

## Jo Hawthorne

(Continued)

this a kind of after-the-fact analysis, not an integral part of his artistic process. Hawthorne said his father's work was instinctive, not analytical.

Not so with Joseph. His viola teacher, William Primrose, later called Joseph Hawthorne his best student, mainly because he was old enough by then to analyze what he was doing, rather than merely spit back technical competency.

Hawthorne started violin lessons at age six, as a child in 1914 in Provincetown. His father, who could hold his own as a quartet cellist, had also played cornet in the Richmond, Me., town band. Joseph's first teacher was a Boston Symphony violinist who had moved to Wellfleet to raise chickens.

Unlike many of his later professional counterparts, he did not lead an entirely sheltered childhood. He was home-tutored until about age 10. He remembers being dressed in "funny clothes, though nothing like cute velvet suits."

But he also played sports and had local friends. Many of his present musician friends fit more closely the image of the uneasy prodigy who practices his violin while the other kids play football outside.

Hawthorne feels that his early Provincetown friends have come to respect his work, as demonstrated by an *Advocate* review of one of his concerts in 1941. Irving Rogers, a boyhood chum and a town selectman then, wrote that he had always felt sorry for Jo, but after the concert finally understood what his life was all about.

While artists flocked here—partly because world war flushed them out of European centers—musicians did not and never have. That may be because of the weather, since the combination of salt and humidity sends serious instrumentalists too often to their lacquer and polish bottles. When Hawthorne practices here, he leaves his case outside so it will be fresh when closed again.

Provincetown was not bursting with music when Hawthorne was young but, just as now, people who played at all sought each other out. Hawthorne sat as second fiddle in a quartet led by a Mr. Stull, the town's watchmaker. The group presented Depression-era concerts for 25 cents.

He considered two hours daily a long practice session, getting it out of the way early in the day. The sound carried so well from his porch that sailors on the harbor claimed to hear him practicing.

It's a point of pride with Hawthorne that his life was not yet consumed with music. Because the field was not a singular drive early in life he fell behind his musical colleagues.

"Many of the others supplemented music with tutorials on history and philosophy and experienced little else," he said. "I wasn't so specialized at an early age. I compensated later, but it took twice as long. Being older then made me more aware of what I had ahead of me."

At a 1950 picnic for members of the Dallas Symphony, the assistant conductor, Hawthorne, was taken aside by two of the world's finest string musicians: violinist Yehudi Menuhin and cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, both soloists in an upcoming concert.

"They wanted me to teach them, right then and there, to play baseball. I looked at their hands and thought, oh my God, never mind next week's concert, what about their careers? You never saw baseball played so gingerly."

Hawthorne himself plays viola superbly. Typically, the dating label inside his instrument—the same instrument

he played when performing the Mozart Concertante with Menuhin—is false. But that's as far as the deception goes.

Off the cuff, he jumped into an unaccompanied Bach suite, written originally for cello, but long since transcribed for viola. There is relatively little solo literature composed for viola.

He huffed a bit at each rhabato pause in the Bach. After a straightforward coda—so many string players draw out those last few bars, assuming that the listener just can't bear to let go—he apologized for his living room's poor acoustics.

He acknowledged that up close, even the finest violinist or violist scratches over strings, a sound that is lost in the spaciousness of a concert hall. He recalled his own shock and disappointment at hearing Fritz Kreisler sounding human from the front row.

Moving back a few seats, he could fully appreciate the performance. The scratching is not a mistake, but a physical characteristic of the instrument, like the air noisily escaping from a clarinetist's mouthpiece.

Hawthorne studied violin eight years with Melzar Charee of the New York Music School Settlement, then four years with Edouard Dethier before and during a college career at Princeton University.

At Princeton in 1928, he won a Damrosch conducting scholarship for summer study at the Conservatoire Americaine at Fontainebleau, France. He returned to conduct the Princeton orchestra and other touring groups, as well as to perform in the string quartet and in solo recitals.

Hawthorne entered the Julliard School of Music in 1930. With the help of a seven-year scholarship, he earned a regular diploma in violin performance and a graduate degree in conducting. At the same time, he had studied conducting privately with Leon Barzin.

During his early student days, he had a summer quartet that played up and down the Cape, soloed extensively, conducted choruses and various small groups: "The usual sporadic professional jobs, when available. This was still the Depression."

Because his family owned property, his parents were ineligible for WPA help. Once out of school, he started to teach at Avon Old Farms, a boys' preparatory school. Ostensibly the music teacher, he doubled as mathematics teacher and football coach, knowing next to nothing about the game.

After a year, he moved on to a lot more professional performing. He taught violin at Julliard, conducted a Hartford, Conn., madrigal group, assisted in the Columbia University music department and directed weekly concerts at the Provincetown Art Association.

During this time, he switched his principal instrument to viola, drawn by its deeper tone. Orchestras always need more violinists, but a very good violist inevitably rises to the top, Hawthorne said. He played in four different New York area orchestras and conducted there, as well as in the Cape Cod Summer Symphony. That group was cut short by Pearl Harbor. Hawthorne entered the Navy.

He was stationed aboard a converted yacht, an experimental underwater sound school perfecting sonar techniques. At first, he was assigned as mess cook, serving the many Harvard and Yale graduates aboard.

He was then assigned to be a sonar specialist, and his musical ear was put to military use. Distinguishing sonar's pings off a jumble of rocks or off a ship is very similar to listening to orchestral timbres, he said.

He wrote a number of fleet training manuals and produced a hundred training recordings, was promoted to lieutenant and was recommended for a Navy Commendation medal.

Other performers, many of whom would later pursue the



Hawthorne at play

Advocate photo by Steven Schwadron

field of "serious music," returned from the war and criss-crossed the country with big bands. That never occurred to Hawthorne. "I guess I'm too straight. I always loved jazz, but I never connected it to my instrument."

He petitioned the Navy in 1945 for a special dispensation discharge to become assistant conductor and principal violist with Antal Dorati of the Dallas Symphony. During the war years, he had led the New London Symphony while stationed there, but had otherwise lost touch with music.

At Dallas, Hawthorne conducted six to 10 concerts a year and founded a youth orchestra. When Donati left four years later, Hawthorne turned down an offer to take the conductorship, a mistake he now blames on false humility.

He never really considered composition as a field. "Nobody should compose until driven to it," he said. "I feel more talented on the recreative side of music."

"The conductor is the intermediary, something that doesn't exist in the visual arts. The stage director is a better analogy, combined with the manager of a ball team.

"The idea is to bring out the piece whole, unified. The conductor considers the orchestra the greatest instrument there is. The piece is an individual. If you have a good conception of it and can come close to catching its ambiance, then it's a fine performance. Anyone can just play the notes. It's a matter of strength, character, passion."

Rather than take over the Dallas Symphony, a major post, Hawthorne accepted the same position at the Chattanooga Symphony, where he stayed for six years. During that time, the orchestra's budget jumped from \$6000 to \$60,000. When he arrived, the group performed three concerts a year; by the time he left, he conducted a nineteen-concert season.

He resigned to conduct the Toledo Orchestra for nine years. As in Chattanooga, he took a mediocre symphony, attracted first-chair players to settle in the area, and

stimulated development of young instrumentalists with many scholarships, special classes, coaching sessions, youth orchestras and chamber ensembles. During his tenure, the orchestra's budget doubled to \$100,000 and attendance tripled.

Musical quality, of course, cannot be measured in financial terms. Statistics of administrative success are meaningful only to the extent that they reflect musical growth.

While at Toledo, Hawthorne won the 1961 Alice Ditson prize for championing the 20th century composer. A Dallas newspaperman keeping tabs on its alumnus said, "Culture boils in Chattanooga," calling his orchestra a "fast-moving concern under the leadership of the damndest Yankee who ever mingled with professional Southerners."

Between Chattanooga and Toledo, Hawthorne founded the Provincetown Symphony, a professional 60-piece orchestra giving five to eight summer concerts in Provincetown and up-Cape. The group, which lasted 15 years, played a rich repertory, including many avant-garde works.

Program notes call the group "a crack aggregation of young professionals [that] stressed the contemporary in its programs, the duty of an orchestra bearing the name of a town which has been a leader in the plastic and literary arts since the turn of the century." He guest-conducted in New York, Haifa and Zurich, but was then stricken with a long-term illness called sprue, incapacitating him for four years.

After a remarkable recovery, he was chosen to lead the Duluth Symphony. "If they don't get 300 applications, they feel slighted," he said. Mobility in the conducting field is slow, following a nearly military hierarchy.

Like his previous groups, the Duluth orchestra is a semi-professional organization. "As a string player, I was able to bring a fresh approach," he said, chuckling over the age-old disputes among instrumental sections of the