

How did you decide to pursue oboe and when did you start playing?

My parents loved music and would take my sister and me to the Milwaukee Symphony concerts. After hearing the oboe, I insisted that I wanted to play it! Each year I would beg to begin, but my hands were too small to cover the keys. Finally in fifth grade my wish was granted and the school bought a new oboe for me. I loved playing the oboe so much that I would get up to practice an hour or more before school in the mornings and come home to do the same. I was blessed to have a band director who had just graduated as an oboe major. He was excited about my learning skills and encouraged me to begin making reeds in 6th grade. In 7th grade my teacher hired me to make blanks and later, finished reeds for a music store in Milwaukee, which was the start of my reed making career! From the time I picked up the oboe, I hoped with all my heart I could do this for my life. The events that most influenced my younger years were playing in the Milwaukee Youth Orchestra starting in 7th grade, an 8th grade concerto performance with my Oconomowoc Junior High Band at the 1970 Midwest National Convention which ended in a standing ovation, and performing with the Milwaukee Symphony as a Young Artists Competition winner in 11th grade.

Where did you attend college?

I started my undergraduate studies after my junior year in high school at Northwestern University with Ray Still. I completed two years there, and then transferred to the Cleveland Institute of Music to work with John Mack. My undergraduate and Master's degrees I finished over the next three years while at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Who have been the most influential figures in your oboe playing?

John Mack was one of the most influential figures in my development, plus Ray Still, for his artistry, and Stephen Colburn, one of my first teachers. Other influences have been some of my dear colleagues, especially Elaine Douvas and John Ferillo, as well as Daniel Stolper, my Interlochen colleague. I am also grateful for Richard Woodhams through my studies at the Aspen Festival. James Levine and Carlos Kleiber at the Metropolitan Opera were conductors of great inspiration to me. And of course the first inspiration came from my parents who modeled the love of music and the arts.

Can you briefly describe your career path after college?

While at the Cleveland Institute of Music I won the principal oboe position of the Akron Ohio Symphony with Louis Lane conducting, and then right out of school, the second and assistant principal job in the Milwaukee Symphony. After Milwaukee, I played principal oboe with the Honolulu Symphony, my dream job for that year! Following this, I took a teaching position at Wichita State University, which had the Lieurance Quintet In-Residency along with the principal oboe position with the Wichita Symphony. It was a great job for that time of my life with the quintet touring 4-6 weeks a year, including national and international touring with colleagues I loved and respected. I was in Kansas for nine years along while playing in the Santa Fe Opera in the summers. My last year in Kansas I played in the New Haven Symphony and was on the faculty of Yale University to assist Ronald Roseman in teaching the undergraduate students. I

went on from New Haven to take a two year position as Second Oboe of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and stayed in New York a total of seven years where I also taught at the Mannes College and the Juilliard Pre-college. I loved my time at the Met; it was my dream job. During my time at the Met I also began to see how much I loved to teach. With this, I accepted a teaching position at Louisiana State University, and continued teaching at the Juilliard School but as a guest faculty teacher of the Juilliard School College Division with a commute of once each month. That was in 1997, when I commissioned the Concerto. In 2002 I accepted the position at Indiana University while continuing to commute for the Juilliard teaching, which is what I am currently doing. I am grateful for all these opportunities. They have been a fulfillment of my original childhood dreams! Because I have been able to live my dreams, I feel I want to encourage the next generation to trust in and live theirs.

Why did you want to commission an oboe concerto and how did you decide to ask Eric Ewazen to be the composer for the project?

I thought about commissioning a concerto for about 5-7 years before I formally began the process. During this time, I was listening to a lot of different composers trying to decide whom to approach about the commission. I was looking for a piece to honor my father who passed away suddenly when I was 19. My father loved music and the arts, and he was so supportive of me and my sister and our musical pursuits. I wanted a work that would commemorate his life and his love, and would be a contribution to the artistic world long after his and my passing. Eric Ewazen, a colleague and friend at Juilliard, had a recital in the early 1990's which I attended. I was inspired by the uplifting spirit of his music and deeply moved by the heartfelt expression. I felt this was just the balance I was looking for and it would be a perfect fit for my vision. Thankfully Eric agreed to write the Concerto!

What aspects of Dr. Ewazen's style do you find most captivating?

When hearing Eric's music I think of sweeping, soaring lines in faster movements, and beautiful poignancy in slow ones. I love his use of colors and sudden changes in harmony. His works often capture reflection and introspection balanced with uplifting empowerment and hope, leaving the listener with a sense of expectancy and renewed feelings of joy. Eric himself models the effervescent spirit of his music!

What was the timeline from when you commissioned it to when it was completed?

It was not until 1997, a number of years after the conception of the Concerto, that funding and a prime venue for the premiere were in place. Eric was excited about the opportunity. However, shortly after this point Eric received unexpected news of great sadness- that of his father's passing. His loss touched me deeply, bringing back my own emotions with the loss of my father, in whose honor the Concerto was to be written. I longed to assist Eric through the grief process as others had so graciously done for me years ago. It was from these feelings that an idea was born: maybe the oboe concerto itself could serve as a vehicle for healing- especially with the soulful poignancy that the oboe offers for reaching the heart's deepest emotions. After all, doesn't music speak beyond words, to the point of transformation and renewal? And as artists, do we not aspire to touch another human heart to meet their deepest needs with compassion,

understanding, and hope? It was this that initially drew me to play the oboe and motivated my professional pursuits. Upon sharing my thoughts with Eric, he graciously accepted my idea and sometime later followed with sharing a newspaper editorial “Down a River of Time”. Once again I could envision a very moving and timeless concerto for the oboe- it would be a work to bring healing and hope.

I know Dr. Ewazen likes to collaborate with performers while composing. Do you have any fun anecdotes about this process? What effects do you think you had on the composition of the Concerto?

Yes, Eric values the collaborative process with the commissioner of the work. Initially he would ask me to tell him about my father, much as an artist who wants to know their subject matter. He would arrange to meet to read through small passages as he wrote them. The passages were as short as 16-20 measures, but he always wanted to be sure he was on the right track since he considers the sound and character of the performer to be an important part of his compositional process. It was equally meaningful for me to work with Eric, always being inspired by his music and the collaboration.

Eric was also interested in my suggestions with the articulation and dynamic markings in the score. We would try different articulations together in our reading sessions to decide the most appropriate markings for the flow and character. In performance he was open to new articulations if they served the feeling and flow.

A funny anecdote is about the register of the concerto. Since this concerto is about the grief process, I asked him if he would consider writing in the middle to high register because the oboe is so poignant in that range. I told him third octave, G, was the absolute highest he should write, but because our conception of the high register was a little different, much of the piece ended up in the third octave.

Were there any specific memories of your father that you tried to incorporate into the piece?

I think that Eric made most of the choices of what to include. I sensed he could feel the sorrow resulting from the unexpected accident that took my father’s life when he was hit by a car on his bicycle in my teens. This event along with Eric’s thoughts of the loss of his own father are portrayed so poignantly in the second movement’s agonizing emotions. “Down a River of Time”, an editorial from the Cleveland Plain Dealer, significantly guided the Concerto’s composition and thus its title. The third movement is a relishing of joyful memories and exudes hopeful anticipation for embracing life anew- the fulfillment of my original vision for the Concerto.

What do you think are the most challenging aspects about Dr. Ewazen’s music in general and then specifically in this concerto?

I think there is a great level of emotional involvement and vulnerability that comes with playing Eric’s music. For this Concerto specifically, the register extremes are probably the most

challenging aspect. Also, perhaps because of the register, the endurance factor is difficult. The intonation can be problematic because of the changes in the tonality and register extremes. One needs a great reed to accommodate these challenges: flexible enough for dynamic and color range and yet stable enough for endurance and intonation, and fresh enough to last the complete concerto!

Do you have any technical suggestions for anyone learning the piece for the first time? Or are there specific “oboe problems” that need special attention while you are performing the piece?

When I approach any piece, I like to look first at the total architecture harmonically, melodically, rhythmically, and emotionally, and then to explore it more specifically movement by movement. As far as technique goes, I try to approach pieces musically and emotionally first, which motivates me to work out the technical challenges. I sing a lot, play the melody outline of the phrases to see the architecture of the phrases and sections, observe how the harmony affects the melody, and listen inside to the story I feel the music is expressing. I also like to study other works by the composer, so I listened to many of Eric’s recordings. When I was getting ready for the Concerto performances and recording of the Ewazen, I did a warm-up that incorporated a lot of extended ranges, especially high notes, extreme registers with long tones, and mixed articulations that mimicked the passages in the piece. The technical passages I practiced slurred or in multiple rhythms for evenness and shaping. I also did a lot of tuner/drone work. Though I prefer to give myself quality time to digest a piece, I only received the full score six weeks before the premiere- I would have loved a year to study it. Patterned after my late teacher, John Mack, I try to be able to solfege by memory any solo or chamber repertoire that I am performing, before putting it on stage. That’s how I learned the Concerto.

When/where was the piece premiered? Did Dr. Ewazen attend rehearsals, and if so, what type of feedback did he offer?

It was premiered on August 12th, 1999 at the Bellingham Music Festival in Bellingham Washington with Michael Palmer conducting. Eric came a few days ahead. He would sit in the hall with his score and explore or pose changes, mostly for balance needs but sometimes simply for orchestration desires. In general, he loves attending performances and rehearsals of his music if he can. He even travels around the world for performances!

How soon after the premier did you record the concerto? What was the recording process like? Was Dr. Ewazen involved in the recording sessions?

We did a European tour with the Concerto in the spring of 2000 and then we recorded it in February of 2001.

We recorded in the recital hall at SUNY Purchase, with Eric conducting and guiding the recording sessions. Adam Abeshouse was the recording engineer and producer, and he was wonderful! I was grateful to work with him and valued his part in the recording. In the recording sessions Eric and Adam would offer suggestions from time to time and we would try passages several different ways. I remember playing the cadenza about 4 different ways before deciding

on the final rendition. The recording was with the Sejong soloists from New York, an ensemble I admire and respect. We had two rounds of edits after receiving the initial one. I had pages of things I wanted to change and Eric came back and said “Linda, some of these, you’re just going to have to live with!” I almost did not release it, but now I am glad I did!

There is a funny story about the recording. We had one rehearsal, and then three days of recording scheduled. The first day it was in the high 50’s and balmy. The next day we woke up and it was below zero. I went to the hall and there was no heat, so we had to delay the recording. Since the reeds were quite different, I brought a lamp and my tools to the session and I did everything I could in the breaks to re-adjust the reeds. I remember returning to my hotel to start over with reeds for the next recording session. This is where fast reed making is a benefit!

What prompted you to commission the second concerto, “Hold Fast Your Dreams”, and how is it different from the first piece?

I wanted to commission a concerto for the oboe and Wind Ensemble since the repertoire is limited. I envisioned a work accessible not just for the professional, but also for high school students and everything in-between. I hoped the concerto could also be a work that would be equally convincing as a beautiful recital or contest piece with piano accompaniment. I approached Erica regarding his interest in the commission and he enthusiastically responded. He was delighted by the thought of the work to be in honor of my mother because he felt he had become well acquainted with my mother from the first Concerto. Eric decided to write a “musical portrait” of my mother. So instead of a family portrait on the wall of my home, I have a musical portrait to share with listeners. It captures my mother so well!

Eric likes to be original with each of his compositions, especially for the same instrument. The second concerto differs from the first in the orchestration (for oboe and wind ensemble), in the structure of the work (slow-fast-slow movements), and in the meters (3/4, 2/4, 3/4). “Hold Fast Your Dreams” is equally as poignant and uplifting for the listener but in a wonderful range for the oboe and accessible and rewarding for all ages. I am grateful for this second concerto. In the summer of 2015 Eric re-orchestrated the Wind Ensemble version for full orchestra and it should be available from Theodore Presser Company in late 2016. I have recently recorded the oboe/piano version for release in 2016.

From the 1930’s on, we think about a distinct American compositional identity independent of the Western European tradition, but why has it taken so long for a well-known American composer to write an oboe concerto? Is the burden on the performers to commission more?

It’s hard to say. I think people are searching for something that is soulful and poignant, reaches deep into the soul and brings them through a universal life journey, and is gratifying emotionally and technically to play. One of the marks of a great composer, I feel, is that the listener and performer never tire of hearing or playing the piece. The great oboe concertos have these qualities and I feel “Down a River of Time” joins them. I have hopes that it will live on to be an equally standard gem of the oboe repertoire for years to come!