

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM MCBRIDE

MARCH 27, 2001

Q. This is Rodney J. Harrison. I'm a member of the Ohio State University Retirees Association. The Association is assisting OSU Archives in creation of an oral history for the University. As a result of this cooperation, I am in the home of William McBride, who lives in Ft. Myers, Florida. We are preparing tape #1 on March 17, 2001. Bill, would you state your full name and date of birth for the record?

A1. William Byrl McBride, born November 29, 1908.

Q. Bill, where did you grow up and what were the factors that sparked your interest in music?

A2. I was born in German Township, now American Township, Allen County, Ohio, and spent virtually all of my early life in Lima, Ohio. I graduated from Lima Central High School in 1927 and went on to Ohio Wesleyan University from where I graduated in 1931. The next year I went to teachers college, Columbia University, where I got my Masters degree. At that point, I really began my program with teaching and music. My first job was in a little town up in Richland County, Ohio. I taught all the sophomore, junior and senior English in a five teacher high school, and all the music in the high school in four one-room borough schools. So, I really began right at the bottom of the teaching career in music.

- Q. Well that's marvelous. What attracted you to Ohio State and what were the circumstances of your employment?
- A3. Well, that's an interesting arrangement. The second job I had was in Lima Shawnee, and this, of course, was in my own home county. Lima Shawnee was, incidentally, at that time the most wealthy of the wealthy school districts in the State of Ohio. Four railroads ran through the community. The Solar Refinery was there also. A big pipe manufacturer, automobiles, and what have you? But at any rate, the Superintendent of the Board of Education had decided to have their contract renewed had to go to summer school. Well, the two of us on the staff at the school already had their Masters degree and it seemed that we didn't need to make this change, but there was no exception. We all had to go. So. I chose to go to Ohio State and it so happened that Mrs. McBride's father and mother lived in Columbus, so of course staying there for the summer was no great problem. So, while I was in Columbus, I took courses with Joe Leeder and a conducting course with Eugene Weigel and those people who were in the early stages of the College of the School of Music.
- Q. Well that's really great. Do you remember how much you were paid at that time?
- A4. I think at the Shawnee Schools it was \$1,800 per year. Now following up on that, it might be said that I went to Ohio State in a very curious way. I had known that Dr. Hughes had died and I thought, well, that's a very serious situation because one of the summers that I was in summer school at Ohio State, I took his course in modern music. I have to frankly admit that he didn't convert me too much in the way of modern schools of music, but I'm glad that I was there because I learned

to know a man who was a great scholar and a very fine gentleman. But at any rate, as we were moving along at the end of fall quarter at Ohio Northern, I had a letter from Joe Leeder, saying “Would you come to Columbus at your very earliest convenience so that we can discuss a matter of our mutual concern?” Well I had a suspicion, but I thought to pursue this very quickly. So I made a long distance phone call, which in those days was something that you only did if there was a funeral or something very extraordinary. Well, Joe Leeder said that he would meet us that Saturday at his home. So we came to Columbus on that Saturday and we sat in his living room for a little while. And he said, “Well Bill, what I want to tell you is that out of the salary of Dr. Hughes, Eugene Weigel has enough money to hire one person and I have enough money to buy a person too. So I’m asking if you would like to join us at Ohio State University?” This I was more than happy to do, if I could get released at Ohio Northern. This I was able to do and came to Ohio State at the beginning of winter quarter.

Q. That was what year, Bill?

A5. Oh boy. I was afraid you were going to ask that because I’m not to sure about that. But I think that has to be beginning winter quarter of 1939.

Q. Okay great. Okay Bill, at that time music was part of the College of Education. Can you reflect upon the factors that led music to become part of a new College of the Arts?

A6. Well, that is a thing, of course lots of things happened in the School of Music, Rod, before that. When I got there, we had our offices in the basement of Paige Hall. The Law School was above and we taught most of our classes in the old

president's residence at the northwest corner of 15th and High, a red brick building, which has since been torn down. The instrumental things were done in Rehearsal Hall back on Neil Avenue, the old barn that was rejected by the College of Agriculture as their soap barn. The chorus practiced over in a room of some kind at the Ohio Union. We were spread all over the campus because we had no better place at all. And not until about 1949, '50, '51 did we get Hughes Hall. So we spent a good share of our time, early part of our time, in those early quarters.

Q. When you were with the College of Education before it came under the College of the Arts, were you strictly involved or the school strictly involved in future education?

A7. No, we had a very well established professional performance program under way, both piano and the woodwinds and the brass and the strings. Those were taught quite successfully in the School of Music. Music education was just one of the parts of the program of the whole School of Music.

Q. What caused the change from education to the College of the Arts? Were you there at that time when that happened?

A8. Yes, I was. And I really can't tell you more than I have. I'm a bit fuzzy about this in my own mind. As I remember, we weren't terribly concerned about a change, but I think that there was in the College of Education. I took his job when he left and went over to the president's office. But at any rate, being a man out of administration, he liked to see everything in a fuzzy way. He, I think, was trying to push the committee that he had had appointed into suggesting that there be a College of the Arts in which only the fine arts and music was placed. Now, I

never sensed that in the School of Music there was a great move to go this way. I think this was really kind of arranged for us, so to speak. Jack Corbally was his name.

Q. Oh yes. I remember Jack Corbally well. Now you've mentioned a little bit about the facilities that were available. They were certainly kind of a hodge podge collection, all over the campus, weren't they? What do you think were the most significant changes in the School of Music during your years of service, which were what 30?

A9. Yes, 30 years.

Q. In the 30 years you were there, what do you see as the major changes that happened in the School of Music?

A10. Well, I can essentially speak of music education of which I was a part. Of course the move to Hughes Hall was really one of the great examples at that time of improvement. But we got the Ph.D. in Music Education in the whole School of Music. I think that was an accomplishment. I think that some of the staff that we had were getting some national prominence. I was one of those who was fortunate enough to go through the chairs of the music education organization in the country, eventually becoming National President, which part I think there was some considerable national recognition to our own School of Music. But I think, really the distillation of the programs that we already had under way, I think they are still quite solid. Probably some programs would be adjusted or that sort of thing. But they are still the same essential structure. But I think really the music

education program is pretty largely still the same as its been for a good many years.

Q. Okay. No need to change good things, right? Whom do you recognize as the major figures in the School of Music? Who left an indelible impression on you?

A11. Well, I certainly would have to say that the outstanding person would be Joe Leeder, who was my mentor and took me through the early stages of teaching in the University, and also was a close personal friend. He was never the kind that you would see in the limelight of affairs, but when you would go to convention, Joe Leeder was always the one that people from all the country were wanting to talk to. He had a little difficulty getting to the meetings because people were nailing him here and there and what have you. Eugene Weigel certainly has to be recognized because he did, I think, hold together a group of sometimes rather fractious musicians who wanted to go in different directions, held them together into a unit that grew from really a small, shall I say, group of people, to one that has first rate state and national prominence in the country. When he departed, it was recognized by most of the people in the country that his was a first line job to have. That was one of the good ones to have. So, I think that says in itself says that we had gone to a place of some kind of repute in the country.

Q. In our discussion earlier, you also mentioned Lou Diercks. So what about him?

A12. Lou Diercks was kind of a curious person. He was a fellow who ran his own show, and he was highly regarded in the choral field. Again now he was out in the country a lot in clinics and working with other choral groups; and he also

developed a marvelous choral program at the University. We had lots of concerts and did a magnificent job of promoting choral and music on our campus.

Q. So these people really helped put the OSU School of Music on the map, right?

A13. That is correct. I think they are the people who did the job.

Q. Well that's super. You probably don't remember but I came to the University as a GI on the GI Bill. A lot of changes occurred on the campus as a result of World War II and the GI Bill. What were the specific impacts on the music program in the School of Music?

A14. Well, there was not much change in the curriculum because of the GI Bill, but we just added more sections of what had to be taught to develop a program. The thing that I remember out of those days was that the students we had were really students that were there because they really wanted to be there. They were the kind that would ask questions in class that really had meaning because I think they had been through the trenches and really had a different point of view on life than the average graduate of a high schooler who comes to college. But it was the most pleasant teaching experience of all of my life to really deal with the crowd of GI students that came through. They really knew what they wanted to do and would really dig in and work at it.

Q. I think they also inspired the other students to be likewise didn't they?

A15. I think that's true, yes. That's correct.

Q. Great. What external forces were there that shaped the music program outside the University?

A16. I don't think there would be much in the way of other forces that would shape the

Program. The National Accrediting Associations would be the only organizations that would be doing anything about shaping our program.

Q. Were there major changes that they made in the 30 years you were there?

A17. No. We were on top of most of everything that was going on.

Q. What were the major changes in the types and kind of music students and faculty during your 30 years?

A18. Well of course, as I went on, I graduated from doing undergraduate to running graduate courses. When you spend a good share of your latter years with graduate students, they again are a type of person that knows what they want and what they're after, and they're more interested with the finesses that you want to develop in music education. They are always more philosophical; sometimes more practical. But they are more broad minded and they come with a body of experience that the average undergraduate student does not have.

Q. So you think the major change was the addition of the graduate program?

A19. I'm sure that would be a very important change, yes.

Q. One of the things that we neglected to talk about during the World War II experience, I have it from a good friend of mine that knows you well, that you had a major role in saving the marching band during the war. Is that right and tell us about it.

A20. Yes, that was a great experience. I had had band experience in the second high school I was in. I had a band when I was at Ohio Northern University. I had a band in Ada High School at the same time. So when Manley Whitcomb was drafted and I had already been declared 4F, Weigel called me one day and said

“McBride, you’re appointed director of the marching band.” I said “Well, look, I don’t think I can hang onto what they’ve done down there. That’s been a great organization.” He said “Well, give it a try anyhow.” So when the season came along, yes, I did take on the marching band. We had some terrific experiences. It was an interesting thing. Come Friday night, you didn’t know whether you were going to have enough players to put the band on the field the next day or not, but we usually got through one way or another. Of course it was an interesting thing that first year particularly. There would be a bunch of boys on the campus that had been hanging with the band and they would walk up and say “Look, we can’t come, we got to go home. We’ve had greetings from the president.” Now some of you in World War II will know what that means. That means you’ve been drafted. You’re on your way in. I wasn’t about to say “Well, look can’t you stay til tomorrow?” because they’re anxious to get home right now. They don’t know exactly what their future is. So we put the show on. Now, it’s true. It keeps coming up all the time: “Did you have people who didn’t play instruments?” Yes, we did. Did we have girls? No, we did not have girls. But when we had people who didn’t play instruments, we did it just to fill a spot. We had a band of ten by ten, ten men wide and ten men deep, and we would have people in there who would fill a spot so a formation would look right. Most of the people were playing instruments. Now the guys in the band, when the season started, were hitting all the fraternity houses and what have you talking to anybody that ever played an instrument. They were encouraged to come and play in the band. Well, it turns out that during that period of time, we were the only “Big Ten” school who put a

program on the field. All the rest of them only put a band on the stands. They never marched at all in the fields. But, every game during the season, we had a show of one kind or another because we kept it together. Now, since then some of the stories that have come out of those trying times have grown. They've had legs and gotten a little bigger than they really were, at least as we thought about it at the time. But it was a great experience, and one I'll enjoy thinking about the rest of my life.

Q. Well that's a marvelous story. How many years did you have the band as your responsibility?

A21. Three years.

Q. Three years. Okay, great. Well let's move on to a little different aspect of your life at the University. Can you comment about the City of Columbus, the changes and how they impacted Ohio State, at least in the music area?

A22. Well, Columbus of course grew, and I think the growth of Columbus affected the University over in finance and that sort of thing more than it did music. Our main contact outside the campus would be of two kinds: The Columbus Symphony. First we had George Hardesty who was our string man at Ohio State, to direct the Columbus Symphony Orchestra. And then they got a regular director. Some of our own staff played in that orchestra. That, I think, would be the main relationship that might be outside the campus in the case of performance people. As far as music education is concerned, we had constant contact with the public schools because we were placing student teachers with the public schools, and we kept those contacts wide open all the time. Our relationship there was very good.

They were very good about when there was an opening; they would try to come to see us so that we could recommend some teachers. And, of course we would always send them a good one if we could because we knew that that teacher might be supervising one of our own student teachers. Now L.O. Andrews over in the Dean's office was the one who was mainly responsible for that arrangement and that contact with the public schools. But those would be the only outside major influences that I can think of at the moment.

Q. Well it sounds like the School of Music had a major impact on the symphony, didn't it?

A23. I wouldn't want to say it was a major impact, but it was a substantial one. Because it was really a thing that was a community affair. There were a lot of people outside the University who were, shall I say, on the Board for it and gave money and that sort of thing, promotion for the Symphony Orchestra too.

Q. Well that's great. Do you remember much about the speakers rule controversy and did that impact music at all?

A24. You know, you're going to have to fill me in on the speakers. Now I do remember the Rose Bowl deal, but

Q. Let's talk about the Rose Bowl then.

A25. Well, the Rose Bowl, before we're through I do want to be refurbished on the speakers deal. Because I know there was a problem, but I don't remember what it was, and apparently it didn't bother us much. But I'd like to know what it was about. But the Rose Bowl, I do remember that. At that time, I think it was the University that sponsored a trip of the band and the alumni and the team, to the

Rose Bowl. And somewhere or another the faculty had the feeling that this was somewhat outside the realm of academic approval, and said that this shouldn't go on. And the point that they decided was that they would have a meeting over in the faculty club. I was there, and I was a part of the meeting. I went there because I thought they ought to go. But the faculty voted at that meeting at the faculty club that we would have no part of the Rose Bowl. I do remember that Jack Fullen(sp?), who was then Alumni Secretary, had already arranged for the train and what have you to take the crowd from Columbus out to Los Angeles, didn't know quite what he was going to do. But in the end, he arranged for the Alumni Association to be responsible. It was sponsored by the Alumni Association and not the University. I know the train eventually went. He got things around so that Ohio State was still represented at the Rose Bowl. Now tell me about the speakers, I don't remember too much about that.

Q. Well as I remember, the speakers were there and there was some concern about people who were speaking on campus. And the Board of Trustees came up with a rule that there was going to be a limit placed or some selection committee that would determine whether or not speakers would come. And I think it had to do with communism. Maybe some left leaning people who were on campus and the Board wasn't very interested in having that point of view espoused to the students. Does that ring any kind of bell?

A26. Yes. We were not concerned because the School of Music would not be having speakers come. We might have conductors and we might have a soloist of some

kind, but we wouldn't have people who were speakers. So, that rule didn't bother us very much.

Q. Okay, great. Were there other conflicts which had an impact on you or the University that you remember?

A27. No, I can't remember any great conflicts that we had. We always had some of our differences, but not great conflicts. The performance people were always concerned about more emphasis on performance. And of course we were concerned about more emphasis on what's going to happen to these boys and girls as they teach in the public schools. Those were the kinds of conflicts that I think would be natural and normal. And as I have talked with my friends and used to talk with them over the country, that was a phenomenon that existed I think in every School of Music in the country. So, it was not unusual for that to happen at Ohio State.

Q. That sounds great. You mentioned one of your major accomplishments. Let's talk a little bit about that and the rest of them that you feel you contributed. Let's talk first about the national presidency you had. Exactly what was that group?

A28. Well, that would be the Music Educators National Conference. That is the largest group of musicians in the world, a music education people in the United States. I went through the Chairs to arrive at that place. I first was President of the Ohio Music Education Association and then the North Central Association, which is about ten states in the middle of the country, also a division of the Music Educators National Conference. I then was eventually elected to do a two year term as National President. That, I think, helped bring some really national

thought to Ohio State University, and I think fully supported because a few years after that I was also elected President of an honorary music fraternity. Music's Phi Mu Alpha, which also is kind of a prestige star that I could bring to the University, having served in that capacity.

Q. Well that was certainly capstones to a distinguished career. Any other accomplishments you wish to mention?

A29. No, I think those and the fact that I got the Ph.D. at Ohio State, are kinds of the things that stand out in my contribution I think, yes.

Q. That's great. What regrets do you have at the end of your career at the University? Things that you maybe hoped to accomplish that you never did.

A30. Well, you see that brings me to another story. When Jack Corbally was moved from the College of Education to the President's Office, Dean Cottrell asked me to come over and take his place in the College of Education, which I was glad to accept. My job was really making contacts for the College of Education in the State of Ohio. One of the things that I felt very strongly about that I didn't get very far with, Jack Corbally tried to do, and said he had not been very successful either. This was to really get the staff of the College of Education interested in the activities out in the public schools. They preferred to stay right in the classroom and hang right in with what they wanted to do there, and not really concern themselves with what was going on in the public schools. I didn't get very much done on that score, either. I had a little radio program at five schools out in the state. Once a month we would have a radio program in which we could talk back and forth, answer questions and that sort of thing. But that didn't continue either after I left.

- Q. Well you certainly made a major impact on the University in your 30 years. Are there any other topics that you wish to add to this oral history?
- A31. Well, I don't think there is at the moment. I'm always amazed at the growth of the University. When we went there 12,000 students was thought to be a whale of a big university. But that's just kind of peanuts now. What kind of numbers do they have up there these days on the main campus.
- Q. I think it's between 40-50,000.
- A32. Boy. And of course there's no driving on the oval. You can hardly get on the campus. You park out someplace and then you walk in or something. They have buses, I guess that take you in, don't they?
- A33. Yes, they do.
- A. What about those parking places on the campus? The parking garage back of Arpps Hall. Is that still open?
- Q. Yes, those are open and they are adding more. They are really trying to work hard to keep it a pedestrian campus. So, it's more convenient for the students.
- A34. That's going to be a problem, I suppose, as it gets bigger.
- Q. Well any last comments you wish to make?
- A.35 This has been a marvelous experience. As I got this list of questions, the first thing that came to mind was that this is just like doing the paperwork for a Ph.D. again.
- Q. Well Bill, you've had a great career and this has been certainly enjoyable for me to get acquainted with you again and to give you this opportunity to have your comments in perpetuity at the University. Thanks again.

A.36 Thank you too. It's been a great opportunity and I appreciated the chance to do it.