

## Paul Brodie: Ambassador of the Saxophone

by Willem Moolenbeek

January 10, 2000

It has been a little over twenty years ago since I had my first contact with Paul Brodie. I had no idea that it would result in a new direction for my life, though upon reflection, it does not seem unreasonable. This is because I came into the presence a man who in many ways is bigger than life, with a personality, resolve and strength of character that sets him apart from many others. He is a genial and generous individual who has been able to shape his own destiny as well as that of others who have had the good fortune to be influenced by him. As a leading international proponent of the concert saxophone his place in history has been secured. With 50 recordings to his credit and by having played more than 3000 concerts during his 40 year career he has been heard by and moved literally millions of people.

As a fitting conclusion to a remarkable career Paul Brodie has published an account of his journey with the saxophone, and what a journey it has been. This is the story of a highly focussed and determined individual told with candor and humour. During his boyhood his entrepreneurial skills and charisma were already in evidence. The book recalls the fortunes and misfortunes of the life of the artist as he singlemindedly pursues his goals, follows his own game plan, and wages a crusade in the name of his instrument.

This autobiography is entitled “Paul Brodie: Ambassador of the Saxophone” and he has been just that, taking the instrument to places it had never been before. From the far reaches of northern Canada to remote villages in China he has exposed the beauty of the saxophone to more listeners than any single individual. By presenting clinics and masterclasses worldwide he has sown the seed of his aesthetic in countless aspiring players.

All this has not occurred by mere luck but with a well thought out and planned agenda that involved promotional and business techniques that Paul refers to as “Surviving in the trenches: Commando tactics for staying alive in the arts”. A remarkable aspect of this is that it was all done by Paul himself acting as his own manager and agent.

This book is an inspiration and education in and of itself and should be read by anyone who loves and plays the saxophone. Moreover, it should be read by saxophone students who think that they may want to make performing their life’s work.

WM- When and why did you decide to become a saxophonist and when did you decide that you wanted to perform on the concert platform?

PB – I decided this after I failed out of the pre-law course at the University of Manitoba in 1950 and all I was doing was playing in dance bands. I thought it

would be wonderful to end up in a band like Tommy Dorsey had or Les Brown and the only thing I was interested in before I went to the University of Michigan was dance band music. I loved the way Freddie Gardner the English saxophonist played and I emulated his style of playing. I had never heard a concert or classical saxophonist play and when I went to the University of Michigan I remember hearing my first recording of Marcel Mule. And then I heard a recording of Sigurd Rascher. There were only two or three recordings available at that time and I decided that I knew nothing about the instrument and that it was really something that I would like to explore. So that was when I first had the idea that I wanted a career as a concert performer.

WM – How did you come to choose Larry Teal’s program?

PB – I applied to several universities in Canada and nobody had a saxophone teacher in the late 1940’s. I applied all over the United States and the only school that had a saxophone department was the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and Larry Teal was the teacher there. I didn’t know who he was. I didn’t know that the University of Michigan had probably the best wind instrument program in North America at that time. It was because my high school music teacher Lloyd Blackman went to the University of Michigan and had taken some summer courses there and was highly thought of as a violinist. That’s the reason I went there.

WM – How did you make contact with Marcel Mule?

PB – I made contact with Marcel Mule because in my last year at the University of Michigan I heard that an American saxophonist had just returned with the first prize from the Paris Conservatory and had been a student of Marcel Mule. His name was Frederick Hemke and he lived in Milwaukee. I hitched a ride with a friend of mine to Milwaukee and I got there about seven o’clock in the morning. I called Fred Hemke and said that I had come talk to him about his experience in France. He was very cordial and he invited me to his home and I spent a couple of hours while he told me what he had done in his studies and what the life was like as a student in Paris. That was really the first contact that I made. Then I went back to Ann Arbor and I found the only recording studio in Ann Arbor in a guy’s basement. I took my accompanist over there and we recorded on an LP about a half an hour’s worth of music. I sent it to Marcel Mule and he accepted me as a student

WM – When you returned from Paris and moved to Toronto did you immediately start your music school?

PB – No. When I came to Toronto I went to every music store in the city to see if I could get a job as a woodwind teacher and the owners of the stores said that they had teachers there who had studied in New York and they didn’t need anybody. I asked, ”could I just play for you?” and they said, “No” they were too busy, thank you very much. I felt really dejected because nobody even wanted to listen to me. Then I went to the Royal Conservatory of Music and knocked on the dean’s door, who was Ettore Mazzoleni, and I said that I had just returned from Paris. He said

that they had never even had a saxophone in the building in some seventy two years and this was quite fascinating. A guy was just going by in the corridor and Dr. Mazzoleni said "George, would you come over here?" This was Dr. George Brough. He said come into the auditorium if you have a few minutes and accompany this fellow on the saxophone. George was a graduate of Oxford, England and he said, "A what? A saxophone?" So we went into the auditorium and I handed George the Ibert Concertino da Camera and the Creston Sonata and he sight-read them. It was incredible. I had never worked with a musician that was that great a sightreader. So Mazzoleni came bounding up on the stage after about twenty minutes and offered me a job there and then. So that's how it happened. We didn't have the Brodie School until the early sixties, after I had been at the conservatory for several years. I had met Rima, played with the Toronto Symphony and started my career as a soloist and we decided that instead of going to New York where Rima was already employed as a professional modern dancer. I thought I would get a job at Julliard or one of the bigger schools and we thought that we'd never, ever see each other because she'd be touring in one direction and I'd be touring in the other. So we decided to open up our own school at that time. WM – When we first met in 1979 you said at one of those early lessons, by which time you had recorded about twenty albums, that anybody who wanted to catch up to you would have to do an awful lot of work. When you started your recording career was that already a plan in the works?

PB – No. The first record I made was done in Toronto at the Hallmark Studio, the only studio that did classical recording. The piano was so bad I had to spend over \$600 just to get the piano fixed. The recording technician was used to recording folksingers and jazz people and he didn't have any idea at all how to record me so Rima was actually the producer and recording engineer as far as the balance of the sound. It cost about \$5000 to make a good tape. Then I ran all around Toronto to get some company to take the tape and put out a record and none of them were interested. They said it was lovely music but nobody was interested because they thought of the saxophone as a jazz instrument. They wished me good luck and I realised that I was going to have a tough row to hoe. Finally the Capital Record Company decided that they would put out my record and of course at that time the Canadian Capital Record Company owned the rights the Beatles from England so they were naturally interested in them because they were making a fortune. My record was the first classical LP in Canada that sold over two thousand copies. That was a record in and of itself. They put me into the international Schwann Catalogue. It was the first Canadian classical record to be listed in the Schwann Catalogue. Two years later they decided to delete the thing because it wasn't selling as much and in order to my tapes that I had paid thousands of dollars to produce back from Capitol I had to pay them \$135 to hand me my boxes of tapes over the counter. I knew I wanted to make some records but it wasn't until I met Clark Galehouse from Golden Crest records and had made 18 records that I

realised that this is something I'd really like to do and I decided I was going to make a lot of records.

WM - Tell me how you organised your first recital. That would have been your New York Town Hall Recital.

PB – Rima and I in the early part of 1960 went to New York to find a manager who would set up the Town Hall concert. We met a lady called Margaret Walters and she said she would make sure that the critic from the New York Times was there. Otherwise you could spend thousands of dollars and it would be a waste of money. And she did it. She arranged for this guy called Raymond Erickson, who was the leading music critic of the Times to be there. There were only about 40 people in the audience when I played. When I played it was only 5 o'clock in the afternoon and 4 other young musicians had recitals booked that day in Town Hall, which was the big recital hall in New York along with Carnegie Hall. I was the only one who got a terrific review, all the other artists were slaughtered on that day. I spoke to Glenn Gould before I went down to New York to find out how to take advantage of the promotional value if I was successful in Town Hall. He was very gracious and talked to me for about an hour over the telephone telling me how to set up promotion. We went to get the review in the New York Times at about two a.m. and we found out it was a great review. I contacted the Canadian wire service and told them it went well in New York. The next day when we got back every major newspaper in Canada and smaller papers across the country had features in the entertainment section about a Canadian who scored big in Town Hall in New York. So that was really a very important launching point for my career. And just the ammunition that Ronald Joy needed to promote me.

WM – Tell me how you invented the fictitious booking agent Ronald Joy

PB – I tried for weeks to locate a concert manager in Toronto and there weren't any that I met who knew anything about promotion. Because I had developed my skills as a promoter in high school and before, I realised if there was no one to help me that I would invent this guy. Rima's middle name is Joy so I became Ronald Joy for some 800 concerts. I even managed Rima's dance company. I also have the first brochure I ever put out with Ronald Joy's name as my personal manager and how to contact him. So this worked and other artists used to call Paul Brodie and ask if Ronald Joy would help them out. I would say he was an uncle of mine and that he was doing this as a personal favour because he was a retired businessman. This lasted for at least eight years.

WM – How did you start your association with the Selmer Company?

PB – I made my first recording and I had already played several hundred school concerts and had collected letters from all the teachers in the schools about what my program was and how successful I was with the students. I travelled by car all the way to Elkhart, Indiana and I met Jack Feddersen who was the president at that time. I met Benny Goodman at that time and they listened to my recording and congratulated me and then I became a Selmer clinician, which I have been for over thirty-five years.

WM – You have always been very involved with bring your art to young people. How and why did you develop this?

PB – When I was a kid growing up in Regina and I went all the way through public school and high school, the only artists who ever performed in Regina was the RCMP band from Ottawa and I was just so knocked out with their artistic level. Nobody else ever came by. So I decided that when I became known that I was going to make a crusade out of this and I went back to Regina for over thirty five years at least once a year to play for the kids in Regina and all over Saskatchewan. You can see from the statistics that I've played in almost every town in Saskatchewan. This has been a crusade because nobody knew about the saxophone as a classical instrument. I've given presentations to little kids which I've called Mr. Saxophone and the Three Bears and I did the same type of program for university students (it was an advanced Three Bears) and I did the same type of program for adults. A different type of presentation but still talking about the instrument and demonstrating what it can do. I did many hundreds and hundreds of those.

WM – Over the years you have been very active in letting aspiring musicians know what it takes to make living in the real world, what you call “Surviving in the Trenches: Commando Tactics for Staying Alive in the Arts”. How did you develop your strategies and how have you been able to impart this knowledge to others?

PB – At a very young age I just had this natural “chutzpah” about me and I was able to promote myself in high school. When I wasn't able to run for school president because my teachers said I would never be accepted in university, my marks would be too low. So I became the manager of the campaigns for other kids who wanted to run for school president. I wrote the speeches for these people and rehearsed them for their punch lines. I had thirty or forty kids making posters and coloured buttons with the candidates' names on them, and I made a parade through Regina. It was just natural for me to be this way, to have this chutzpah. I realised very early on that lots of musicians just didn't have that. When I went through the University of Michigan they never once talked about having a career, and I was aware of this. I asked questions about why don't we discuss promotion and marketing and they answered that “we're here to talk about angels dancing on pinheads and that we're not here to tell people how to promote themselves” and this is something everyone is responsible for on their own. I always thought this was a big mistake. Then after teaching at the University of Toronto and having saxophone workshops where we did work on that a little bit I decided to make it part of my career.

WM – I'd like to ask you what led to the formation of the World Saxophone Congress?

PB – This is covered in some detail in the book. It tells o how I went to an accordion congress in Toronto and I was so impressed that I thought “wouldn't it be great to do this for the saxophone”. In 1967 I was invited to play in Chicago at

the Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic. I gave a master class and a recital and that's where Clark Galehouse from Golden Crest Records heard me play. He taped my recital and came up the next day and asked if I would record for Golden Crest. The next year I came back to the Midwest Band Clinic. I had written an article for Instrumentalist Magazine - Towards and World Saxophone Congress and I was invited to a meeting of the executive committee and they offered me the grand ballroom of the Sherman House Hotel for December 16, 1969. I asked other saxophone players to help me and nobody responded. I called Eugene Rousseau because I had met him in Seattle at a music convention. I was impressed by him as an artist and as a person and he offered immediately to help. So we met in September 1969 at the Holiday Inn at O'Hare Airport in Chicago and we stayed up all night designing the program and started to call everybody the next morning and by the time we held the first congress we thought that maybe 200 people would show up. Well over 500 saxophonists showed up. Eugene and I each spent several thousand dollars promoting the program. I asked people to submit tapes of saxophone quartets so we could have some play at the congress. Only two groups, The Milwaukee Fine Arts Quartet and the Chicago Quartet sent tapes. So the next day I called them and said that the executive committee, which consisted of only Eugene and myself, had selected them to perform and of course they were very thrilled. And they played very well by the way.

WM – Are you happy with the direction that the World Saxophone Congress has taken?

PB – I would say that I really am happy that the repertoire has expanded and the way we get together and socialise to a certain extent but I wish more was being done to bring the instrument to the public. It seems to be mainly directed at the university level and I feel that we should do more to have the instrument presented to the public. I also feel that we should invite great artists of other instruments to perform with our great artists. Generally I'm very pleased with the congress. I'm really excited about coming the twelfth World Saxophone Congress because it's now thirty years after I started it and while they asked me to play at the congress I felt it wasn't my place to perform. At my age I'd rather let some younger person have the chance.

WM – When did you start touring internationally? How did you organise that?

PB – In the early 1980s I met a violinist named Jack Glatzer. Jack had performed all over Southeast Asia for years playing Paganini violin caprices for student and adult audiences unaccompanied. He had travelled to the smallest towns in China and India and he knew everybody. He gave me the names of all the contacts I needed to build a tour of Southeast Asia which we did for nine weeks in 1984. You will remember that you took over my class for that period.

WM – In March of 1998 you called me up and said that June 17<sup>th</sup> would be your last day of teaching. Then on the morning of June 17<sup>th</sup> you called and said, "This is it. This is the last time I'll have to argue with somebody about how to finger Bb. (Paul laughs) I bring this up because I've never met anyone who has his game plan

set as far in advance as you do. I remember at our very first lesson you coming in with your big book, a three ring binder chock full of sheets and pieces of paper clipped to it. I recall how impressed I was by this degree of organisation.

PB – I want you to know where this came from. I wrote a big chapter in my book about my first days at the University of Michigan. Did I ever tell you the bass saxophone story?

WM – No.

PB – Well I wasn't good enough to get into the Michigan band. I'd never had a teacher before and there were these 17 and 18 year-old kids that blew circles around me. But I heard that the Michigan symphonic band needed a bass saxophonist to play in some pieces so they could take these pieces to play in Carnegie Hall in the spring of that year. So I asked if I could play the bass saxophone. I went to the storage room for the first day of rehearsal, Saturday morning at 8:30 I picked up that bass saxophone. I had never seen one before. I was amazed at the size of the mouthpiece and the reeds. They sat me at the back of the band with the tuba player. The saxophone section sat up front. A couple of minutes before nine o'clock this little tiny man came roaring up through the band and got up onto the podium and a hush fell over the band. It was Dr. William D. Revelli, the most famous band conductor in the United States. He said hi to everybody and the first piece we're going to start with starts off on the bass saxophone playing its lowest note and he turned and raised his hands towards me. I put up my hand and said "Excuse me, Dr. Revelli. I just took this instrument out of the band room 15 minutes ago. Could we maybe play a couple of numbers so I can try it out? He looked at me for a moment and said, "Pack up the instrument. Take it back to the storage room and take out a drop slip for this course."

Everybody in the band, which had about a hundred pieces in it, turned around in their chairs to see who was being butchered at the back of the band. I didn't like what Revelli said to me. I jumped up and knocked the bass saxophone over and ran through he band up to the podium, pulled up my pants in front of him and said "Listen you. Just because you had a rough night last night you're not going to talk to me like that." He was shocked and after a moment said "Okay. If you're going to be a man, sit down and play you're part." So that was my introduction to William Revelli. Then after we got to know each other I was in his office to talk to him about something and he was on the telephone. I looked at his desk and I could see his schedule book and I could see that he knew when his planes were taking off over the next few months, which hotel he was staying at, what time he was seeing so and so. I'd never seen anything like that before. This guy was organised. And that's how I learned how to do this. By observing him.

WM – Tell the story of how you learned self-discipline from Ted Hegvik.

PB – I lived in a rooming house in my second year with 14 musicians. I was on the second floor and my roommate was trombone player named Chuck and other musicians lived on the third floor. One morning, in February I think it was, somebody came roaring down the upper stairs banging against the walls at 6:30 in

the morning. I ran out into the hall and this little guy was running by loaded down with all kinds of musical instrument cases. It was Ted Hegvik. I said "Where the hell are you going?" "To get to the practice rooms for 6:30 so I can get a chance to practice. Bye." And he ran out the door into the night. It was still black outside. So I went back to bed and said to myself "No wonder this guy is the first saxophonist. People are afraid to sit beside him because he'd blow them right out of their chair." The bugger practices all the time. So the next morning he comes roaring down the stairs and I'm standing there waiting for him at 6:30 in the morning with my saxophone case and I said, "If you don't mind, I'm going to pace you." He said "That's OK, but let's get going so I can get to my practice room." So we trotted off, the first steps in the snow that morning and we got to the band hall. I paced him around all day long. He'd only take 15 minutes for lunch. He was practising 18 hours a day, seven days a week, month after month. And that's what I attribute my development of self-discipline to. My experience with Ted Hegvik. And I paid him back. We met at the Midwest Band Clinic years later and I was already performing and making records and he was living in Florida, playing clarinet with the Tampa Symphony and nothing had happened career wise. I said to him, "Ted, if I could arrange for you to make a recording of this Rudy Wiedoeft music that you like, would you be interested? He almost fainted. So from the hotel room I called Clark Galehouse from Golden Crest Records and Ted got a record contract right then and there over the telephone. He made four recordings for Golden Crest Records as a result of that. And I told Ted at that time that this was a payback from me because of what he had done for my life. So we've been friends ever since.

WM – What would you qualify as the three most significant accomplishments in your life?

PB - My marriage to Rima, the World Saxophone Congress and playing in China.

WM – If you had to do it all over again, what would you have done differently?

PB – I can't say I would have changed a thing.

WM – Have you enjoyed your career?

PB – Obviously. I have accomplished more than I thought I would and I feel very fortunate to have had the endurance, the health and the companion to go along with everything that I've done. I feel very lucky. I've enjoyed my teaching career. I've enjoyed playing for young students as well as adult audiences. I've enjoyed working with over 50 piano players who have accompanied me as I played all over the world.

WM – How do you feel about retirement?

PB – I'm very fortunate to be living in a paradise like Muskoka. I've taught for over 40 years and I still have some students coming up for the odd lesson and career talks and stuff like that. But we're just having a wonderful time and I hope that we can continue to do so. I'm doing very little touring and I'm kind of travelled out. Every time I go to the airport I feel like I've haven't been out of the airport. Those long flights across the ocean, transferring terminals, checking in and



out of hotels and motels is just not as much fun as it used to be. So this is the right time to sit back and reflect.

WM – I can't imagine you sitting down and doing nothing. What kinds of things are you looking forward to doing?

PB – I'm still practising, doing some school programs and will play the odd recital. But it's much slowed down compared to what it was. And I think I'm going to keep on doing that until someone says "No."

WM – What do you like to do to relax?

PB – I'd have to say nature. I love walking anytime and in the summer, floating around on the Moon River in my rubber tube or canoe. Those are my main activities.

WM – Thanks for your time and this interview. It's been fun.

The following letter was sent to Paul from Jean-Francois Guay, president of the Twelfth World Saxophone Congress

"It is a great pleasure for me and the World Saxophone Congress 2000 to pay a tribute to a Canadian saxophonist, Paul Brodie. Mr. Brodie is certainly one of the most important Canadian artists in our century. By his numerous concerts, recordings, worldwide tours and his devotion to establish a Canadian saxophone school, he has made our instrument known to a large public.

This is why the committee of the Twelfth World Saxophone Congress-Montreal 2000, of which I am the president, is happy to highlight his distinction by organising the book-launching of his autobiography, "Paul Brodie – Ambassador of the Saxophone". Many important international saxophonists and one hundred persons will participate and be able to pay tribute to this pioneer of the Canadian music world, which will help make this event a success and an unforgettable moment for Mr. Brodie.

I am happy and proud that this book-launching will take place during the Twelfth World Saxophone Congress-Montreal 2000. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish Paul all the success he deserves."

Jean-Francois Guay(President)  
XII World Saxophone Congress  
Montreal 2000

Paul Brodie's equipment:

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C Star mouthpieces on the sopranino and soprano and D on the alto with Selmer ligatures.

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About the author:

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