

Biographical notes provided to Academic Bass Portal  
by Wilmer Fawcett.

I was first attracted to music in high school in the 1950s, by an after-school radio program where host Red Robinson played the top rock & roll hits of the day. I was captivated by Elvis, Little Richard, Chuck Berry et al. I received a very basic guitar as a gift, took a few lessons, moved up to a basic electric guitar and was part of a very basic rock & roll group with school friends, playing for local dances.

In high school I started listening to jazz and going to a Vancouver jazz club The Cellar, where I was inspired by many touring great musicians, my special attractions being the great guitarists Barney Kessel, Wes Montgomery, Howard Roberts, Herb Ellis etc, and Vancouver's own guitarist Jim Kilburn. Jim and his group played at our high school and I asked him to take me on as a student.

When I started university I joined a group of young musicians at a jazz club called The Black Spot, where I learned to jam and solo. I was captivated by music, and desired to be a professional. I decided to play bass because I liked the sound and thought I'd always have work- what kind of music doesn't include bass?

After a year at UBC in music, (I was disappointed that I was not permitted to study bass and studied flute instead), in 1962 I went to Edmonton at the suggestion of my aunt, soprano Ruth New. I was admitted to the University of Alberta as the first bass student and studied with George Woodall, who taught in the Torello tradition.

While in Edmonton I met Ron Johnston and Joe Wade, and we formed a jazz trio, reopened the dormant Yardbird Suite, and played nightly at the Caravan Penthouse, a top-end dine and dance restaurant. Ron had just returned from studies with Oscar Peterson, and his charts reflected some Bill Evans too!

While pursuing my music and bass studies at the U of A, I met and dated my future wife Lucy, and asked her to accompany my recital. I had opportunities for chamber music under Tom Rolston, especially with Roman Totenburg. I performed the Dittersdorf Sinfonia Concertante with the university symphony orchestra. And the first of nearly two dozen different Trout Quintets over my career.

In 1964 I was accepted by the National Youth Orchestra of Canada, where I met and was captivated by Frederick Zimmermann, who invited me to study with him in New York. With the NYO I made two Canadian tours and a tour of Europe, performing in the major European concert halls. I also performed in jazz groups and chamber groups with the other NYO players.

I graduated with a BMus degree from the University of Alberta in 1965 (bass diploma #1). With Mr. Zee's kind generosity and wonderful support of the Canada Council, I then went to New York and studied for a year 1965-66. I heard some wonderful bass playing including my first bass quartets, attended NYPhil concerts, played in community orchestras, and travelled to France with a Jeunesses Musicals International Youth Orchestra.

I returned to Canada, auditioned and was accepted by the Vancouver Symphony in 1966, my first concert being Symphony of Psalms and the incredible Busoni Piano Concerto with John Ogden and choir! At the same time I joined the CBC Vancouver Chamber Orchestra, led by John Avison, which broadcasted and recorded regularly, especially new music by Canadian composers. With first-chair players of the VSO (Norman Nelson and Simon Streatfeild, alumni of

the Academy of St Martins in the Field), we formed the Baroque Strings of Vancouver, performed many concerts and several CBC recordings. I joined some early music groups at UBC, and many chamber music groups and series. I had the opportunity to play solos, such as the Eccles Sonata.

Lucy and I (we had married in 1967) decided in 1970 to expand our horizons with further study, and (Mr. Zee having died suddenly in Europe) after searching, decided on Indiana University. Murray Grodner offered me a TA, and we packed our bags on the roof of our tiny 1961 Mini and headed to IU. I studied with Murray for a year, heard much wonderful music, played as principal in the IU Philharmonic, and came back with new ideas and new music. I had been in correspondence in the late 60s with Rudolf Malaric, who we visited in Vienna on our honeymoon in 1969, which correspondence deepened our friendship and he sent me many of his researches and transcriptions. I wanted to explore further the world of original bass music.

I had rejoined the VSO in 1971 as associate principal, and the CBC Orchestra. I took part in the many chamber music series and opportunities flourishing in the area at the time, (the Vancouver and Orcas Island Chamber Music Festivals, Masterpiece Music etc) and I learned and performed much of the chamber repertoire with bass. (Rossini Duo, Prokofief Quintet, Hoffmeister solo quartet, Many Trouts and Octets and Septets etc.) In 1972 I taught at the Banff School of Fine Arts, and also that year performed a duet recital with tuba (Dennis Miller) for which we commissioned a tuba-bass duet by Ian McDougall. In 1979 I toured Scotland and the USSR with the Purcell String Quartet (Trout and Rossini).

In the late 70s under the direction of producer Karen Wilson, the CBC Orchestra took on a new role of early music performance. Under the tutelage of the finest practitioners of the day (Hugget, Koopman, Goodman, Breuggen), we presented early music concerts and learned to play in style and with period bows. In 1980 John Eliot Gardiner was appointed music director and the orchestra continued with amazing performances of early Haydn symphonies etc. He invited us each to play Baroque concertos with the orchestra, and I (as principal bass by that time) chose to play the Karl Kohaut concerto, which I edited from the mss at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna. I was learning to play Viennese tuning and this was my first foray into that. (Since meeting Malaric in 1969 I had obtained on film the scores of all the major Viennese concertos and had been transcribing them laboriously by hand, long before the advent of scanners!)

I was very fortunate with the CBC Radio Orchestra (as it was eventually called) to perform many of the great bass solos, some of which were recorded on CD: all the Haydn symphony solos except #72, Pulcinella, Ginastera Variaciones Concertantes, many contemporary works with challenging bass solos.

I have been fortunate to acquire some fine instruments in my career: a good Hawkes Panormo bass, a fine English bass, a fine Mirecourt bass labelled Vuillaume 1844, a grandfather J.F. Lott 1840, and in 1971 had Pollmann make a copy of Murray Grodner's design.

After a long and very rewarding career in Vancouver, and due to aggravating physical problems, I decided to retire in 2004. Since that time I have still been fairly active, playing mostly in choral concerts in the Vancouver area.

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