealed to you.

17. Please describe your reed-making experiences with Mrs. Johnson. Be as detailed as possible. Were you required to make a certain amount of reeds per week? Was reed-making presented to you as a positive activity?

18. If applicable, how did Mrs. Johnson prepare you for auditions?

19. Do you have any exercises, lessons, teaching manuals, diagrams, etc. written out or given to you by Mrs. Johnson? Would you be willing to share copies of them with me for the purposes of this study?

20. I am interested to know about Mrs. Johnson's reputation throughout the music world. If possible, could you please remark on her reputation both from your perspective and the perspective of others you know?

21. Part of this study will include a biographical section about Mrs. Johnson's life. The main source of information about her life will come from her students, colleagues, and friends. Please share any biographical information you know about her. No fact is too small.

22. Please suggest any other people or institutions I should contact about this study. Include contact information if possible.

Depending on your answers, follow-up questions may be asked.

For Former Colleagues/Acquaintances:

1. What is your name?

2. When and where did you play/teach/work with Mrs. Johnson?

3. What is your occupation?

4. If applicable, please list any teaching positions, including when, you have held (add additional lines if necessary).

5. If applicable, please list any playing positions, including when, you have held (add additional lines if necessary).

6. If possible, can you please include a short bio or resume when you return these questions? Knowing more about you will help me to further understand your answers and relationship with Mrs. Johnson.

7. How long, how often, and in what manner did you keep in touch with Mrs. Johnson?

8. Please share any personal stories of friendship with Mrs. Johnson.

9. Please describe any rehearsal habits you noticed about Mrs. Johnson. (some aspects may include punctuality, willingness to adjust, communication, concentration, number of reeds used in rehearsal, reed adjustment during rehearsal, etc.)

10. What do you think her lasting contributions to Bassoon/Music/Oklahoma/World community will be?

11. Please describe how Mrs. Johnson influenced you as a Bassoonist/Musician/Human Being. Be as specific as possible.

12. Please describe Mrs. Johnson's personality, both teaching and personal, as you perceived it.

13. I am interested to know about Mrs. Johnson's reputation throughout the music world. If possible, could you please remark on her reputation both from your perspective and the perspective of others you know?

14. Part of this study will include a biographical section about Mrs. Johnson's life. The main source of information about her life will come from her students, colleagues, and friends. Please share any biographical information you know about her. No fact is too small.

15. Please suggest any other people or institutions I should contact about this study. Include contact information if possible.

16. What is/are the most important thing(s) you want people to know about Mrs. Johnson?

Depending on your answers, follow-up questions may be asked.

For Friends/Acquaintances:

1. What is your name?

2. If possible, please include a short bio/resume with these answers. Knowing more about you will help me to further understand your answers and relationship with Mrs. Johnson.

3. How long and in what capacity did you know Mrs. Johnson?

4. How long, how often, and in what manner did you keep in touch with Mrs. Johnson?

5. Please describe the circumstances in which you met and got to know Mrs. Johnson.

6. Please tell the "story" of your friendship and time with Mrs. Johnson.

7. Part of this study will include a biographical section about Mrs. Johnson's life. The main source of information about her life will come from her students, colleagues, and friends. Please share any biographical information you know about her. No fact is too small. Everything is interesting! Hobbies, favorite foods, restaurants, places to visit, etc.

8. Please share any personal stories of friendship with Mrs. Johnson.

9. Please describe Mrs. Johnson's personality, both teaching and personal, as you perceived it.

10. Please describe any big events or episodes you shared with Mrs. Johnson.

11. Please share any other information about her life you think the world should know.

12. Please describe any personal habits you noticed about Mrs. Johnson.

13. What do you think her lasting contributions to Bassoon/Music/Oklahoma/World community will be?

14. Please describe how Mrs. Johnson influenced you as a Bassoonist/Musician/Human Being. Be as specific as possible.

15. What is/are the most important thing(s) you want people to know about Mrs. Johnson?

16. I am interested to know about Mrs. Johnson's reputation throughout the music world. If possible, could you please remark on her reputation both from your perspective and the perspective of others you know?

Depending on your answers, follow-up questions may be asked.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWEES (including first year of meeting Betty Johnson)

1. Joan Straach- Daughter of Arthur and Betty Johnson
2. Arthur Grossman- Student, Colleague, Friend (1946)
3. Richard Killmer- Colleague (1967)
4. Katherine Sleeper- Student (1973)
5. Tracie Whitelaw- Student (1985)
6. Dayna Houck-Smith- Student (1988)
7. Dustin Seay- Student (1995)
8. Lisa Harvey-Reed- Colleague (1986)
9. Parthena Owens- Colleague (1977)
10. Carl Rath- Colleague (1981)
11. Mark Parker- Colleague (1990)
12. Debbie Musick- Colleague (unknown)
13. Mark McCoy- Student (1975)
14. Larry Reed- Colleague, Student (1966)
15. Valerie Watts- Colleague (1988)
16. Jerry Neil Smith- Colleague (1975)
17. Herb Hardt- Colleague, Friend (unknown)
18. Sandra Flesher- Colleague (unknown)
19. Irv Wagner- Colleague (1969)
20. Shannon Highland- Student (1997)
21. Ad Acres (Kevin Acre's father)- Friend (1935)
22. Bob Weiner- Colleague (1974)
23. Larry "Lacy" McLarry- Colleague, Friend (1958)
24. Beverly McLarry- Friend (1958)
25. Barre Griffith- Colleague, Student (1953)
26. John Clinton- Colleague (early 1970's)
27. Kay Dean Walker- Colleague, Friend (1956)
28. Brad Benson- Student (1974)
29. Denise Reig Turner- Student (1980's)
30. Hap Apgar- Colleague (1950)
31. David Robillard- Colleague (1970)
32. James Brewer- Student and Colleague (1962)
33. Don Jaeger- Student, Colleague, Friend (1956)
34. Kent Kidwell- Colleague (1966)
35. Virginia Sircy- Colleague, Friend (1980)
36. Herb Bardt- Colleague (1972)
37. Richard Ramey- Colleague (1999)
38. Jerry Steichen- Student (1982)
39. Robert Barris- Colleague (late 1950's)

APPENDIX C

Short Biographies of Former Students of Betty Johnson – Student Years in Parentheses

1. **Arthur Grossman (1946-1953)** began studying with Johnson at the age of eleven and continued his lessons with her through high school. His professional career started at the age of thirteen, when he joined the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra, where he performed for four years. After a further season with the San Antonio Symphony, he entered the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with Sol Schoenbach and took chamber music classes with Marcel Tabuteau.

   Upon graduation, he joined the Seventh Army Symphony Orchestra, which was stationed in Europe and with which he performed for three years, during which time the Seventh Army Wind Quintet, later the Soni Ventorum Wind Quintet, was formed. After two seasons when he served as principal bassoon with the Indianapolis Symphony and one with the Cincinnati Symphony, Pablo Casals asked Soni Ventorum to form the wind faculty for the newly created Conservatory of Music of Puerto Rico. Seven years and several recordings later, Soni Ventorum moved to Seattle to join the faculty of the School of Music of the University of Washington.

   Grossman has toured world-wide with Soni Ventorum and as a soloist, and has made more than thirty recordings. He has also served as principal bassoon in the Israel Philharmonic. In January 1988, he became Divisional Dean for Arts of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Washington, a position in which he served for ten years.

   In 2000, he purchased a Heckelphone, an instrument on which he has worked assiduously. He retired from the University of Washington in June 2004. He continues to perform and record on both bassoon and Heckelphone. http://soniventorum.com/3.html (Accessed September 14, 2015).

2. **Barre Griffith (1953-1962)** studied with Johnson as a beginning student through the end of high school. He is currently the third bassoonist and contrabassoonist with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Norman Philharmonic, and Lawton Philharmonic. He also plays with the Cimarron Wind Quintet. He has played second with the Phoenix Symphony and was a member of the U.S. Navy Band in Washington, D.C. He is now the president of the American Exchange Bank, Lindsay, OK, and the First National Bank in Fletcher, OK. Griffith earned his Bachelor degree in music education from Arizona State University and a Master of Music Education from the Catholic University of America.

3. **James Brewer (1962-1970)** studied with Johnson from the ninth grade through the end of his undergraduate education. He has a Bachelor of Music Education

degree from University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK, and Master of Music Performance from Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. Brewer served as the 2nd Bassoonist with the Oklahoma Symphony Orchestra from 1969 – 1987. He was the 2nd Bassoonist in the Peninsula Music Festival Fish Creek Wisconsin founded by Thor Johnson for eight seasons. Currently, he is the 2nd Bassoon with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the Lawton Philharmonic and the Norman Philharmonic. He taught Orchestra and Band in public school for 23 years in Oklahoma City and Putnam City school systems.

4. **Larry Reed (1966-1974)** began studying with Johnson in the ninth grade and continued with her throughout his undergraduate studies at the University of Oklahoma. He taught bassoon and music theory at Baylor University from 1975 until 1980. He is currently a wealth management advisor. He continues to perform with the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Lawton Philharmonic, and Norman Philharmonic. He earned his Master's degree in Bassoon Performance at the University of Indiana, where he studied under Leonard Sharrow.

5. **Richard Beene** is currently the Dean Emeritus of the Colburn School Conservatory of Music, Chair of the Winds Department and teaches bassoon. He enjoys an active career as a teacher, soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral performer. In 2001, while serving as Professor of Bassoon at the University of Michigan, he was awarded the 2001 Harold Haugh Award for excellence in studio teaching. He has been invited to present master classes and teaching residencies at a number of institutions, including the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California, Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, and McGill University, among others. He has also served on the faculties of Michigan State University and Wichita State University.

   In addition to performing numerous times with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Beene has appeared with the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. While maintaining his teaching schedule in Michigan, he also held the position of Principal Bassoonist with the Toledo Symphony Orchestra, where he performed many times as a soloist. Additionally, he has toured Europe as a soloist with the American Sinfonietta and performed as a soloist at the Festival de Musique de St. Barthelemy in the French West Indies. Summer festival engagements have included the Sunflower Music Festival in Kansas, the Basically Bach Festival in Anchorage (Alaska), the Colorado Music Festival, Strings in the Mountains (Colorado), the Arkansas Music Festival, Washington's Centram Chamber Music Festival, the Bellingham Festival of Music, and the Peninsula Music Festival (Wisconsin).

   Chamber music and recital engagements have taken him to New York's Merkin Concert Hall and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., as well as venues throughout Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. Mr. Beene has also been a featured recitalist at the annual convention of the International Double Reed Society.

http://www.colburnschool.edu/cf_directory/dirprofile.cfm?p=1941&id=4 (accessed October 2, 2015).

6. **Kathryn Sleeper (1973-1978)** studied with Johnson as a high school student. She has since commissioned and premiered over 25 works for bassoon, from solo to concerti with orchestra. She is the former principal bassoonist of the Atlantic Classical Orchestra and Miami Symphony Orchestra and is currently an extra/sub musician for the Naples Philharmonic and Florida Orchestra. She is also the Second Bassoon/Contrabassoon with the Crested Butte Music Festival Symphony Orchestra.

7. **Brad Benson (1974-1976)** studied with Johnson as an undergraduate music education major at the University of Oklahoma. He has held his current position as the Director of Fine Arts for the Norman Public Schools since 2002. He has been a music educator in the Norman public school system since 1979. He earned both his Masters of Music Education and a Ph.D. in Education Administration, Curriculum and Supervision from the University of Oklahoma.

8. **Mark McCoy (1975-1979)** began studying with Johnson as an eighth grader and continued with her through the end of high school. He is currently Vice President and Regional Manager in the Corporate Trust Group of Bank of America (BOk) Financial. He has been with BOk since 1998. Prior to joining the Corporate Trust Group, Mr. McCoy worked for seven years in New York at the Wall Street firm of Salomon Brothers Inc, where he was Vice President in investment banking.

   Mr. McCoy graduated from the University of Chicago with a degree in German Language and Literature, and has completed graduate work at Chicago and the University of Central Oklahoma. Mr. McCoy was also a participant in the Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program, spending a school year in Wels, Austria. He attributes his interest in the German language to the German translations present in the Julius Weissenborn Method Book for Bassoon used for lessons with Johnson.

   An additional career direction for Mr. McCoy was teaching German at Putnam City High School in Oklahoma City, where he was named District Teacher of the Year in 1996 and was a finalist for Oklahoma State Teacher of the Year. Mr. McCoy also devotes time to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, Putnam City Public Schools Foundation, United Way and other community volunteer opportunities.

9. **Jerry Steichen (1982-1984)** studied bassoon with Johnson at Oklahoma City University. He currently holds the positions of Principal Pops Conductor of the Utah Symphony, Music Director of the Ridgefield Symphony (Connecticut), and Principal Pops Conductor of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra. He was also with the New York City Opera for ten years. He has guest conducted the Boston Pops and the New Jersey Symphony, as well as the symphonies of

Naples, Florida, Portland, Oregon, the Florida Orchestra in Tampa, Cincinnati, Columbus, Oklahoma City, Hartford, and the New York Pops. International appearances include the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the NDR Philharmonie Hannover, and the Norwegian Radio Symphony. He earned his Master's Degree at the University of Southern California.

10. **Denise Reig Turner (1980's)** studied reed-making with Johnson for two summers during the 1980's. She is currently Lecturer of Bassoon at the University of New Mexico, Assistant Principal/2nd Bassoon of the New Mexico Symphony Orchestra, Principal Bassoon of the San Juan Symphony and was also Principal Bassoon and frequent soloist with the Chamber Orchestra of Albuquerque. In addition to being bassoonist with the New Mexico Winds, Ms. Turner performs regularly as a member of the Bosque Chamber Music Society, and the Animas Music Festival in Colorado. Ms. Turner has performed orchestral, opera, and chamber music throughout the Southwest, Italy, and Mexico, including the Santa Fe Opera, Santa Fe Symphony, Santa Fe Festival Ballet, Santa Fe Pro Musica, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Musica de Camera Orchestra, Albuquerque Baroque Players, and the baroque Orchestra of the Duke.

11. **Tracie Whitlaw (1985-1992)** began studying with Johnson as a sophomore in high school and continued through college. She attended OCU and the University of British Columbia and has been a musician in the United States Army for 15 years performing in numerous countries and throughout the United States. Her woodwind quintet, TRADOC, based at Fort Eustis, Virginia has won the Army Woodwind Performance Team of the Year. She has participated in many festivals including Banff, Scotia Festival of Music, Brevard, and the European Mozart Academy.

12. **Dayna Smith (1988-1995)** studied with Johnson her last year of high school and through her undergraduate degree. She is currently a chief financial officer for a nonprofit school. She also teaches private lessons. She played with the Jackson Bay Quintet from 2007-2012 and substitutes regularly for the Signature Symphony and the Bartlesville Symphony.

13. **Anna Resnick (1991, 1995-1996)** studied with Johnson as a beginner and then as a high school junior and senior. She has been the Adjunct Bassoon Professor at Oklahoma City University since the fall of 2005. She was also the Adjunct Bassoon and Oboe Professor at Southwestern State University for two years. She is currently a substitute for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Tulsa Symphony, Wichita Opera, and Enid Symphony. She played principal with the Arkansas Symphony as a sabbatical replacement for one year and has also played with the Monterrey (Mexico) Symphony, New Bedford (MA) Symphony, Newtown (MA) Symphony, Flower Mound (TX) Chamber Orchestra, East Texas Symphony, and the San Angelo (TX) Symphony. Anna received her undergraduate degree in Music Education from the University of

North Texas and a Master's Degree in Bassoon Performance from Boston University.

14. **Dustin Seay (1995-1999)** studied with Johnson from his senior year in high school through college. He was the adjunct bassoon instructor at Oklahoma City University from 2003-2006 and has performed with the New York City Kammermusiker since 2013. He has also been a substitute as the second bassoonist with the Garden State (NJ) Philharmonic since 2013.

15. **Shannon Highland (1997-1999)** studied with Johnson during high school. She earned a Bachelor of Music in Bassoon Performance from the University of North Texas and a Masters in Performance from the University of Southern California. She is the extra second bassoonist and contrabassoon for the Dallas Opera and is currently the Librarian for the Dallas Opera. Former positions include Substitute Librarian for the New York Philharmonic, Library Assistant for the Metropolitan Opera, and Substitute Librarian for the Julliard School.