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MANNY LAUREANO'S QUARTER CENTURY WITH THE MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

BY LUIS LOUBRIEL

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MANNY LAUREANO'S QUARTER CENTURY WITH THE MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

BY LUIS LOUBRIEL

Early in 2007 I met with Manny Laureano to talk about some of the experiences he has had in his remarkable music career. The 2006 – 2007 Concert Season with the Minnesota Orchestra marked his 25th year as principal trumpet of that orchestra. This interview celebrates that milestone and serves as a vehicle for him to talk about his experiences to this point in his career.

Manny Laureano was born and raised by his Puerto Rican parents in the Spanish Harlem neighborhood in New York City. After graduating from the High School for the Performing Arts he went to the Juilliard School and had a brief

tour with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer before joining the Seattle Symphony as its principal trumpet at the age of 22. In 1981 Manny won the principal trumpet position with the Minnesota Orchestra where he has served since.

Our conversation took place between rehearsals with the Minnesota Orchestra in downtown Minneapolis. We covered some of his early musical influences and quickly progressed to areas such as the New York and the Chicago Schools of playing, the function of the trumpet section in a symphony orchestra, and advice to young trumpet players of today.

Loubriel: *Can we talk about some of the early musical influences you had, even before you played the trumpet?*

Laureano: Actually, I think that is one of the most important aspects of what made me into a musician. I went to a public school in New York City, where I was born, called PS 198. In that school we would put on plays, musicals, and operas. The first production that I had to sing was Gilbert and Sullivan's Operetta *The Pirates of Penzance*. I was chosen to be Frederic so I had to do a little bit of singing. The next year we put on a version of Bizet's *Carmen* and I was chosen for Don Jose's part. I had two years of rehearsing with a pianist and I learned to act, to sing in tune, and to sing expressively. As a result I learned not just to sing but to also tell stories with my music. I did not do anything else musical until seventh grade when I started to play the trumpet.

The interesting thing about growing up when I did was that acoustic music was everywhere so you could hear the trumpet all the time. When I was in grade school you could hear Al Hirt play the main title theme to the *Green Hornet*. We listened to Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass, and the Spanish language radio stations in N.Y.C. played Rafael Méndez all the time. This was in addition to all of the Latin bands I heard on the radio. Rhythm and the sound of the trumpet was something I knew way before I knew what a trumpet was.

Loubriel: *Did you hear any live music?*

Laureano: When I was eleven years old a brass quintet from Lincoln Center came to my school and they demonstrated the trumpet. I vividly remember this group on stage and the trum-

pet player buzzing his lips, then buzzing his mouthpiece, and finally taking the trumpet and playing a tune. That made a big impression on me... how the connection of what you did with your body, then you added a little piece of equipment, and then the trumpet served as an amplifier.

When I went on to junior high school I chose the trumpet but we were not given the instrument right away. We were told to bring \$2.50 to buy a mouthpiece and as I recall it was an "Artcraft" 7-C. When I took the mouthpiece home I remembered the brass quintet demonstration so I buzzed my lips and then I buzzed the mouthpiece and I was able to get a sound.

However, the novelty of that did not last very long so I went over to my mother's junk drawer and I found a straw which I put inside the stem of the mouthpiece. I buzzed that but after a while that was not enough so I went back to the junk drawer and I found a plastic funnel that I taped to the end of the straw. For a solid week I had a little "make-believe" trumpet that I used to pretend that I was a trumpet player. At the time I didn't realize that I was building an embouchure of sorts and once I was given the real

trumpet I was only person in the class who could play with a clean, clear trumpet sound. That was my first experience with the trumpet.

Loubriel: *That is a wonderful way to start because you took care of the basics right away.*

Laureano: Exactly. All I was doing was having fun. Also, I was at an age when a lot of my friends were athletic or they were adept at the social graces of being with girls and I was not like that so I gravitated towards something that gave me a voice. The trumpet turned out to be a great outlet for me.



Manny Laureano

That Christmas, my dad saw that I was really enjoying playing the trumpet so he went to a pawn shop and for the sum of \$28.00 bought me a Pan American trumpet and I thought it was the most wonderful thing in the world. It was an absolute wreck and the slides were frozen but I really loved it.

So I noticed that I was pretty good at playing the trumpet, and in eighth grade I auditioned for the Borough-Wide Band and Orchestra Program for Manhattan. When I took the audition, I was placed in the orchestra. When I got there I heard all of these eighth and ninth grade string players and it was absolutely horrendous. I had never heard a string instrument up close. Not only that, but the orchestra parts hardly had anything to do for the trumpet compared to what I was used to playing in band. So, I went to the orchestra director, his name was Camille Taylor, and I said, "Mr. Taylor, I think that I am not really cut out to be in orchestra. I think I'm more of a band person." He looked at me, frowned, and said, "Are you sure?" and I said, "Yes sir, I think I would be better off in the band." So they traded a kid from the band to put me in and I was so incredibly happy. I just did not realize what an honor it was to play in the orchestra.

At the very end of the season the band director, who was a fellow named Dave Rosenthal, chose a couple of kids to receive scholarships from the New York City Board of Education and I was chosen. This scholarship enabled me to study at the 92nd Street YMCA with a gentleman named Jimmy Smith who at that time was the fourth and utility player with the New York Philharmonic.

In ninth grade I began my first trumpet lessons with Jimmy. He was a very sweet man... an absolute prince. He always had a smile on his face. I could bring anything I wanted to play in the lessons. There weren't any methods books or anything like that. He would teach me the correct rhythms to play Herb Albert melodies or the correct trills in the Sousa marches. At the end of that year he realized that I had something special and that he had to get serious with me. He told me to go to 96th street to a place called Levitt and Elrod to pick up an Arban book. Once I got there I saw this gigantic inch and half thick book that cost \$6.00 and when I opened it I had never seen so much music in my entire life. I was absolutely dumbfounded by all of those notes not to mention the French and German words. A whole new world was opened up to me.

At that same time I was given my first recording of Rafael Méndez by a neighbor. The first thing I listened to was the *Bell Song* from *Lakme* by Delibes. Here is this lush orchestral introduction and then when Rafael opened up with that famous interval of a fifth I was also dumb-struck by the sheer gorgeous quality of his sound and how it shivered. For the first time I was noticing vibrato. It had a tremendous effect on me. I was getting very tuned into the sounds of the trumpet, the sound of the band, and the sounds of the orchestra.

Loubriel: *Were there any other influences during that early time in your development?*

Laureano: I would eat up anything that I heard. I would listen to the "Top 40" music and to the Spanish language radio station's oldies that had lots of great trumpet playing from the 1930s. I noticed right away that that trumpet style was so interestingly close to what Méndez had been doing. I could not say that I listened to jazz because at that point I really did not understand what jazz was. I was also totally into the Beatles and vocal music.

Loubriel: *That is a great variety of music.*

Laureano: Yes. That is one the things I feel sorry about for the young generation now because if they want to hear music on a "grand scale" the only place they can go is to the movies. If they turn on the radio they are not going to hear the kind of colors that I heard in the 1970s. All they are going to hear is a rhythm section and perhaps somebody screaming.

Loubriel: *Can you talk about the time you spent in the High School for the Arts?*

Laureano: I auditioned for that school in the ninth grade as well. This was an important time for me because music was something that I enjoyed a lot. My parents supported my playing but really did not know much about music, so they could not talk to me about it. The only place I could talk about music was in my lessons. Not even my neighborhood friends were into the music I was into. Basically, if you could not dance to it they had no patience for it.

At the High School for the Arts I found myself surrounded by 1500 other kids who loved classical music as much as I did and we talked about it all day long. That was where I continued my theory and ear training... very important for my development as a musician. I was not good at math or science but I was very good at all of the communication classes. During the three years I was there I was able to play first cornet in the top band, principal trumpet in the top orchestra, and lead trumpet in the jazz band. I got so much experience in that one place! I will never be able to thank the city of New York for providing me with that opportunity. It was wonderful.

Loubriel: *Who were your trumpet teachers at the High School for the Arts?*

Laureano: There were two trumpet teachers who were very important and very dear to me. One was Sid Baker who used to play principal trumpet with the Chicago Symphony before Herse. Sid eventually found himself teaching at the High School for the Arts. I had great admiration for him. He would play cornet solos for me all the time. I would go into his office and bother him constantly; he would just about sit there and give me lessons free of charge. There was also another gentleman named Jack Laumer. Jack had gone to St. Olaf College in Northfield Minnesota and had studied with Ron Hasselmann, with whom I would eventually play in the Minnesota Orchestra. Jack also had studied with Vacchiano at Juilliard, so he was my connection to a more contemporary style of orchestral trumpet playing. He was also kind enough to lend me his four-valve Selmer piccolo trumpet so I could perform *Brandenburg #2* and use it to audition for the Juilliard School.

Loubriel: *Years ago I had dinner with Jack Laumer in New York and I asked him, "How was Manny as a student?" and he told me, "Manny had every lesson perfectly prepared all the time."*

Laureano: Jack answered every question I had and helped me prepare the audition to get into Juilliard. I have a story about that audition. I had prepared the last movement of the *Brandenburg*, but I had left out the first movement out because parts of it were just too much for me. At that point nobody was playing piccolo trumpet except professionals. There were not many high school students in 1973 playing on a piccolo. When I walked in to my audition there was William Vacchiano, Ed Treutel, Jimmy Chambers, and others that I do not remember. I played through most of the last movement of the *Brandenburg* and as I was getting ready to put the piccolo away Vacchiano says, in that wonderful "Godfather" voice of his,

“Play that first movement part with the high A’s.” So I started a few measures before and what do you know, I got all three high A’s. I had maybe built up enough lip to that point so I was able to play them. So he says, “You know, those sounded a little sharp. Play them again with the second valve.” I played them again using the second valve and I got all of the A’s and he said, “There, you see, that is better.” So instead of just saying “yes” I said, “Well, actually sir, they sounded a little flat to me” and he said, “Oh yeah? Play them again.” And I did. (laughing) After I got accepted I was talking to Jack Laumer and he asked me, “What do you want to do with the trumpet?” and I said, “I would like to play like Rafael Méndez.” He had this half-smile in his face and he said, “Well, William Vacchiano is not going to teach you how to play like Rafael Méndez.” When he said that I was flabbergasted because I thought, “Who would not like to play like Rafael Méndez?” I did not rebel, but I just followed along.

Loubriel: *What kinds of things did Vacchiano worked on with you?*

Laureano: Once I got to Juilliard I worked on some Arban stuff with Vacchiano, and he told me to get the St. Jacome, the Arban’s bass clef book, and the Sasche *100 Etudes*. Towards the end of the lesson I told Vacchiano, “I have a solo and I wonder if I could play it for you.” I had prepared the introduction of Vassily Brandt’s *Concerto #2*. I got out about a line and a half because I played with my most “Mariachi/Rafael Méndez style” with accents all over the place and this hard tongue. It looked like somebody had just shot Mr. Vacchiano. He recoiled and he said, “No, no, stop! You cannot play with that kind of vibrato and you cannot accent those notes.” He marked up the music, and there began my real study of musical phrasing. Arnold Jacobs used to say, “I am the only guy in the world who has ever made money teaching the same lesson over and over again.” You could say the same thing about Mr. Vacchiano because in every lesson we covered the same materials. We covered transposition, phrasing, arpeggios, scale patterns, and the rules of music. The rules had to do with how you treat musical phrases. It did not matter what the context of the music was. It could have been something Baroque, Classical, or Romantic; they were just general rules of playing.

Vacchiano used to have his students phrase by using string bowings. He marked some of my music. For example, in the lyrical solo in *Don Juan* he wanted me to emphasize the same notes a string player would emphasize. He wanted us to know that the up-bows and down-bows the string players fussed about were important. The string players knew inherently, over centuries, what the rules of phrasing were. That is, how you should always phrase toward a strong beat and never accent a weak beat (except when marked), playing long quarter notes and short eighth notes, etc. He taught us the importance of rhythmic subdivision and did not want us to approximate rhythms.



Manny Laureano with William Vacchiano in New York City

“Vacchiano used to have his students phrase by using string bowings.”

It is interesting to note that in the four years I studied with Vacchiano, we never worked on a solo except a little bit of the Hummel *Concerto*. He taught you the rules of phrasing so you could use those rules to play virtually any solo. It was assumed that you had enough technique, a good sound, and enough low and high register because all of those things were covered through the study of the arpeggios, triple tonguing, scales, and intervals. Transposition was covered through the Arban bass clef book and the Sasche book.

He would also have us pretend that we were playing with a “D” trumpet and he had us transpose up a minor third and down a major third because he wanted us to be able to play any Mahler symphony on a D trumpet if necessary. He wanted us to feel comfortable to pick any instrument that would make a musical passage easier and not have transposition be any kind of a worry. He said that his last fifteen years in the Philharmonic were mainly done on the D trumpet. It just made life easier for him.

Interestingly, my first concert with the Seattle Symphony showed me that Vacchiano was right about so many things. In that concert the literature was “brass heavy.” There were things like Gabrieli a *Canzone*, Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Procession of the Nobles*, and it ended with Tchaikovsky’s last movement from the *Fourth Symphony*. I knew that I had to play this concert back to back and that

Tchaikovsky is a “corner burner” enough so I thought to bring the D trumpet. Sure enough, by the middle of the second concert I was starting to feel a bit fatigued so I used the D trumpet with no hesitation and I made it through the whole concert. I had no trouble transposing at sight because of all the training I got at Juilliard with Vacchiano.

Loubriel: *He was a very practical teacher.*

Laureano: Very practical. That is a good way of putting it.

Loubriel: *The one thing about Vacchiano that a lot of people do not talk about is his concept of sound. He had such a beautiful brilliance. It reminded me of the sound of Armando Ghitalla.*

Laureano: When we were in school we would ask Vacchiano who were his greatest students and at that time he would say Armando Ghitalla and Mel Broiles. What I find so wonderful about that is that neither of those individuals played like Vacchiano. He was not out to make clones of himself. I have great respect for that. He was out to teach the students all of the rules they needed, and it was up to the student to use all of that practical teaching to let them sound like themselves. I do not think that there was anybody who sounded as opposite to him as Mel Broiles did. Ghitalla sounded the closest to Vacchiano.

There was something very compelling about working with Vacchiano, listening to his recordings, and then the few times

he would pick up the horn and play. It was a mystery how he was able to get this wonderful staccato that seemed to come out of nowhere. It was the antithesis of the “Northwestern” approach to tonguing which had this really clear button on the attack. Vacchiano always told us that what he taught was more of a German style of playing. You would not hear that clear button at the beginning of the note but somehow it was incredibly clear. The end of the sound faded into nothingness. It was very unique. The only other person I have heard play this way was Ghitalla.

Loubriel: *Were there other orchestral trumpet players who influenced you?*

Laureano: When I was at Juilliard I started hearing of this guy, Bud Herseth, in Chicago. I did not listen to his records very much because being in New York, which is such a provincial place, you tend to stick to what you are familiar with. I listened to players closer to the East Coast like Roger Voisin, Bernie Adelstein, and Harry Glantz. It was interesting to hear a little bit of Glantz’s playing in Vacchiano.

Loubriel: *I think Vacchiano said that he used to listen to Glantz’s recording of Meyerbeer’s March of the Prophets every morning, before teaching at Juilliard, to remind him of the concept of sound.*

Laureano: Harry had a beautiful style of articulation and a beautiful shimmering quality to his sound.

Loubriel: *Most people do not know that Harry Glantz was principal trumpet of the Puerto Rico Symphony for a couple of seasons. My old teacher, Nilda Ledoux, used to play in the section with him.*

Laureano: Right. With Jack Holland also.

Loubriel: *Did you study with anybody else in New York?*

Laureano: I studied my first year with Vacchiano, but I think he got a little bit frustrated with my transposition skills. He put me on a program where I would study with him one week and then I would study with Mel Broiles the other week. The idea was that Broiles could speak my language a little bit better and that was exactly what happened. Broiles was able to explain transposition in a way I could understand. It was like Vacchiano thought I needed to hear what he was trying to teach me in a much “hipper” voice. Broiles played for me all the time and we played duets. We also had the lessons in a basement at the Metropolitan Opera where the sound would ring for hours. Mel once told me that he liked teaching down there because he wanted students to get an impression of their sounds that was more than it actually was so that they could take that concept of sound and “out it” in other situations. With me it sure worked. I studied with Broiles my sophomore and senior years.

Loubriel: *What did Mel Broiles say to get through to you with regard to transposition?*

Laureano: It was just a different way of looking at transposition. For example, E trumpet transposition was difficult for me so he told me the story about “Dummy and Brain.” (laughing) He said, “You have this guy called Dummy. Dummy could not understand how to transpose E trumpet. On the other side Brain would sit there and figure all of the transposition note by note. One day Dummy figured out that E trumpet was nothing more than E-flat or F trumpet with a different key signature. Suddenly, while Brain was trying to figure out every sharp in the planet, Dummy was just changing the

key and playing E-Flat or F trumpet. I knew who Dummy was right away. I can still see him explaining that to me (laughing). Mel also gave me the tickets for the first opera I ever saw. It was Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*.

Loubriel: *While you were in school did you take any auditions?*

Laureano: The first audition I took was for second trumpet in the Dallas Symphony and I learned in that audition that I needed to get the actual parts for the pieces. I say that because when I got to that audition they asked for many things that were not in the excerpt books.

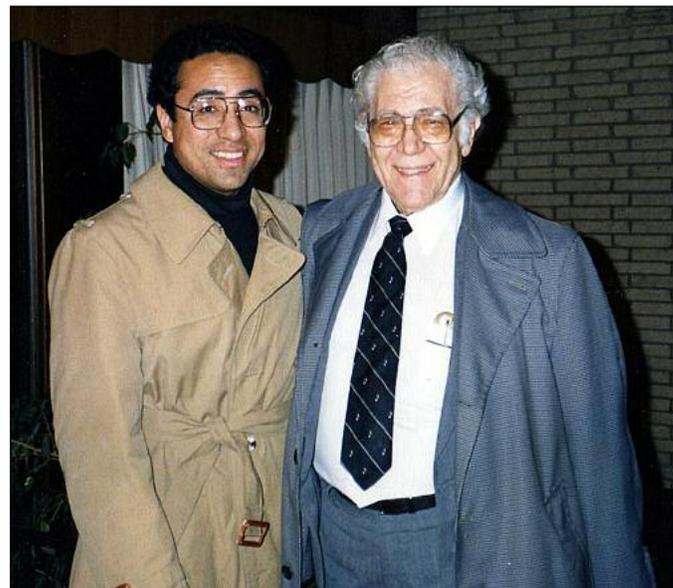
The next audition I took was for the New York Philharmonic second trumpet position. What I learned in that audition was that I needed to be more familiar with tempos. I did not really have a good grasp of the music. I needed to learn the pieces more than the excerpts. In other words, I needed to learn the pieces more organically.

The third audition I took was for the Metropolitan Orchestra. In that audition I made the finals and I went to a group of ten. I got very close but I did not make it. I was unhappy with the results of those second trumpet auditions, so I called Mr. Vacchiano and he said in that wonderful voice of his, “Don’t worry about it. It just means that you are not cut out to be a second trumpet player.” Well, within a few months I was principal trumpet in the Seattle Symphony and that is where things really began for me. Seattle was a perfect job for me because I was learning orchestral, ballet, and opera repertoire. It was almost like going to post-graduate school. The orchestra was very good.

Loubriel: *By the way, you were 21 years old then.*

Laureano: Oh my goodness, yes. I turned 22 right at the beginning of the season in 1977. I got to play the *Ring Cycle* eight times there. That was a unique experience.

The greatest influence I had in that orchestra was working with the second trumpet player Jeff Cole. Not only did he become my best friend there, but he also taught me how to listen to music. The two of us would sit for hours listening to Chicago Symphony recordings... he also introduced me to the teachings of Vincent Cichowicz and Arnold Jacobs. That is where I developed a deep appreciation for the Chicago School. I found myself blending all of the things I had learned in New



Manny Laureano and Arnold Jacobs in Chicago

York with the new concepts I was learning from the Chicago School.

Loubriel: *What was different about the Chicago School?*

Laureano: In the New York School there was a certain amount of “portamento playing.” That is a kind of smooth lyricism that you can use in your playing. There were certain eccentricities that were allowed in that kind of playing. When you listened to Herseth on the other hand it was “clean as a whistle,” yet very strong and authoritative. Every note was absolutely solid. There was nothing that you had to forgive in his playing. When you listened to the recordings from the New York Philharmonic there were things that you had to say, “Maybe that was not the most perfect take but it was very exciting.” Suddenly you would hear Herseth play the same thing and say, “That is exciting and it is absolutely rock solid.”

I was most intrigued by the articulation. Herseth had this wonderful little “ping” at the start of each note and that was different from the blunt articulation I had learned. In 1980 I went on a self-imposed trek to Chicago to take lessons from Herseth, Jacobs, and Cichowicz.

In the lesson with Jacobs, as much as I enjoyed it, I was too naïve to understand what was going on, and also I did not understand what my physical issues were. At one point Jacobs said in the lesson, “Yep, you are screwed up...” and he put me through all of the breathing machines he had in his office. However, I was not screwed up enough to really understand what he was trying to say.

At that time, I was getting prepared for an audition in Boston because Rolf Smedvig was getting ready to leave so I took the opportunity to play the audition excerpts for Cichowicz and for Herseth. My lesson with Vince was wonderful. It was great to go into that office and see how incredibly well organized he was. If you had a playing concern, Cichowicz would go to this drawer and pick out the exact piece you needed to fix that problem. I told him that I wanted to learn about the articulation and we talked about having a very emphatic and clear “too” on everything.

My lessons with Bud (Herseth) were a lot of fun because they reminded me a lot of my lessons with Vacchiano. Herseth focused on making sure that the rhythms, phrasing, and style were all correct. He played for me in those lessons and his sound was so vivid that I could swear that I could see it coming out of the horn. He had a very live sound.

Loubriel: *Back in Seattle did you do any other kinds of playing besides orchestral playing?*

Laureano: I did a fair amount of solo work, like the Hummel for youth concerts... for family concerts I did the Michael Haydn *Concerto*. That was really fun to work up. I got some notoriety for being able to play in the high register. Vacchiano used to say that there were a few areas that you have to be good at if you are going successful in this business. You have to have a really beautiful sound. If you do not have that, you have to have a much better than average high register and endurance. You also need dazzling technique. At Juilliard everybody had a good sound, but I seemed to have better endurance and a good high register. For that reason I got noticed. I would always be asked to play all the high parts.

Loubriel: *Most people do not know that while you were in New York you played for some of the Latin orchestras.*

Laureano: You know, that is played up more than it actually was in reality. I played for a brief while for a “little conjunto” that played terrible gigs, but I got to learn the style. It is a pity that I was playing lead because I would have probably benefited more by playing second trumpet to a top class player and been given the opportunity to listen to that player. I was really building great chops during that time.

Loubriel: *I think you also played with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer.*

Laureano: Before I graduated from Juilliard I found out Emerson, Lake, and Palmer were putting together a symphony orchestra to take on tour. They were auditioning in Chicago, Boston, L.A., and New York. So I go to the audition and I tell the fellow I was playing for, “What would you like to hear?” And he said, “Anything you got, man. Just hurt me.” I played an extended “fanfare part” from Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben* and at the part that you take the mute out I held it with one hand and played the high C that comes after that one-handed. He got a big kick out of that and I got hired for the job. I was working for most of the summer. It was a lot of fun to play...it was a dynamite orchestra. It was shortly after that that the Seattle audition came up so my chops were in tremendous shape.

Loubriel: *What series of events took place that led to the Minnesota Orchestra audition?*

Laureano: I went out to Boston to take their audition for first trumpet; you played your audition into a microphone so a committee could hear the recording at a later date. I thought that was a nice way of doing it. In the semifinals there were ten of us. I played very well and I was told that I was in a group of five. So I played for Ozawa and they deliberated for a long time. Eventually they came out and said, “We are dismissing everybody but Mr. Laureano.” However, there were enough misgivings about how I had played so they wanted to make sure they were getting the absolute best candidate so they decided they would throw me in with other players they had invited to play. I remember Charlie Schleuter from Minnesota was one and Thomas Stevens from L.A. was another one. Each player got to come in and play about 20 minutes with the Boston Symphony. I was way too excited to be nervous about anything. Quite a while passed and the decision came to give Schleuter the position.

I was disappointed but I was very happy in Seattle. I had great friends there and the orchestra was good. I knew that the position in Minnesota was open, but I was not interested in it. I thought, “This is so nice here. Why would I want to go to the prairie with the mountains and water right here.” Also I had heard that it was very cold in Minnesota. There had been a preliminary audition, but they did not select anybody. At this point Schleuter got the idea that they would hold auditions similar to the auditions held in Boston.

When they first called me for a temporary one-year position in Minnesota I turned it down. I had a negative impression of Minnesota from when I was with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer because we showed up for a concert at the Convention Center and the streets were absolutely dead and I thought, “Does anybody live here?” That experience did not leave me with a good

“If you had a playing concern, Cichowicz would go to this drawer and pick out the exact piece you needed to fix that problem.”

impression. They called me up again and told me that it was going to be a regular permanent position and I thought about it for a second and said no. I'm not sure what they were thinking, but they called one more time and said, "Look, we will pay your way out here and put you up in a hotel..." and I said, "Now you're talking."

The competition was very stiff. Auditioning with me were Wilmer Wise, John Aley, the late Larry Weeks, and John Raschella. The first thing I did was to play with the brass section. The guys were very warm and friendly. The next day I played a round with the orchestra and after that I played a solo round on stage. I was chosen for the position shortly afterwards.

Loubriel: *Now that you mention the trumpet section I think that was one of the more stable trumpet sections in the history of symphony orchestras from the United States.*

Laureano: Yes. They had been together with Steve Chenette, Schleuter, and then me.

Loubriel: *Once you started to play with the Minnesota Orchestra, how did your playing style evolve?*

Laureano: That is probably one of the most interesting parts of my history with the orchestra. When I came to Minnesota I was 26 years old and full of that "crazy energy" you are supposed to have when you are in your twenties. I was still new to a business where there is so much repertoire to be learned. When I joined the Minnesota Orchestra, for example, I had only played Mahler #1, #2, and #3. I had seven more to learn.

The difference in the schedule between the Seattle and the Minnesota Orchestra seasons was tremendous. In Minnesota we were responsible for a 52-week season. Also, when I came here Sir Neville Marriner was still very popular, and the hall was always full. That was not the case in Seattle so I had to get used walking out to a full house every night.

The music making was at such a high level. To make things more serious, here I was in charge of a section of gentlemen who were all biologically old enough to be my father. I was supposed to tell them what to do. The rest of the brass section was full of players who had a lot of experience. I had to learn to balance the times when I could offer my ideas and when I had to shut up and listen. That was very important.

I also had to learn to deal with a new "echelon" of conductors and guest artists. I played for people who were known throughout the world week after week and not just every once in a while. The very first piece I played here in Minnesota was Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The one thing that let me know that I was in a whole new world was the solo entrance of the bass clarinet in *Tristan und Isolde* played by a fellow named Fred Hedling who is retired now. I had never heard anything so soft and so beautiful in my life. I think the following week we were playing Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* where you have the E-flat clarinet solo in the "Witch's Sabbath" movement and

I had never heard anything so stirring and exciting. There were a bunch of sounds I was hearing in a whole new way. It was like sitting in the middle of a recording and it was my job to try to add to that.

The "eye" was on me because I was a very different player from Charlie Schleuter. Charlie had his style, his way of playing, and I had mine. People were watching me to see what was it that I was going to do, and fortunately my colleagues and the conductor were very supportive and nursed me through all of my stupid mistakes and were encouraging about all the good things.

That first season in Minnesota I was asked to play the Hummel *Concerto* in a concert. When I was in Seattle I used to play a cadenza in the third movement of the Hummel that would go from a high E-flat concert to a pedal E-flat and the audience would always applaud in the middle of it. It just got to

be one of those things that the audience always did spontaneously. Well, in Minnesota I was playing through that cadenza and I did the same "trick" and as I was ready to go on the audience suddenly burst into applause and I thought, "You play a high note on the trumpet and no matter where you are, people just seem to enjoy it."

Loubriel: *Now that you were in Minnesota learning the vast orchestral trumpet repertoire under different conductors, how was that experience for you?*

Laureano: It is the most thrilling part of this whole journey. The first ten years of playing in an orchestra like this you learn probably 50% of the repertoire you are going to learn. If you make it through those first ten years you should be able to do well during the next twenty years.

Loubriel: *It had to be an intense learning process. What kinds of things did you find yourself doing differently as a player once you started to play through the orchestral repertoire?*

Laureano: Well, there have been huge changes in my equipment and in the way that I hear. I have always tried to be a sensitive player and tried to hear as much as I can while I am playing but that is a "double-edged-sword." In other words, when you are young all you hear is yourself and then you start to develop more sensitivity. You also start to understand intonation and that your articulation has to match something that came before you. That way you become an active listener as well as an active player. That is probably the orchestral skill that takes the longest to develop to its maximum because at the same time you have to play with authority. Playing with authority demands a certain kind of ego that has to be there whether you are playing principal or whether you are playing in the section. In other words, as you develop that skill of being an active listener you have to learn not to lose the part of you that is most essential to your playing. It is a combination of being a team player and of



Manny Laureano and Doc Severinsen after the performance of Stephen Paulus's *Double Concerto*, 2003. Used with permission of the Minnesota Orchestra.

"Playing with authority demands a certain kind of ego..."

being a leader. I think that is the toughest part of being a principal player.

One of the things that tied into my conducting skills was hearing music organically. If you do that too much you wind up losing the message you are trying to communicate. In other words, you end up being a follower and that is not the job of someone sitting in the principal chair. At the same time you can't be egotistical... thinking that it is all about you. There has to be a very delicate balance to what you are doing as a principal player.

There are some principal players who are happy playing everything exactly the way they have played it for ten years. However, if you get a conductor up there who is not going to buy into that, there is going to be trouble. That is where you have players and conductors butting heads with each other because the player wants to play in that zone where they are comfortable. The conductor might say, "No, I want that softer, I want that louder, or I want this kind of articulation" and the player says, "Well, this is the way I have done it for the last ten or fifteen years." To continue to develop as a musician, you need to be flexible. This is essential for anybody who is playing in an orchestra. There are still times that I hear from young players, "Well, that is not the way I heard it on the recording." That is fine to say when you are in college or just out of college, but when you are playing in a professional symphony orchestra that is not what the gig is all about. The gig is not about what your recording sounds like. The gig is about the new recording that you are making for the audience. I always try to be very cooperative that way and make the challenge of playing part of the fine balance between sensitivity and authority.

Loubriel: *In terms of evolution, I know that you changed trumpets from Bach to Monette trumpets. Can you describe your experience with Monette?*

Laureano: When I met Dave Monette, I did not realize what my ear was going to get into in terms of sound. The first thing that captivated me concerning his horns was the incredible sense of security I felt when I played them. It was like I

could not miss. As a matter of fact, my first Monette horn came the week when I was playing *Zarathustra* and I had already played a Wednesday night performance on my Bach. Thursday morning I got my Monette and I could not come close to missing the high C. That night I played the concert on the Monette. That was in November 1984 and the rest is history.

Loubriel: *How did you hear of Dave Monette?*

Laureano: Actually, he heard of me because Charlie Schleuter had met him and had said, "You should go and meet Manny in Minnesota." Dave came out and he brought a B-flat trumpet with him and I used it in a pops concert. Again, the

"To continue to develop as a musician, you need to be flexible."

feeling of security that instrument gave me was something that I was not used to at all. There was a solid core to the sound that I really liked. The instrument fit me very nicely.

The horn attracted a lot of attention when I got it because it did not look like other instruments because it was this brown-looking thing so it attracted more attention than if it had been silver-plated.

With all of Dave's developments, I found that over time what I had been looking for in the sound I wanted had really changed. Whereas I was used to a certain amount of buzz on the outside of the sound, I grew not to like that anymore. I wanted more and more solid core. What I found was that I was blending better with other instruments in the orchestra. When I was playing something that dovetailed with the clarinet or with the trombone I was able to go in and out of the orchestral textures in a more satisfactory manner. It has been a wonderful ride to experiment with David Monette, to test prototypes, and to see what the end result is from his observations. I have a sound in my ear now that I hear when I think of a trumpet sound. That sound has a solid core out as far as you can get but also with great clarity. For me the perfect trumpet sound has to be very full and wide with lots of color in it whether I am playing something that is soft or loud and high. Dave is aware of what I like and he builds things for me according to that.

Loubriel: *Do you think that the evolution of the solid core, clarity of sound, and stability of the Monette instruments matched your evolution as a player?*

"...play with maximum resonance and with the least amount of effort possible."

Laureano: Right. What I have learned to do is a physical manifestation of what I have always thought a trumpet player should be able to do. That is to play with maximum resonance and with the least amount of effort possible. The only physical effort that should be involved in playing should be in actively taking in the air and in letting it go as relaxed as you can while maintaining a stable embouchure. That is the most important thing in playing the trumpet. Anything after that is up to the individual player. If you can get there you will be able to play whatever you want to play. If you miss one of those ingredients, you can pull in all of the air you want, but if the embouchure is not stable and flexible it is not going to work. You can also tell that there is one of the ingredients missing



Manny Laureano with David Monette

because if you feel that you cannot sing through the horn, then you are missing something somewhere along the line. The missing link could be the mouthpiece, the horn, or something that you are doing with your body. If you can imagine yourself doing it then your equipment has to help you get the sound that is in your brain. That is why I have stuck with Dave all of these years because his instruments help me get to what is in my mind.

Loubriel: *In talking about blending with the other members of the orchestra and about working with conductors, we should also talk about working with your trumpet section. In your mind, what works with regard to the trumpet section?*

Laureano: The principal player has to have great command. You have to be able to persuade three other people that what you are doing is right, and the only way to do that is by example. You can talk all you want but if you cannot play the game, that is it. They will not care what kind of rules you are making up.

You also have to be precise and clear because when you are in the middle of a rehearsal and the conductor has just said something you need to be the one who understands what the conductor said. Even if the section is having trouble playing what the conductor wanted you have to be able to make an executive decision and say, "Okay, let's do this even if it seems wrong." It is easier to correct four people who are doing the same thing wrong than fixing four people who are doing their own thing.

The second player has to be part genius and part psychic because you have to be able to anticipate the first player's intonation and the problems in your part since you rarely get the melody, and you are playing all those strange intervals that do not make any sense from a melodic point of view. In other words, you have to hear melody and provide harmony in a musical way, simultaneously. You have to become a shadow of the first player. You have to be responsible for the low register and you have to play in the same register the first player does. Just play any Mahler symphony and you will see what I'm talking about.

The third player has to do the same job the second player does but then he or she has to be able to jump in and play principal. That is another tough job because they constantly have to have their brain in the hot seat. In other words, they have to think like a principal player and also like a second trumpet player.

The fourth player is like a utility player on a baseball team so you never know what you are going to do from one day to the other. When you are in an orchestra like the Minnesota Orchestra you have to have high chops and low chops.

Every position in a major orchestra has unique challenges, and people who go into this business and do not think playing in an orchestra is a "never-ending game" do not end up happy. I say that because every day you should look forward to what challenges that day is going to bring. You have to constantly be looking for what is going to make your orchestra sound better by virtue of you being here. You have to ask, "What is going to be my contribution to making this band sound really wonderful?"

"Every position in a major orchestra has unique challenges..."

We have a variety of games we play. The one we play the most is simply this, "Okay, today we are going to play through this whole rehearsal and not have the conductor talk to us." What that means is that you have to anticipate everything a conductor might say about a certain passage or about an entire piece. You have to anticipate where you might be too loud, how to articulate, or where you will have to imitate another player. It is basically the game we play every day. There have been several rehearsals where we have been able to pull that off. Those rehearsals are the ones that I feel go the best because a conductor can rehearse and not waste any time telling the trumpets how to play.



The Minnesota Orchestra Trumpet Section, L – R:
Charles Lazarus, Douglas Carlsen, Manny Laureano,
Robert Dorer

Loubriel: *Since we were talking about the role the second, third, and fourth trumpet players play in a symphony orchestra... in an audition situation, how can you tell if a player will be able to play the role?*

Laureano: You can't. All you can tell from an audition is whether the player has a nice sound, good intonation, good basic musicianship, a good range, technique, and that is pretty much it. That is why the tenure process is so important. In the Minnesota Orchestra you have a couple of years to have this person sit next to you and see how they apply all the technical knowledge they have developed in the process of getting to the orchestra. Someone could come and play something thrilling in an audition and then not have what it takes to work in the section.

When I am rehearsing with the orchestra, the less I have to talk, the more I know the person sitting next to me is listening to me and to the conductor. If I have to tell them to play softer or louder, then they are not doing their job. I would not want to spend my career telling a section player how to play his or her music. If somebody is younger, then they are going to need a little more direction and as they get older they are going to need less. You have to give them a little bit of time. That is why two years is a good amount of time to see if someone will work well in the section.

With some people you will be able to tell if someone will work in the section right from the audition. In an audition you have the opportunity to ask somebody to play something at different tempos or dynamics. You are able to address them in more esoteric and eclectic musical terms. If you say something to them like, "Please make the phrase sing a bit more..." and they look at you and say, "Huh?" Perhaps that is somebody you do not want in your section. If they cannot understand the

inner meaning of something as simple as that, then they are in trouble.

Loubriel: *Thinking of the conductors you have played with during the last 25 years, do you have any highlights you can talk about?*

Laureano: The first conductor that always comes to my mind is Klaus Tennstedt. He was from East Berlin and the orchestra adored his musical sincerity. He went for the softer pianos and the loudest fortissimos that he could get, but it was always with a sense of beauty. There was never an ugly note. He was from the Furtwangler/Karajan tradition of German conducting, but I think he really brought it to a beautiful state of the art. He was a true personality as well. He loved his Scotch and his cigarettes after the concert and he loved to play ping-pong with members of the orchestra. He had a great affection for this orchestra. He conducted the most memorable Beethoven's *Ninth* I ever played because of the sheer beauty of what he did with the "Ode to Joy."

I also enjoyed playing with Charles Dutoit whenever we did French repertoire. He is a Swiss conductor, but his interpretation of French repertoire was always very interesting. He was also a real personality. He would be a "hit" with audiences just walking onto the stage. I also got along very well with Neville Marriner and watching him record was a real study because he had that down. He knew what all of the recording situations would be and he knew how to compensate for speed and overall sound. He was also the man who hired me so I have a very special place in my heart for him. He did let the orchestra kind of lapse to a sloppiness that he tried to correct but he was really never able to recover. He also had a terrible time with American music union rules. He needed more time than he actually had so he was always frustrated by those limitations.

Edo de Waart was the next music director and he instilled a great sense of discipline within the orchestra in terms of rhythm, intonation, sound, and stylistic concerns. He was a very important part of the orchestra regaining a certain amount of stature that it had as the Minneapolis Symphony. He was prone to bring his personal problems to the podium, so if he had had a bad day we would bear the brunt of it. Some people got to resent that. However, he did a great job of cleaning up the approach and the sound of the orchestra.

Eiji Oue came after Edo and I enjoyed him very much. I thought he continued what De Waart did but he did not focus on the precision because he did not have to. Instead he developed a very sensuous sound out of the orchestra. A very "high calorie" sound. It was under him that people started to say that the sound of the Minnesota Orches-

tra started to remind them of the sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Stokowski. That was high praise indeed. The Minnesota Orchestra has as much precision as any orchestra anywhere but it also has a beautiful lushness to the quality of the sound.

Now, with Osmo Vanska it is like we have taken all of the things I have seen in the last 25 years and have put them all together. In rehearsals he is a friendly "task master" so he is not a Fritz Reiner in that regard. He is as demanding of himself as he is of us so we will walk on nails for him. He does what all great conductors do. That is, he works with great sincerity... when the orchestra feels that genuineness, they will do anything for that conductor.

We have a saying about Osmo and that is that with most conductors you bring a pencil to rehearsal but with Osmo you bring an eraser. He does not get caught in tradition but he seeks freshness in music by going back to what the original was without making that his master. I have enjoyed making music under Osmo. I look forward to working with him for a while since his contract does not expire until 2011.

As far as guest conductors, Leonard Slatkin was very important in my early life with this orchestra because he was our music director during Summerfest. I premiered the Wilgans *Trumpet Concerto* with him... a crazy piece he came up with and one that should be played more often. To play that piece you have to have a solid high concert D. Another favorite was Rafael Frubeck de Burgos, a classy guy I enjoyed playing for because he always had terrific ideas on how to make the music sing.

Loubriel: *One of the things most people do not realize is that you are also a conductor and that you are serving as one of the assistant conductors with the Minnesota Orchestra.*

Laureano: Right. That job has mainly meant to be a "cover conductor" with the orchestra. As I have said to many people, all you have to do is prepare the scores and wish ill on whom-ever is on the podium so you can have a chance to get up there and wag your tail in front everybody. (laughing)

Loubriel: *You also conduct the Minnesota Youth Symphony.*

Laureano: That is my pride and joy. Working with kids, you get to see them experience things for the first time. It's great to

"I cannot say enough about the value of bringing good music to good music students."

see young musicians experience a piece of music they have never been exposed to before and you get to see them grow to love it... what could be better than that? When you can influence someone's development in a positive way, it's very rewarding. I cannot say enough about the value of bringing good music to good music students.

Loubriel: *Can you talk about Minnesota trumpet section today?*



Manny Laureano and Wynton Marsalis in the 1980s

Laureano: I had a lot of fun at helping to pick the members of my trumpet section. Bob Dorner has been with the section the longest. He came from Albuquerque. He played a good audition and he impressed us with his beautiful sound and his ability to make music. Doug Carlsen also came from New Mexico and he is my “Johnny Ware.” He takes over for me when necessary and has a very brilliant style. I never have to worry when he is sitting in the principal chair. Of course, Chuck Lazarus rounds out the section not only as a superb and versatile musician, but like me, has as warped a sense of humor. It’s a wonderful section, we have played many terrific tours, and I hope we can stay together for a long time.

Loubriel: *The whole brass section seems to be young.*

Laureano: Yes. I am the second oldest person on the block since I am 50. I intend to be here for a long time. Doug Wright is playing principal trombone and we play together all the time. This is a brass section that gets along very well, and I cannot stress the value of playing with a section like that enough. Many people have asked me, “Why didn’t you audition for this or that orchestra?” The fact of the matter is that I work with colleagues I respect and who respect me. They are people who play beautifully as individuals, but spectacularly as a section. I can always look forward to sitting down and being able to tell a little joke to a colleague or ask somebody about their family. They are people that I actually care about and like very much.

When I am playing with an orchestra that has the “sound” of this orchestra, nothing else appeals to me. This is a place that I have carved out for myself. I am very comfortable here and I have become a part of the community in a big way partly because of the youth orchestras and the other groups I have conducted in Minnesota. I am set for as long as the orchestra will have me.

Loubriel: *Any recordings you have done that people might be able to listen to?*

Laureano: I have not done any solo recording but with the orchestra I have recorded many with Eiji Oue in the seven years he was here. I think we did 17 CDs with the Reference Record Label. Some of my favorites of Oue’s recordings include the *Bernstein Album* and the *Copland Album*. We also made many recordings of Richard Strauss’s music with Edo de Waart. Everybody seems to like the *Alpine Symphony* recording with him. Another great experience was to have had the opportunity to record with another orchestra. A few years ago I was asked to join the Atlanta Symphony for a week and record Gustav Mahler’s *Symphony #2*. I was working alongside Jay Friedman (principal trombone with the Chicago Symphony) who was also asked to join the orchestra for those sessions. A funny thing about that recording was that Chris Martin ended up recording from the choral section forward. There was a “glitch” with the recording session I was on so they had to re-record from that section on.

Loubriel: *Any thoughts of what the future might bring?*

Laureano: I love conducting and I love working with young people. It would be a real pleasure for me to play here for a while longer, and then if it would be possible for me to be able to get in the circuit for working with college orchestras and summer festivals, I would love that. I think young people are wonderful to work with because they always have great questions and they have great attitudes about learning.

Loubriel: *Finally, knowing what you know today, do you have any advice for young trumpet players?*

Laureano: The one thing that I have to say is that every successful trumpet player needs to make sure that they are first substance and then style. I think that too many people get caught up in style first and do not worry nearly enough about the fundamentals. Those are the things that make a solid player.

Having solid fundamentals is very important. It is like watching a successful baseball player go through a slump. Great players get out of slumps because they have such good fundamentals that they will go to the batting cage, adjust their stance, and look closely at what they are doing... how they are striding, how they swing the bat, etc. Within a couple of days they will figure out whatever it is they are doing wrong at the plate because they have such good fundamentals. It is a shame to see perfectly good players go all to pieces because they do not have enough of the fundamentals behind them.

You need to find the balance that will give you good endurance and a good low and high register. You also have to find a balance in the things that teach you style and phrasing. You need to be able to be a very discriminating sort of musician and you cannot be afraid to have high standards and not always go for whatever the latest “fad” is. Now, one person’s balance is out of balance for somebody else. You have to pay attention to the trumpet voice within which is, “exactly what do you want to create when the trumpet is in your hand?”

“Stay open to lots of possibilities.”

That said you always have to stay open to new influences. At one point my old teacher Jack Laumer asked me that question, and I thought I had the answer. He told me, “You are going to study with somebody who is not going to give you what you need to go to the next level. Sometimes you have to be flexible and learn from a new approach that you have never considered.” Stay open to lots of possibilities. Do not “pigeonhole” yourself into one little corner unless you are so absolutely convinced that is what you want to do. In that case go for it. In short, a young player should learn to be good musician so he or she will love music and have great ears. Then they should learn to play the trumpet and express themselves.

About the Author: Luis Loubriel was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico where he studied at the “Escuela Libre de Musica.” He joined the American Federation of Musicians at age sixteen to play with the Puerto Rico Philharmonic, the Orquesta de Zarzuelas, and the Puerto Rico Symphony. He earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Northwestern University where he studied with Vincent Cichowicz and Luther Didrickson concurrent with private studies with William Scarlett, Arnold Jacobs, and Armando Ghitalla. He served as a Harris Fellow at the University of Minnesota where he studied with David Baldwin, Gary Bordner, and Manny Laureano as well as having served as an ICEOP Fellow at the University of Illinois where he earned a doctorate degree in trumpet performance and studied with Michael Ewald, Ray Sasaki, and Ronald Romm. Loubriel has performed with the Minnesota Orchestra, the Canadian Brass, and the Artie Shaw Orchestra, among others. He has served as faculty member at Western Illinois University, St. Xavier University, North Central College, and at Benedictine University in Lisle, IL.

