

Indiana University Tuba-Euphonium Oral History Project

Daniel T. Perantoni, Project Director

Oral History Interview of

**Mr. Robert T. LeBlanc**

Galena, Ohio

May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000

Robert LeBlanc

Carole Nowicke

Also present: Paul Bierley, Arden LeBlanc

Approved by narrator, July, 2001

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## Robert T. LeBlanc

Robert LeBlanc grew up in Port Arthur, Texas, and attended Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas, where he studied with trumpeter Richard Burkart (as did J. Lesley Varner and Toby Hanks). After graduating from Lamar, where he earned a B.S. in music education, Mr. LeBlanc attended the Eastman School of Music on an Orchestral Scholarship, studying with trombonist Donald Knaub and earning an M.M. in music education. Mr. LeBlanc also studied privately with Arnold Jacobs.

Mr. LeBlanc taught in the Dayton, Texas public school system for several years, and then returned to upstate New York where he was Director of Instrumental Music for the Oneonta public schools, performed in, and was assistant conductor of the Oneonta Symphony Orchestra, and a guest lecturer in music at Hartwick College in Oneonta.

Hired as Professor of Tuba by The Ohio State University in 1966, Mr. LeBlanc also held conducting and administrative positions at the University. He was conductor of the Buckeye Bands from 1966-1975, Associate Conductor of the University Symphony Orchestra from 1968-1970, Associate Conductor of the Concert Band from 1971-1979, Conductor of the Symphonic Band in 1989 and 1993. He performed in the faculty brass quintet, and substituted for Paul Bierley and James Akins in the Columbus Symphony.

His administrative responsibilities include Chairman of the Faculty Committee from 1973-1975, Head of the Brass Faculty from 1973-1976, and Chairman of Music Performance from 1976-1989. He also taught as Visiting Professor of Tuba at the University of Michigan from 1995-1996.

Beginning with his introduction to the Sousaphone in 8<sup>th</sup> grade in Port Arthur, Texas, LeBlanc describes his educational experiences in Texas, New York, and with Arnold Jacobs in Chicago. As an undergraduate, LeBlanc was fortunate to locate a 1927 York CC tuba, and it has been the only instrument he used (or needed) for his entire career.

As an undergraduate at Lamar, LeBlanc met and studied composition with Paul Holmes, who was teaching theory and composition at the school, and who wrote *Lento* for LeBlanc's graduation recital. Holmes also wrote a tuba trio with band accompaniment for LeBlanc, Les Varner, and Toby Hanks, which was performed at a Texas Music Educators Conference and is, as yet, unpublished.

After graduating from Lamar, Mr. LeBlanc earned his master's degree from the Eastman School of Music. He discusses Donald Knaub's teaching, and mentions some of his fellow students. While still attending Lamar, and in later years, LeBlanc would travel to Chicago to study with Arnold Jacobs. Leblanc comments on Jacobs' pedagogical techniques, and on some of Jacobs' Chicago Symphony colleagues. One trip to Chicago coincided with the Chicago Symphony's recording *Alexander Nevsky* with Fritz Reiner conducting, and LeBlanc's lesson took place in a room behind the stage, during a session where Mr. Jacobs was not required.

Mr. LeBlanc

Paul Bierley and LeBlanc discuss LeBlanc's style of conducting and compare it to other O.S.U

Mr. LeBlanc's many students include Fritz Kaenzig, James Akins, Mickey Moore, Jeffrey Rideout, Jan Duga, Charles Schulz, John Jones, Scott MacMorran, Steven Bryant, and Steven Winteregg, a number of whom returned to O.S.U. to perform at a concert in honor of LeBlanc's quarter-century of teaching.

In retirement, LeBlanc is playing in a Dixie band, building a very elaborate stereo system, and breeding and showing Border Terriers and Labrador Retrievers.

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Abstract, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2001

This interview was conducted on the afternoon of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000 at the LeBlanc's home in Galena, Ohio. Paul Bierley was sitting in on the interview, and Arden LeBlanc, who was recovering from knee surgery was in adjacent room, adding her comments.

Tape 1, Side 1

Carole Nowicke: We are commencing an interview with Robert LeBlanc. Paul Bierley is also sitting in the background and will probably open his mouth at some point.

Paul Bierley: Not Paul.

Nowicke: Not Paul.

If you'd start by telling me where you are from and about your early musical experiences.

Robert LeBlanc: I was born and raised in Texas, Port Arthur to be precise, which is sometimes called "Hurricane Alley." I started playing the tuba in junior high school, in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, because my best friend played euphonium and he talked me into trying to get into the band and they didn't need any more euphoniums. So the band director said, "I need tuba players." I said, "What's that?" and he showed me one and he gave me an *Easy Steps to the Band* book and there it was.

I did my undergraduate work Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. I started out at Lamar as a Chemical Engineering major and got two years of that. Then I changed my major to music when we got a good brass teacher there, who happens to be the man we eventually hired at Ohio State as a trumpet teacher, Richard Burkart. I graduated from Lamar two years later and

went to the Eastman School of Music and studied with Don Knaub. At the same time I would make trips to Chicago to study with Arnold Jacobs. After that, I started teaching, taught two years in the public schools in Dayton, Texas. Taught five years in the public schools in Oneonta, New York and played in the Oneonta Symphony Orchestra.

The last couple of years I was in New York, I also taught part-time at Hartwick College. My part-time job was to teach all the brass instruments, that is, the private lessons. I had a couple trumpet players, and a horn player too, and a tuba. I don't remember what else. I taught brass methods, conducted the concert band, and I did percussion also. So I got a lot of good experience there.

I graduated from Lamar in 1958 with my bachelor's, graduated in 1959 with my master's from Eastman. Left Dayton, Texas, in '61, went to New York, left there in '66, came to Ohio State, retired in '92. At Ohio State, I was hired as the tuba professor. I taught tuba my entire career there, which was 26-something years or whatever it was. In the course of being there, I also conducted some fine ensembles. I was assistant conductor of the orchestra for two or three years. I was also associate conductor of the top concert band for several years, and I was the principal conductor of the second band for several years. When Jack Evans retired in 1972 (I think it was) I was head of the Brass Department, and in 1976, when Don McGinnis retired as Chairman of Music Performance, I became Chairman of Music Performance. So, I did a bunch of other stuff.

We had a faculty quintet. Paul Bierley was kind enough to be sick one year, so I played in the Columbus Symphony one year when he was out. I was the only guy he would let be his assistant. [laughs] That pretty much takes us up to date. As I said before, now my playing is essentially filling in with the Columbus Symphony when Jim Akins is not able to be there for whatever reason. I also play in a Dixieland band that was started with faculty members at Ohio State.

Nowicke: Did that make you feel a little like a bridesmaid then, in the Symphony?

LeBlanc: Yes. Well, you know, if you're only so good, you don't do too well.

Bierley: [laughs]

Nowicke: Did you take lessons with Richard Burkart when you were in high school?

LeBlanc: No. Just as an undergraduate. This was his first job out of school also. He's only five years older than I am. We had a very good relationship, and I got a very good foundation with him, and got an awful lot with Arnold Jacobs, of course. When I was an undergraduate I got my tuba, my very own tuba, which was a very fortunate thing, because it's a 1927 York. It's a CC, and it's not the great, huge, CC like Jacobs had. Every time I ever saw Jacobs, he would try to buy it from me because he wanted that smaller York.

Nowicke: Is it the one with the bell that comes off?

LeBlanc: No, the bell doesn't come off. It's a .750 bore CC tuba. It's the only tuba I've ever owned, it's the only tuba I ever needed. It does anything I want it to do.

Nowicke: That's great. Where did you find it?

LeBlanc: Well, when I was an undergraduate, the "then" Minneapolis Orchestra (which is now the Minnesota Orchestra) was on tour and played in Port Arthur. I called and made arrangements to take a lesson with Paul Walton, who was the tubist in the orchestra then, and who was also a Jacobs student, and also had one of the large-bore York tubas. I told him that I was looking for a tuba. This was in 1958, and there weren't really any decent tubas made then. The only thing I had come across was a Mirafone, which was the most awful thing you can imagine. The intonation was non-existent, the sound was terrible.

Paul Walton said, "Well, you know the tour manager in the orchestra is a man named Glenn Cook. He lost all his teeth and he's got an old tuba in his attic at home. He's not using it, maybe he'd sell it to you." I said, "Well, I'll go ask him." So I went and asked him, and he said, "Yes, I've got this old tuba up in my attic, but I'd have to have \$600 for it."

Bierley: [laughs]

LeBlanc: So, I said, "Well, OK, can I try it?" He said, "Sure." So he shipped it to me, and from the very first sound it made, I just knew that it was pretty special. It was. I had to do some hack sawing on the slides to get the pitch up to current day standards, because I think it was probably built for A435. If you play in an orchestra anywhere you know that today they play more like A460. Jacobs said, "It's a wonderful horn, but you have to carve all the slides down. So, we did. Actually I did some of them twice. It was wonderful.

Nowicke: You did it yourself or you took it to a shop?

LeBlanc: Well, the second time I did it myself because it was just the 1<sup>st</sup> slide that I could not get the D's where I wanted them. The first time there was a brass repair man there in town that did it for me. It's not that big of a deal to just cut valve slides down a little bit. So, that was kind of a fun time. Actually, everyone who has ever played my tuba has coveted it.

Nowicke: What was the first tuba you actually played.

LeBlanc: The first tuba I actually played? You mean besides a Sousaphone?

Arden LeBlanc: [laughing from the other room]

Nowicke: Well, if that was the first?

LeBlanc: Oh yes, that was the first. In high school they were all Sousaphones, Conn Sousaphones.

Nowicke: Eb or BBb?

LeBlanc: BBb. In college we had, I'm trying to think what those were. There was a Conn BBb 4 valve tuba there that I played, and it was OK, I guess, but then the Bessons came out with that compensating valve system thing, so they bought one of those, and that was OK. Finally there was a guy there who had some kind of an old tuba that I never even knew the make of that let me borrow it for a while. That was the best I'd played on so far. Then I got my own. I shudder to think now how anybody could have done anything on those instruments, but ignorance is bliss. There weren't very many tubas made then, of course, they are still developing tubas. A lot of them are out there that obviously I wouldn't buy, or I would have one. But I think they are coming around now that I think are pretty good.

Nowicke: Have you seen the new Conn 52J?

LeBlanc: Yes, as a matter of fact, Jim Akins is working with them in Cleveland on the design, and they are going to have something really beautiful pretty soon. It's quite good now, but I think it's going to be better. I'm going up there with Jim sometime in the next month or two to try to help with that. Those are pretty much based on the Yorks.

Nowicke: I think they've mostly used spare parts from the Kings but they've put them together better.

LeBlanc: Yes and no. There are numerous design changes.

Nowicke: It's going to maybe be a success where the Harvey Phillips model has not been.

LeBlanc: A lot of people have unsuccessfully tried to copy other tubas, and I maintain that part of it is that the brass is different.

Nowicke: Definitely.

LeBlanc: The physicist would tell you that that's bunk, because it doesn't make any difference what the instrument's made of, so long as the shape is right. I still think what the tuba is made of is important. I guess I've seen just about every one they've ever made. They're getting better, they're not wonderful yet.

Nowicke: That and people don't read old patent books and they keep reinventing things.

LeBlanc: That's right.

Nowicke: Christian Lindberg just reinvented an Allen valve. He also reinvented the Dr. Young mouthpiece.

LeBlanc: One of my favorite stories is, they had the chief engineer from Alexander out (I forget who told me this story) and he was in the States for something, and they were having this big meeting. One of the scientific types said to him, "Sir, we've noticed that prior to World War II, the bottom bow on the Alexander tuba was 'such-and-such' dimensions, and we've noticed that since World War II that the bottom bow is a little wider down there. How can you account for that?" He said, "Well, Ja, you are correct. The tree grew." [laughs]

To me, that summarizes what we've been dealing with for a long time. Those Alexander tubas were pretty good, but their intonation was not. That's the thing. Every one they've come up with, "That's a great instrument, except for... fill in the blank."

Nowicke: Ivan has been telling me about the horns he had Alexander make for him. Which were different—in the key of D...

LeBlanc: [laughs] On purpose?

Nowicke: On purpose. He had an E tuba, and a D tuba, a G tuba, and then he said he doesn't believe he invented the thumb valve, but he was the first one he saw with a thumb valve. He said, "You know, the opposable thumb is a great thing." Why keep putting 5<sup>th</sup> valves on the left hand? He said that the first time Roger Bobo saw his horn he picked it up and mimed "How can you possibly do this?" I don't imagine that Roger Bobo has everything over on the left now.

Ivan said the one horn he misses are the old Sander tubas. He admired the way they looked, they were very graceful. I don't remember those. I just remember the proprietary name "Sanders" on the VMI horns that Custom was selling.

LeBlanc: Those were pretty good, by the way.

Nowicke: Now I guess they are importing them from Taiwan or some place.

You're the first one I've taped so far who has had their first experience been on a good old York.

LeBlanc: [laughs] Well, there weren't very many, there were only 12 made.

Nowicke: Only 12 good ones?

LeBlanc: No, only 12 medium-bore Yorks. I wrote the factory right after I got this one, because I knew that there weren't very many of them, and I sent them the serial number, told them where I got it, and said, "Can you tell me about the instrument? What is the history of it?" They wrote back, and I've still got the letter somewhere.

Nowicke: You've probably talked to all the people who are obsessed with Yorks.

LeBlanc: Oh yes.

Nowicke: So they all know about your letter. Glenn Call has a CC that wasn't a cut-down, but his has a screw bell on it. It's quite large.

LeBlanc: That was probably the same one Jacobs has, or maybe a predecessor.

Nowicke: No, it's taller and thinner.

LeBlanc: They said there were 12 of them made. See, what happened was: York sold out to Carl Fischer at some point, and that's when they quit making those. Fischer went toward the school-quality instruments and didn't make professional instruments any more. So that's why there are only 12. At one point I had accounted for nine or ten of them. I think getting that horn was a big break for me.

Nowicke: As a trumpet player, what did Richard Burkart do with you as students?

LeBlanc: He taught me about music and brass techniques.

Nowicke: Les Varner said, "Be sure to ask him about that." Because he was very important in his career, and Toby Hanks'.

LeBlanc: Yes. In fact, he might have told you this. Some years back, the three of us played a trio at the Texas Music Educators' convention for tubas and band, for the Lamar band. The piece was written by Paul Holmes just for that occasion. I have not seen it or heard it since.

Rich is probably, I think if you examined his track record, and his students' track records, you would see that there's not a better trumpet teacher anywhere on this planet. He always had a good control of the technique of brass playing. There are some things about tuba playing that I don't think he ever really understood, but if he would tell me to do something a certain way and I thought I couldn't do it, I would just say "OK," and I would do something that was acceptable. For example, one of the things about his teaching of trumpet is that he always said, "Keep your tongue up in the top of your mouth." Well, if you do that on the tuba, you're dead. I just said, "OK." We never talked about it again.

Musicianship-wise and certain techniques and things, I can't remember anything specifically right now, but it was a good experience. First of all, he was very supportive. That made a big difference. He helped me get into Eastman and get into those things I probably couldn't have done otherwise.

Of course, Knaub was a whole other thing, he had a lot of experience teaching tuba. Coincidentally, one of my former students is the tuba professor at the University of Texas where Knaub was for so long. I'd like to tell you about all of my students sometime.

Knaub was, I guess you could say he was really a perfectionist, but he had heard a lot of good players. Roger Bobo was an undergraduate when I was there.

Nowicke: Roger Bobo and Dan Perantoni should have been there when you were there.

LeBlanc: Perantoni had already left, or wasn't there yet.

Nowicke: OK. And Paul Droste?

LeBlanc: No, Paul was there later than that. Paul taught a while before he went.

Nowicke: He told me that he was in a quintet with Perantoni...

LeBlanc: OK.

Nowicke: ... and David Greenhoe.

LeBlanc: Just being at Eastman is a unique situation. You're around so many students who are so good.

Knaub was a good guy. We got along really well. If you missed a note he was all bent out of shape. There's great merit to that. I also got from him a feel for the orchestral side of things. Listening and hearing other players play, particularly the trombonists that were there at the time. Remington was still there, and he was still going strong, and hearing Knaub himself play the bass trombone in the orchestra—you can't help but learn from that.

I always felt that you can learn from anybody if you pay attention. To hear things done correctly, that's one of the reasons why I'm putting this stereo system together. When you hear the differences between different orchestras and how they approach things, and how conductors how do things differently—getting all those different experiences are worth a fortune. It's just really important. Being at a school like that was a real positive thing for me. I think without that I'd probably still be teaching in public schools in Texas or something. It wouldn't be all that bad, but I wouldn't have learned about snow. [laughs]

Nowicke: This is true—and the absence of tornados.

LeBlanc: I think Knaub was very good at taking a student and working from where that student is now, to the next thing. He was a very flexible guy, and a down-to-earth guy. Then of course Jacobs, the technical things that he had done as far as breathing—particularly breathing, the musicianship he insisted on, and even in what some might call the “least important” of orchestra parts I think was important. My experience over the years leads me to believe that too many tuba players forget about the music, and they are only concerned with the technique. In my opinion, that’s the separation point. I never wanted to be just called a tuba player, I wanted to be called a musician. Somehow a lot of people don’t get there. If you listen to the good orchestras, you hear those differences.

I also believe that the tuba really is best at what you hear it do most—that is, the tuba is not really going to play the Mendelssohn violin concerto, that’s not what it’s made for. It might be able to do the Saint-Saens *Swan*, or something like that acceptably well, but the literature for the tuba has gotten to the point, a lot of it, is not really idiomatic for tuba. It’s something else. It’s trying to be a trumpet, or trying to be a violin, or trying to be something else. That’s fine, so long as you don’t neglect what the tuba is really made for, and that is, when you hear a Shostakovich symphony, you know what the tuba is made for—or the Mahler *Second*, you know what the tuba’s made for.

I’m going way off course here. [laughs]

Nowicke: No, that’s great. “What does the tuba mean to you.”

So you started with Mr. Jacobs about 1960?

LeBlanc: No, I think I probably started with him about ‘58. My wife (who at that time was my fiancée) had an uncle who managed the Lyon and Healy building in Chicago and had pretty good access to orchestra tickets and a place for me to stay. So I would go to Chicago and have a lesson, and all this other stuff at the same time. For example, I was there when Reiner and the Chicago Symphony recorded *Alexander Nevsky* with Rosalind Elias singing. I’ll never forget that. I never will forget that. Those guys were all at their peaks, there was Herseth, and Farkas, and Jacobs, and all those guys. I actually had a lesson backstage while they were rehearsing that thing, in a part where Jacobs wasn’t to be there. We were back in some room in the back of the hall having a lesson. [laughs]

I studied with him off and on, I went as often as I could for a while, and even went when I taught in New York. I even went from there to Chicago for lessons.

Arden’s a horn player, she taught elementary music in her career. She went and had a lesson with Farkas one time when I went to study with Jacobs.

Again, it was a great experience. There’s never been anybody like him, I don’t think. There probably never will be anybody like him.

Nowicke: And not because you changed, but did his technique of teaching change over the years you studied with him?

LeBlanc: Only that he got more into the technology stuff—which is not bad, but he didn't really need it. I don't know whether you've heard this or not, but I asked him something about, "How did you ever learn all of this?" He said, "My son was a medical student" (I forget where, a school in Chicago) "He was able to get me in to use the fluoroscope and we tested all of this stuff, and we looked at it, and we watched it." It was a pretty good scientific approach to things, it really confirmed what he had to say.

If you could just stand and watch a day's worth of his teaching without even hearing what was going on in the room, you'd have to be impressed. I remember once I went for my lesson and two people ahead of me was a trombonist from the New Orleans Symphony, there was a singer—I don't know where in the heck the singer was from, you know, people like this, coming in from all over the world to study with Arnold Jacobs.

He had a pretty darn good voice, also, but they weren't there for the voice, so much as they were the techniques of breathing and phrasing. A lot of people forget about those issues; phrasing, what is a phrase? How do you play a phrase? He wouldn't accept anything which wasn't phrased musically. You can't go wrong if you keep in mind what you are really supposed to be doing is making music.

I just think that he probably had so much influence over the brass playing in this world... Just for example, Gunther Schuller was here last week. I wasn't there, but I am good friends with Marshall Haddock, the orchestra conductor at the university, and he said they were talking about Gunther Schuller's brass symphony that was recorded in the '50s—about 1956 or so. He brought in all these players from all over New York who were the best players in the city. He said that they rehearsed for three months, and the entire time they were rehearsing, he said these guys are complaining. "You can't play this, nobody can play this." Well, shucks, we probably had three student groups at Ohio State that could play that piece.

The development of brass playing I think just goes right back to people like Jacobs. There are so many of us who studied with Jacobs, and because we studied with Jacobs, understand the instrument and how to play the instrument better than we did when we started. It's made a difference. The brass players today, and particularly the tuba players today can play just about anything you put in front of them. The only thing I can still criticize about a lot of them is that they don't think about the music so much as they think about the technique. Of course, when I think about music, I think about tone quality. That's a pretty subjective subject, but, if it hasn't got good sound and musicianship there's nothing there for me.

Tape 1, Side 2

LeBlanc: Let me just interject here, I went through my files the other day to come up with a list of the students who I have taught. Because of Jacobs, I think, I knew how to teach these guys and that's why they did what they did. Let me just tell you who some of them are. I told you about Steve Bryant already—University of Texas. He had just transferred from Purdue University to Ohio State to major in music when I came here in '66. He went to the University of Texas and is on the faculty with Don Knaub. Chuck Schulz was a freshman that year also, and Chuck is on the faculty at Memphis State. He's been the tuba professor at Memphis State for well over 20 years now. I think he plays in an orchestra there, but I can't be sure of that.

Fritz Kaenzig was one of my students. You probably know all about him, but you might not know he played in the Costa Rica Symphony and the Florida Symphony as a young player. He went to Northern Iowa, taught there a couple years—I don't know how long. He taught at the University of Illinois, and then went to Michigan and the Grant Park Symphony. Fritz did his undergraduate work here, he was from Vandalia, Ohio, which is just north of Dayton. You probably came by there on your way from Bloomington. He was such a talent and he was so dedicated to the instrument.

My favorite remembrance of Fritz is, in lessons if I wanted stop him to make a point—I couldn't say anything because his concentration was so strong that he didn't hear me—I had to grab his shoulder. "Fritz, just a minute." [laughs] I did teach at Michigan the year he was promoted to full professor. He took a leave, and I taught tuba at the University of Michigan that year. That was four years ago, I think.

Nowicke: It's nice to look after your professors.

LeBlanc: Yes. It was kind of fun.

Nowicke: You hired yours, so it's a family tradition.

LeBlanc: Yes, right. Well, if you know guys that can do the job, that's who you want. That's the way I look at it.

Scott MacMorran—you may not know Scott, but his brother Sande is at the University of Tennessee—or I guess he still is. Scott was my first graduate assistant here, and he taught at the University of Southern Mississippi for a couple years, then he went into business with his brother, in Bloomington (as a matter of fact). He's now in the banking business. He was quite a good player.

Nowicke: Les Varner told me that he had sent him to you. Trusted you with his students.

LeBlanc: Jim Akins, who is in the Columbus Symphony, has been my successor at the University, and is doing very well.

Jan Duga is another one. She is in the Air Force Band. I assume she is still there. I saw Jules, her father, a couple weeks ago, and he didn't say she'd left. What a great band!

Mickey Moore, is at Illinois now. Before that, Mickey was at Shenandoah Conservatory. He did his master's degree with me. I believe he was at Southern Mississippi for a while too. When Scott left there, I think Mickey succeeded him, and then he went to the University of Illinois to replace Fritz when he left for Michigan.

Another coincidence which is kind of interesting—the year I taught for Fritz at Michigan, I had a student who started at Illinois with Fritz, then he had Mickey, then he came to Michigan while Fritz was gone and had me. [laughs] He's going to be a conductor and not a tuba player, so I guess we ruined him totally.

And then Jeff Rideout, and you know about Jeff. He did his master's also.

Nowicke: I was in school with Jeff.

LeBlanc: J.J.— John Jones at the University of Louisville. He came here from Illinois working on a D.M.A. and he was working on it when I retired. I corresponded with him and we talked about some things, I was his D.M.A. advisor (of course). I haven't heard any more from him, I don't know what his situation is on the degree, but he's still at the University of Louisville.

Then there is another student I was quite pleased with, that's Steve Winteregg. He teaches at Wittenberg University, and plays in the Dayton Philharmonic. Very good musician.

There was one other, a young man from Chillicothe, his name was Bill Mason who graduated from here. He is now in another field, but he taught—Arden are you there?

Arden LeBlanc: Yes.

Robert LeBlanc: What's the name of the school in Corpus?

Arden LeBlanc: Delmar.

Robert LeBlanc: Delmar University, he taught down there for a while. Then he went into some kind of financial business after that.

Those are the guys that I felt I helped, but I helped them essentially because of what I learned from Jacobs, Knaub, and Burkart. Those things are important.

Nowicke: These are people who mostly went on in professional careers in tuba, you probably taught a lot of others that went on to other musical careers and become conductors, band directors, and so forth.

LeBlanc: Oh yes, absolutely. Right, tons of those.

Nowicke: How many students would you have a year?

LeBlanc: New students? We would usually admit maybe six a year. So we'd have 20 or so ongoing. I was there 26 years.

Nowicke: A heap of them.

LeBlanc: Yes, a bunch. I had some good ones too. You must have something to work with, of course. Those experiences that one has some people can come out of the same experiences and not really understand what they've done, but most of these guys have understood what they've done, and I'm proud of that.

Nowicke: Were they made to play in the marching band?

LeBlanc: No, only those who want to do that, do that.

Nowicke: They don't make all music ed majors do that?

LeBlanc: No.

Nowicke: I understood you had to audition to get into the marching band.

LeBlanc: That is true. Until I left they had to audition for me to get into the marching band. [laughs] In fact, Fritz played his freshman year in marching band, Jan Duga played her whole career in marching band. Akins played in marching band as a graduate student, just because he wanted to. [laughs] It was kind of goofy and he'd never do it again I don't think. Let's see, which of those other guys did? I don't think Bryant did. I am pretty sure Chuck Shultz did. I am pretty sure he did. None of the others did. No, you don't have to be in marching band.

Nowicke: In many places it is regarded as a form of punishment. But this band's a little different.

LeBlanc: Well, it's different in some positive ways, but it's different in some negative ways too. It can be totally out of hand.

Nowicke: Unfortunately my desk is about 20 feet away from where the I.U. marching band rehearses.

LeBlanc: It's not my bag. That was one of the things, when I came to Ohio State from New York, of course everybody that I met for the first time said, "Oh, do you have anything to do

with the marching band?" I said, "Nope. One of the reasons I came here was to get away from having to do anything with marching band." [laughs]

Nowicke: Was it part of your teaching load to play in the faculty quintet?

LeBlanc: Yes, and we were quite active for a while, and then as each of us got a little bit into other areas because of interests (my interest was in conducting)... I studied with some good conductors and it was something I really loved, and then I got into administration. Our horn player Jim Jones, who was here for a long time, got into administration, he was assistant director of the school of music for a while and eventually went to Cleveland State as the director up there.

Tom Battenburg, who was one of the trumpet players got into the jazz side of things. Tom is a terrific musician, well-rounded and one heck of a trumpet player. He was spread that way. Of course Rich was always Rich, he was always a trumpet teacher and a trumpet player. Before that we had another trumpet teacher here, Dick Suddendorf was his name. He was into conducting a lot. Paul Droste played trombone for several years.

It was a pretty good group. It was a good quintet. Again, with brass quintet, it can be fun, but there's not a plethora of great literature. There's a plethora of brass quintet music, but there's not a plethora of great literature.

Nowicke: An awful lot of the brass quintet music is post-1960.

LeBlanc: Right, exactly. And that's it. Of course, you don't want to do Ewald quintets all the time. So, we did take the quintet and we played a Gunther Schuller piece for quintet and band in Lincoln Center. I don't remember what year that was, but that was a good experience. We were pretty active.

I'll always remember the year I substituted for Paul Bierley in the Columbus Symphony, because I found that you can't do both of those things well. You can't play in the orchestra and in the quintet and do it well, because it's a whole different kind of concept of playing, both mentally and physically. That year I felt my quintet playing suffered quite a bit because of the orchestra. So I tried real hard not to give any more heart problems to Paul so I wouldn't have to do that too much more.

Nowicke: He's asleep.

Bierley: I nodded off there for a minute.

LeBlanc: [laughs] I am pretty boring.

Bierley: I was concentrating on something and let my mind wander off. Sorry about that.

Nowicke: It was just insults, and aspersions, and taking the blame for your heart problems.

LeBlanc: Yes, I caused Paul's heart problems.

Nowicke: How about your recordings of Paul Droste and your own recording?

LeBlanc: That's interesting—I hadn't thought about that in quite some time. My own recording, what I've tried to do with that— Gosh, that was a long time ago! Twenty-five years ago. What I was trying to do with that was to get people interested in playing music again. I tried to pick things that I thought were more idiomatic for the tuba, some of which weren't even really written for the tuba as I recall, but the things that I liked at the time, I don't think people knew very much about. The circumstances under which we recorded those were not the best, because it was tape recorded and Bob Buchsbaum, who was the recording engineer was a nice guy and all that, but he was not as well organized as I'd like to be. It was sometimes difficult to get him to say "We can do that again, we can maybe do it better."

We were talking about carving up my tuba—right after I did that recording is when I shortened the first slide again. I realized from doing the recording that it needed to be shorter. [laughs] So my late, great friend, Jim Jones (the horn player I was telling you about) and I got the hacksaw out one day and shortened it. [laughs] Of course, being a horn player, all his concert D's were sharp (because it's 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>) and the tuba was always flat because of the 1<sup>st</sup> valve D. We had some arguments about that, in spite of the fact that we were the best of friends.

Nowicke: I know you had some music that was written for you or dedicated to you.

LeBlanc: The Paul Holmes *Lento* was written for me. It was actually written for my graduating recital as an undergraduate. That's an attractive little piece. It was right at the edge of my ability at the time, which in a sense, was good. I learned from it.

Nowicke: Was he a classmate?

LeBlanc: No, he was the theory-comp teacher when I was an undergraduate. He's had some significant performances. Paul's not a real go-getter, or self-promoter. But, a wonderful person and a fine musician.

That's one of the things that was really kind of a miracle when I think about it, is as an undergraduate in this little podunk school down in Texas. The band director was an outstanding musician, his name was Pete Wiley, his father was director of bands at the University of Kansas for a long, long, time. Pete died in Moscow a few years back. He probably wouldn't have died had he been in the United States, but he had a heart attack. He had a publishing company called T.R.N. Publishing which was essentially for band music. He did some arrangements himself, in fact, he and I had talked about doing a series of tuba things

for a teaching series which would be the things I was talking about. That is, taking some arrangements and transcriptions and things and publishing them with a recording with it—college level kind of stuff, or several different levels, but that never came to pass before he died. I learned a lot about music and conducting from him.

Paul Holmes was a great teacher. He taught me individual composition because there wasn't anybody else there who was even interested. I'd go out to his house and we'd sit down and I'd write stuff and we'd discuss it. He had performances by the Houston Symphony and San Antonio, and had something done up in Cleveland at some point. I was surprised when I learned all this, but his music was quite good.

My undergraduate degree was in music education (actually so was my master's degree, come to think of it—it was Master of Music in music ed). We had some good singing teachers, and those things kind of give you an idea of where I come from.

Nowicke: How did they all happen to be at this little school?

LeBlanc: Beats me! [laughs] I really don't know. There were a lot of excellent students there also.

Nowicke: Is it a well-heeled institution?

LeBlanc: Well, fairly well. It started as a junior college a long, long time before I was there. That part of Texas was fairly well off financially because of the oil industry. In my first teaching job in Dayton, Texas—I could have anything I wanted for that program. In fact, the band parents came to me and said, "What do you need instrument-wise?" I had gone through all of the inventory, the only thing I could possibly use is a contrabass clarinet or a contra alto clarinet. They said, "Well, go find what you want." So I went and I picked out a Selmer rosewood contra alto clarinet, and they bought it. At the end of every year, I don't know whether it was the principal or the superintendent said, "You got money left. Go find something to buy!" So I'd go into Houston and I'd look through the band literature and try to find things for band that we didn't have in the library and it wasn't easy to find any.

In 1976, when I started in administration at Ohio State, the entire performance division at Ohio State had less money than I had in 1959 in the Dayton Public Schools. My high school band was 80 players, the total high school population was 240. I guess that had something to do with it, plus, I think, now, I don't know how to explain this, but I think there's a very strong (particularly) band situation in Texas. It has a lot to do with high school football and all of that stuff, yet there are fine bands there, and there always have been, as far as I know, and there's plenty of talent to go around.

Nowicke: Isn't the Texas Music Educators' Association Conference something all the big vendors go to?

LeBlanc: Absolutely.

Nowicke: The vendors sure don't go to anything in Indiana or Ohio do they?

LeBlanc: Well, they do come to Ohio, and it's more that way here than it is in a lot of places. Our brass quintet played at several state conferences of that nature in the course of our doing those things.

Nowicke: So you had a chance to compare them.

LeBlanc: Yes, consequently I would say to you that they are mostly less grand. The thing of it is, you get down there, and there's money everywhere you look. Yes, there are people who don't get money, but there's a lot of people who do. That was another interesting thing in that job, it must have been the second day that I was there, one of the trumpet players came in and said "What is the best trumpet they make?" I said "Well, I am kind of partial to the Bach in a medium large bore." He came in with one with one the next day. His father was Uncle Ben's Rice. You would never know it by looking at him or the father, but they had the wherewithal to do those things. Now, the kid wasn't particularly talented, but having a Bach trumpet certainly made him a better player than whatever it was he had. I think he had a student-line Olds.

I can't explain it, really. All I know is that we were pretty lucky.

Nowicke: So then why did Janis Joplin want to leave Port Arthur [laughs].

LeBlanc: Well, because she got run out of town. [laughs] Jimmy Johnson's from Port Arthur, Texas too--the football coach that coached the Cowboys and the Dolphins. He was from Port Arthur High School also. Both of those were younger than I am, I am glad to say. [laughs] I don't know if I could have dealt with it! But Janis Joplin was [clears throat] a real piece of work, even as a young kid. She was famous in Port Arthur for being a real piece of work!

Arden LeBlanc: Any coffee needed?

Nowicke: No, M'am.

LeBlanc: Any coffee is likely to keep Paul awake, he's already had one cup.

Nowicke: I'm going to have to poke him on the way back to keep him awake.

LeBlanc: I can put anybody to sleep [laughs].

Nowicke: What haven't I asked you about the tuba that you would like to tell me? You've already blown one topic—you only had one tuba your entire life.

LeBlanc: That's right. I'll tell you, another one of my things about the tuba is that I've always tried to tell my students that intonation is an academic problem. If you're relying on your ear and your pitch sense to help you play in tune, you are going to lose. By the time you have made the sound and it's out of tune, it's out of tune. I don't care if you correct it in a millisecond, you've still produced bad intonation for an instant. Therefore, it is important to know the pitch tendencies of your instrument, of every note on your instrument, and if there are varying valve combinations for an individual note, you need to know all of those.

It also helps you to know what the pitch tendencies are of the instruments that you are playing with. Not that you necessarily need to always play out of tune to match somebody else, but you need to have a thorough understanding of your instrument and its pitch, and how you play it. You can do most of that with a piece of paper and a book if you know the overtone series and you know the tendencies of all brass instruments. The 6<sup>th</sup> partial's going to be sharp, and the 5<sup>th</sup> is going to be flat on every single one of them (if somebody doesn't do something about it), and how the varying valve combinations effect it, so you understand before you ever have anything to do with music what you have to do to produce that pitch at the correct level.

That's how I started every year. We had a tuba class once a week. We always started with that. I think it makes a difference. Not only does it make a difference as far as the actual intonation, but, it makes a difference in finding the tone quality. That is, if you play off-center from where the tone quality is best, then you have some problems to deal with, and you have to learn to adjust those.

The other thing that bothers me is that I see young players messing around with a bunch of different mouthpieces. I know I'm a Neanderthal about this, but I have been playing the same mouthpiece since 1967. Conn sent me a Helleberg to try, and that was the smartest thing they ever did in Central Ohio, because they probably sold 200 Conn Hellebergs as a result of sending me that thing.

I played a Bach 7 before that—that's a good mouthpiece. A lot of guys monkey around with different mouthpieces, and they monkey around with different instruments, and that's fine, but sometimes they do it to the extreme. Trumpet players are terrible about this. I know trumpet players who have had 20 trumpets! [laughs] Admittedly, sometimes you might need a little different kind of sound on the music, from a certain kind of instrument, but by and large, you don't need all that. As far as I know, Jacobs played on an F tuba and a CC tuba, and that was it.

Nowicke: I guess he had that weird double tuba that he did *Pictures* with? He told Les it was a "one of a *time*" horn.

LeBlanc: Well, see, that's why he wanted my horn, so when he had to do *Pictures* he could do it on my horn and tell Reiner it was an F. Reiner always wanted him to play an F on that, and he didn't want to play an F. [laughs]

Nowicke: That was when he had Geyer make the F into the CC?

Bierley: Bob, there is something I think you should address. I don't know how it applies to tuba playing or not, but I noticed when you were conducting the O.S.U. Band on the same program as someone else (same band) but when you were conducting the kids always seemed to be better, to play out, like they were playing with more confidence when you were conducting. Can you explain that? That was intended as a compliment.

LeBlanc: I take it that way too, and I appreciate it, because I think that my career has spanned a period of time where band directors thought the way to do this was to make the brass players play as softly as they could play so that you could hear the woodwinds. That always bothered me, because if somebody writes a *fortissimo* for the horns, you want a *fortissimo* for the horns. It's just a question of playing what's written there, and being musical about it. I never sat on people for playing too loudly unless it was too loud.

The concept that I always had was that "You've got to make what you are doing fit with what's going on around you." There should be balance, but I would always tell the group, "OK, who has the important thing here? What should be heard above all else?" If it was not in balance, that's the approach I would take. Therefore they had to hear and know what should come out, and what should be in the background, and they had to do that at all times. You can't just do that once in a while, you've got to do it all the time.

Bierley: I'm comparing your band playing with Don McGinnis conducting, and it might have something to do that Don was a clarinet player. Take the U.S. Navy Band when Don Stauffer was conducting, and he was tuba player, they had a much bolder sound when you compare that to the Langley Air Force Band with Lowell Grant conducting, he was a clarinet player. It sounded like a different band.

LeBlanc: The conductor is, I guess, sort of the pre-amp that all this comes through, and if it's not satisfying to the conductor then adjustments have to be made. Don McGinnis (who directed the bands at Ohio State when I first came here) was in the same Navy band with Herseth and Jacobs. He had, as you say, a little more woodwind approach to things...

LeBlanc: As I quoted Gunther Schuller before, from the mid-50's to today, brass playing has improved humongously. I mean, it's just incredible. I think back on it, and I know what he's talking about. I think Don was still a little bit of the mind of what brass playing was in the '30's or '40's as opposed to even at that time—in the '60's or '70's. Perhaps the players couldn't do it, they didn't have the ability to play this kind of sound. The sound that you get from the Chicago Symphony is not something that a junior high school band can produce, they get distorted. That was the other thing that as a conductor, particularly when talking to the trombones and the trumpets, the ones who really have the power if I wanted them to play *fortissimo* or more, I would say to them, "I want you to play as loudly as you can, but I want it with good sound. Do not lose control. It has to be controlled *fortissimo*, or controlled whatever it is." It's pretty easy for a clarinet to play four p's but it's difficult for any wind player to play a full range of dynamics, and that's what I always asked people to do, is give me the dynamics that are there, whatever they happen to be, don't water it down. If it's a *fortissimo*, I want to hear *fortissimo*, not *mezzo-forte*. You know as tubists, we've played under so many conductors who said, "I don't want to hear the tubas, I want to feel them." Don't give me that stuff.

Bierley: It's difficult for me to play with Evan Whalen, who was an oboe player. He never had the foggiest idea of what a tuba could do.

LeBlanc: Right, and that's part of it. You have to hear people do it. We all know that Roger Bobo is one of the really great players. I think I am two years older than Roger, and I remember a tape of him doing the Vaughan Williams *Concerto* with the Interlochen group. I don't remember where I got the tape, but I was still an undergraduate, and I had been working on that, and in my own mind as I was working on that, I was thinking, "God, you can't do this!" I heard the tape, and I thought, "Hey, you can do this!" Well, I learned to do it, because I heard that he could do it. Now I probably didn't do it as well as he did, but I could do it because I heard that it can be done. That's all part of that whole thing, I think, if you've got players who can do it, let them do it. Don't sit on them, let them play, as long as they are doing it correctly.

Does that answer your question?

Bierley: Yes.

LeBlanc: I appreciate your saying that, because that was one of the things I always tried to do, was to get that contrast. Hearing music that's loud all the time and hearing music that's soft all the time means nothing to me. It has to have those contrasts, whatever way it was written. You listen to the great symphonies of Shostakovich and Mahler (or whoever else) with a good orchestra, and you are going to hear fantastic contrast.

As I said earlier, I've been really studying the Mahler Second for quite some time now. I have several recordings of the thing. It's really fascinating what differences there can be between

great players and great conductors. For my money—well, I'd better not say it, but I think the players in San Francisco are very, very good, but the Mahler Second that San Francisco does is played very well, but it's not conducted very well musically. I don't like it musically as much as I like Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic musically. Bernstein understood Mahler.

Nowicke: Because of something I was asked in my capacity as "historian" (which I put in quotes) I've been asking people for "Bydlo" stories. Do you have a "Bydlo" story?

LeBlanc: I have a "Bydlo" story.

Arden LeBlanc: Is there a tuba player that doesn't?

LeBlanc: [laughs] My "Bydlo" story—it was my first year of teaching in Texas and I played in the Beaumont Symphony. My teaching was in Dayton, I went to Beaumont to play. For some unknown reason programmed *Pictures*. So I struggled with it on my CC, and had it been during my graduate student time, or my late undergraduate student time, maybe I could have done it on my CC, but teaching the entire band program in Dayton, Texas, starting with 6<sup>th</sup> graders and going through high school, I didn't have a whole lot of time to work on the tuba. So, I tried all kinds of stuff, and I finally just took an old King bell-front euphonium that we had in the school, and I played it on that. It was OK.

My favorite "Bydlo" story is—"that's why Jacobs wanted my horn—to play 'Bydlo'." [laughs]

I think we, again, we certainly don't want to hear ophicleide in the orchestra any more (at least I don't). I don't think we would probably want to hear "Bydlo" on the instrument it was written for, but it wasn't written for a tuba, it was written for something else, and it was written for that French tuba, which could do that pretty easily.

Nowicke: But it's not an instrument that any of us are used to playing.

LeBlanc: No, or hearing it played. In the later years, Jacobs didn't play it. I never asked him if that was his decision, or Reiner's decision, or whose. When Reiner was still there, I think he stopped playing it. Now, he did play it on the earlier recording that, what was that guy's name who went to Detroit?

Nowicke: Kubelik?

LeBlanc: Yes, on the Kubelik recording, Jacobs did play it on the F tuba, but I don't think he played it after that. That was my understanding, that one of the trombonists played it on euphonium.

Nowicke: Abe Torchinsky didn't play it, and was very happy.

LeBlanc: Right. I think it's a macho thing that guys simply have to do it. Jim Akins does it on the F, which is fine. He can do it on the F.

Bierley: He did it the first year on the CC.

LeBlanc: Yes, I know. [laughs]

Nowicke: That's treacherous.

LeBlanc: Jim is an animal, really. He is one heck of a player. He does have a little trouble playing softly once in a while, but we all do.

Nowicke: The Eb tuba mention reminded you of John Fletcher.

LeBlanc: Yes, John Fletcher I think was a wonderful player, a wonderful musician, and a wonderful person. It was a great loss that he died so young. He was here with the Phillip Jones group some years ago, and we had a clinic here. Ronnie Bishop came down and he brought with him the tubist from one of the Australian symphonies. I forget his name—his last name was Young. We had a great time, it was a very educational thing for the students and the four of us played together and had a great time. Jim Akins was there as my teaching assistant at the time.

The point about the Eb tuba is that it can be played very well. I think probably one of the problems is that nobody has done a great job of trying to make a really good Eb tuba. In a sense, it's more of a stepchild than a CC tuba is to most instrument manufacturers because they know where they are going to make their sales, and it's to schools.

Nowicke: People aren't using Eb tubas in the schools now, so it has one home, the competitive British style brass band. Here unless you happen to play in a band which buys them, we're all going to play our CC and BBb horns.

LeBlanc: That can work.

Nowicke: It's a different tone color, and Paul Bierley's Martin Eb is a lot different than a British Eb.

LeBlanc: It's a bigger horn.

Nowicke: Yes, a bigger bell than this 52J.

LeBlanc: I think that's a 20" bell. Mine is an 18".

Bierley: Mine is 19".

Nowicke: Only 19"? OK, the one Sam Gnagey made out of King parts that my buddy Phil in the brass band just bought is 22" or 24". It's amazing.

LeBlanc: That's interesting and can be a lot of fun, but I don't think you are going to make a dynamite tuba taking parts from different horns and putting them together.

Nowicke: But it keeps him off the street.

LeBlanc: Well, yes, that's important too, with a lot of tuba players.

Nowicke: And we know what keeps Paul off the street.

LeBlanc: I think you're going to see something from Conn here soon.

Nowicke: It is exciting to see a little more competition.

LeBlanc: Well, I didn't think about this until just this very minute. The guy who is doing that work at Conn is one of my former students—Rob Phillips is his name.

Nowicke: People keep bringing his name up when they are talking about this horn.

LeBlanc: Rob Phillips is a very intelligent guy from down in Southwest Ohio. I can't think of the name of the town now, somewhere around where that Golden Bull restaurant is. Paul, you know what I'm talking about?

Bierley: Golden Lamb? Lebanon, Ohio.

LeBlanc: Golden Lamb. Somewhere around there.

Anyway, he was a music ed student and he did the work, and he was an OK tuba player, but he knew from the start that he was not going to be a world leader of a player, and he also knew that he wasn't really interested in teaching in the public schools and he went off in this direction. I think he might do some good things. In fact, I just talked to Jim Akins yesterday, he had been to Buffalo to do some clinics, and he stopped in on the way back and they made some adjustments yesterday.

So many things make a difference, like when you have the rotary valve that doesn't line up with the tube, and it can't possibly, the way the thing is put together. So, making some differences there, and the bore taper, and where it tapers.

Nowicke: And if it tapers *through* the section.

LeBlanc: Exactly. One of the things that Jim was able to correct yesterday was that the tubes were enough different at one point where he said, “Well, look, let’s make these tuning slides so that the slide part is on the outside instead of the inside so it will be closer to what you have in one back here.” It’s kind of exciting that those things are happening. Finally.

Nowicke: People have not been willing to do R & D.

LeBlanc: Right, exactly. Of course, it’s expensive. I understand that. They’re still doing R & D on Stradivarius violins, for crying out loud. [laughs]

Have you been keeping up on that one down town?

Bierley: Yes. Rubinoff? I was cleaning my second valve the other day and I found an inscription, “Antonio Stradivari 1728.”

LeBlanc: [laughs] Paul, you don’t want to clean those out—that messes everything up.

Bierley: I’m sorry.

LeBlanc: That reminds me of another good story. When I was in graduate school I went back to Texas for some reason, and the band director, Pete Wiley, had been trying to find a good tuba to have for the program and the retired tubist from the San Antonio Symphony had an old Conn CC for sale. He asked me to go over to San Antonio and try it and make an recommendation, and I did. It was a nice tuba, it was very good tuba. I assume it’s still there, I don’t know. I played it, and I started messing around and adjusting slides, and I looked at the tuning slide and it looked like some kind of crud—the tuning slide was out about this far, and there was some kind of crud all around it. I asked, “What is this?” He said, “That’s the tuning slide, you don’t ever want to move that.” [laughs] I got to thinking about it—you know, he might be right, because all you are going to move it for is to get sharper to play with the damn violins and clarinets.

Nowicke: Our percussionists in junior high cut blocks of wood and that would be how they adjusted the pitch of the tympani—stick them under the pedals.

LeBlanc: Paul knows who I’m talking about: Jack Evans was the trombone professor and marching band director here for a long time, until, actually--Paul Droste, succeeded the guy who succeeded Jack. He was down in North Carolina judging a marching band contest and he swears this is true. He said the last band that they had before lunch was this band from a high school in North Carolina and the Sousaphones were just awful. They sounded so bad you couldn’t believe it. They were walking to go to lunch and the band director had all the Sousaphone guys right around him talking to them as they were walking by, and Jack swears he heard him say, “I told you boys not to use them valves, them is for college kids!” [laughs]

I have another marching band story. My very first teaching job in Texas, I think there were two Sousaphone players in the marching band. Of course that's the first thing of the year, the marching band. We went outside, we went through the stuff without instruments and did it several times. Finally we started playing the music. I noticed (I don't remember what we were playing, this was in the days before we had special arrangements. We all played "the" march, whatever it was) this one was in the key of Ab (I remember that because it's pertinent to the story) I noticed as they went down the field that the one Sousaphone player who could play, was playing Ab all the way down the field. On the beat, all the way down the field, Ab all the way. I said, "OK, well, maybe he's having troubles with memorization, he'll get it." So we did it again, same thing. We did it a third time and I finally went down and asked, "Why are you playing the same note all the way?" He said, "That's what's on my music." I said, "What do you mean?" He had a percussion part. [laughs] I don't happen to know how he figured "I'll play an Ab" even though there's no key signature, but he did, and that was the right note most of the time. [laughs]

There's another story that happened in my wife's school. She brought me this Sousaphone home and she'd tried to play it, the kid tried to play it. She said, "What's wrong with this?" Sure enough, it was awful. Somebody had stuffed in there as far as it could reach, an entire roll of toilet paper. I don't remember how we got it out?

Nowicke Full immersion?

LeBlanc: Probably. There's a million of those kinds of tuba stories but that only goes to show you that really (probably even today) the worst taught instrument in the public schools is the tuba. A lot has to do with the fact that the guys doing the teaching never learned anything about it. They didn't care about it, for whatever reasons. So, in that sense I think it's kind of miraculous that we do have good players coming out from time-to-time. We don't have a bunch of them, but we do have some.

Nowicke: Now everyone starts taking private lessons when they are in high school and that wasn't true even when I was a kid.

LeBlanc: That depends on who they are taking lessons from.

Nowicke: This is true.

LeBlanc: I used to always wish that some of the students who came in as freshmen had not had lessons because they had been screwed up so much by somebody who didn't know anything about the tuba. They might have known something about the trumpet or the clarinet, or whatever, but there's a lot of misconception about these things. I guess we've done OK after dealing with that.

Nowicke: You were talking about mouthpieces, anything in particular about mouthpieces?

LeBlanc: Well, I think it's like everything else. First off, I think shallow, little mouthpieces are counterproductive to what you need to do as a tuba player. I think tuba players need to be able to play and sound good in the low register, because that's what nobody else can do. Somebody else can play at the top of the staff, but you can't play below the staff unless you got a tuba. So, consequently, you need a mouthpiece that's large enough to do that successfully with good intonation and good sound, but you don't want it to be so large that you can't play in the upper register of the tuba. I think that again, that they've done some things with mouthpieces nowadays, some of which are OK. I just say get a good medium size tuba mouthpiece such as the large Conn Helleberg, or a Bach 7, or something of that nature and use it. If you can't do what you need to do on that, it's probably not the mouthpiece that needs to be fixed or replaced. [laughs] I think a lot of people make too much of it.

Another one of my Jacobs stories that I love and I've told a million times. In one of my lessons, after I'd gotten to know him pretty well, having been around a horn player for so long, she had the Farkas *Art of Horn Playing*. If you know anything about that book, you know it starts out at the beginning and it has the pre-warmup which goes for about 10 pages, it has a warmup that goes for maybe 20 pages. So I asked Jacobs once, "Does Farkas really do all that?" "Yes," he said, "He does it *religiously* and he sounds great." I said, "OK." He said, "But, you know what, every now and then he's late to rehearsal and he doesn't do it, and he sounds great."

I think what I learned from that is that you get yourself in a frame of mind thinking you gotta do something, and you gotta do something. If you don't think you have to do that, then you don't have to do that. Warming up on a brass instrument is not the same thing as warming up to run the 100 yard dash. The muscles you are using are so small it's a different ball game. All you need to do to warm up is to get things going so that you know where you are if you're going to play a Bb or a G or whatever you are going to play, know where that is. Just play a few notes and get the process going. Anything past that is practicing. That's one of the things I tried to stress to my students. You have to know what you're doing when you're doing it. Are you practicing, are you warming up, are you working on triplets, are you working on range, are you working scales, know what it is you're doing, don't just sit there mindlessly and do stuff because you think you have to do stuff. It might not be productive. Nobody has too much time on their hands, so, figure out how to get things organized so that you can do what you have to do to get the job done.

Nowicke: So you didn't recommend a set routine?

LeBlanc: Not really. Just get things warm. I used a thing Jacobs used which was just a little melodic thing that you play within an octave. I used some of the things of Remington's, but again, those Remington things were practicing, they were not really warming up.

That trombone ensemble at Eastman was just such a *fantastic* thing. Every great trombonist in the world wanted to study with Remington, and most of them did! You put 40 of those guys on a stage (and when I say guys I include girls, there were women in there at the time) they would start their concerts with those things. Obviously that's not warming up, but it sounded wonderful.

One of the fun things that I used to do with my kids. There was a telephone on my desk after we got into Weigel Hall. My telephone had four or five buttons, two of which meant something. Well, if they were doing an orchestral excerpt and I didn't think it was quite right, I'd pick up the phone and punch one of those useless buttons and call Berlioz and say, "How did you really want that to go?" I said, "Did you want it like this?" and I'd have the kid play it, and say, "No, that's not what he wants."

The other thing I'd usually would tell the kids is that you get all tied up with all this stuff. It depends on who the kid was and what kind of language I would use. Essentially I would say, "Would you just play it?" "Just play it, don't mess around with all this stuff."

That was something else I got from Jacobs. He would go through all this stuff and he would talk about Herseth. My understanding (although it could be totally wrong) is that Herseth really wasn't into all these scientific things. He would just play it. There will never be another one like Herseth. Ever. There's a lot of pretenders and a lot of people are pretty close, but there will never be another one. Those two guys are just in another Heaven. Of course Herseth isn't there yet, but he might as well be. He's such a heavenly kind of player.

I guess those are the things that are important to me. I don't know of anything else that I could add except if you have other questions. I think I was fortunate in that I was able to do a lot of different things and maintain what I had to maintain as a player fairly well. I was fortunate in that I had a gift that I didn't have to work real hard, and I know that, and I'm grateful for that, because otherwise I would have had to spend more time doing that and not expanding to the kinds of things that I feel today were important. That's something that I think people need to come to grips with. Like Clint Eastwood says, "A man's got to know his limitations." [laughs]

What'd I leave out Paul?

Bierley: I'm trying to think of something Bob, and I can't, you've touched on a lot of things. Teaching, pedagogy, philosophy I think is the thing that Carole is mostly interested in. I think you've touched on a lot of good subjects there.

Nowicke: I love horn tech stuff too, but he's played the same horn forever. [laughs]

LeBlanc: Well, yes, I can't help you much there. If it ain't broke don't fix it.

Bierley: I keep asking people why is everybody in town getting a better tuba than I have, can they play that many more notes?

LeBlanc: Akins has really gotten into this. He's helped Kalison, he's been playing a Willson, but he literally helped Kalison design that tuba. Whatever that guy's name was, (I forget now) he improved that tuba. I bought one and I thought "Well, I'll try this." I tried it for a while and I sold it. It was good, but it wasn't any better than what I had. I think this work that's going on in Cleveland now, he will be largely responsible for making that work, because he's really studied it and he knows what he's doing. Most tuba players I think dabble at it. Jim studies it. Jim is a real Renaissance man, he's an artist, I'll show you something he did.

Tape 2, Side 2

LeBlanc: He's a very studious kind of guy.

Nowicke: That's a pretty good dawg picture. I thought you were going to tell me he did that other one.

LeBlanc: No, he didn't do that one.

Nowicke: It looks like a Wyeth.

LeBlanc: It is. That's exactly what it is. It looks like our first Lab, Elsa. That was the mother of our super-star, Gustav Mahler.

Nowicke: Is super-star here or is he out with the trainer?

LeBlanc: He's down in the kennel.

Nowicke: We'll have to meet the dogs.

LeBlanc: Let me let the terriers out and you can see two terriers.

Nowicke: OK.

[End of interview]

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