

A Visit with Roger Collins. by Randall Faust

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This Spring, Roger Collins completed 31 years as a Horn Professor at **Western Illinois University** and Hornist in the *Camerata Woodwind Quintet*. I have seen his work as a hornist and teacher through the excellent performances of his students. Consequently, the opportunity to get to know Roger better has been one of the high points of my move to Macomb. Recently, Roger and I met over lunch at the Macomb Dining Company. The ideas that follow were from that meeting.

When asked about some of the new works performed by the *Camerata Woodwind Quintet*, he named several. They included works by nearby American composers William Karlins and Thom Ritter George to Europeans like Karkoschka and Andrez Dutkiewicz. The latter pieces were performed on a tour to Poland and Stuttgart, Germany in 1988. The *Camerata's* command of such advanced works--in addition to standards from the Quintets of Anton Reicha to Irving Fine--no doubt--are reasons for its longevity.

When asked about the longevity of the *Camerata Quintet*, Roger cited two factors: 1. rehearsals were always a joy, and 2. confluence of the personalities of the members of the ensemble. In fact, Roger said that he always looked forward to the 10--12 sessions each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. In addition to helping to "keep in shape", he cited the rehearsals as often being as interesting and enjoyable as the concerts. However, the concerts were often very interesting in content, location, and audience profile! In addition to many foreign travels, the *Camerata* often had interesting visitors in the audience at Hainline Theatre. Once during a St. Louis Symphony residency, the audience included Roland Pandolfi and Carl Schiebler. The year before, when the Chicago Symphony was in residence for a week at WIU, audience members included Dale Clevenger and Ray Still of the CSO.

The symphony musicians were always very supportive of the *Camerata's* performances. A former member of the Quad Cities Symphony--Dennis Behm (currently Horn Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi), described the *Camerata's* style as "symphonic" and "orchestral." Roger indicated that although he was brought up with an orchestral concept, he grew to appreciate the clarity of intonation in chamber music performance.

Before coming to **Western**, Roger had performed in the Denver Symphony. His horn teachers included Jim Miller at The University Northern Colorado --as well as Philip Farkas and Abe Kniaz at Indiana University. Among the qualities he admired in Mr. Kniaz were his intensity and the fact that he sincerely enjoyed teaching. He remembered Mr. Farkas as a person who was quite helpful professionally and could easily describe solutions to a musical or pedagogical problem.

The sonority of Roger's playing can be attributed in part to the influences of his teachers and colleagues and a variety of instruments. He cited the New York Philharmonic broadcasts as early musical influences and the corresponding use of a CONN- 8D Model Horn (1964). Around 1969, he was visiting Carl Geyer's horn shop in Chicago--where he purchased a Hans Hoyer Horn. After using that instrument for two years, he traveled to Elkhorn, Wisconsin where he purchased a large-bell Holton. Other instruments included a piston valved Schmidt and two different PAXMAN horns. In 1986, he purchased the large-throated LAWSON that he currently uses.

In addition to performances with the *Camerata Woodwind Quintet*, Roger has been and continues to be active as a hornist in area orchestras in Galesburg, Peoria, and the Quad Cities. A memorable performance was the playing of the Fifth Symphony of Gustav Mahler conducted by James Dixon on his final concert with the Quad Cities Symphony. Performing in the section were several of his former students--Mike Fee as principal hornist, Annette Pegis as third horn, and Ingrid West Mullane as fourth horn. Also performing was Roger's colleague--University of Iowa Horn Professor Emeritus Paul Anderson. Between those hornists, a span of fifty years of Quad Cities Symphony horn playing was represented.

Roger's private studio and WIU students include area hornists such as Mike Fee and Ingrid West Mullane of the Quad Cities Symphony and more recent alumni David Smalley and Debbie Sherrill--who are currently studying and playing in New York City. Other former students include Cheryle Obstfelder of the U.S. Marine Band, Jay Remissong of the Fort Wayne Symphony, and Jennifer Dugle Kummer--formerly Principal Hornist with the Memphis Symphony--currently a recording artist in Nashville.

When asked of the secret of his teaching, Roger laughed in a self-effacing manner. However, when prodded, he revealed that he always tried to pay attention to the needs of each individual student. These included the development of a daily drill for each individual's needs, a list of things to cover by the end of the day, and a study of traditional exercise and etude materials by Farkas, Schuller, Kopprasch, Pottag-Andraud, and Maxime-Alphonse. Among the contemporary etudes of Dubois, Bitsch, and Reynolds he cited the Reynolds 48 Etudes as a means of developing dynamic consistency throughout the registers.

Like his teacher Philip Farkas, Roger has had the reputation of being able to help students find solutions to the challenges of playing the horn. Another characteristic he also attributed to Mr. Farkas was that "you always felt good by the time you left the lesson." Like his teacher, Roger Collins continues to provide students and colleagues with a positive outlook on horn playing and life. Thank you--Roger.

Roger Collins, Western Illinois University
by Ingrid Mullane

When I first met Mr. Collins it was during my talent grant audition at Western Illinois University in 1982. Several of the Western faculty picked me up at the Peoria airport after I had flown in from New Jersey. Dr. Koper, Dr. Cheadle, Dr. DeJong, and Mr. Brody told me a lot of stories about Mr. Collins. I heard that he was 6'5" tall and a very large man. Why in fact, he hand was so big that he couldn't fit his whole hand in the bell of the horn, so he just used his thumb!

Being a very naive young woman, I believed what they had to say. You can imagine my surprise when I met him the next morning. My first words to him were, "Well you're not big you're short!" Fortunately for me, Roger recognized the teasing instigation of his colleagues and I was awarded a talent grant scholarship in spite of my verbal faux pas.

My years at Western were busy and I have fond memories of music making on campus. As I look back now, I realize the many opportunities that were available to me because of the smaller music department. I was able to play in Wind Ensemble and Orchestra for the four years that I attended Western and participated in several small ensembles as well. I had the advantage of working with a caring teacher who was also an active performer with the Galesburg Symphony and the Camerata Woodwind Quintet. I heard the Quintet perform many times which increased my desire to play the horn and also helped to focus my listening through live performance. Practice rooms were always available in Browne Hall and we would see Mr. Collins on a regular basis in the music building whether we had a scheduled lesson or not.

Thank you Roger for all the work on Kopprasche, Maxine-Alphonse, and the Big Blue Book, as well as introducing me to Schumann, Strauss, Dukas, and Hindemith. The foundations of horn playing and music were taught to me well and I enjoy a life as a musician and music educator because of my experience at Western and the dedication of my Horn Professor, Roger Collins.