



# Ken Radnofsky



interview by Richard Hoenich

**I**t's hard to imagine a busier saxophonist teacher than Ken Radnofsky. For five workdays each week, and on weekends "for just 9 hours," he's also a teacher. He is not the after school teacher, the college teacher, the administrator teacher, the performer teacher, or the volunteer teacher. Ken Radnofsky is all of these things. The common thread in all his work is simply to be a dedicated teacher. In Ken's words, "I teach my age, 51 hours each week of basic teaching, plus the volunteering, travel, and gigs (if being the Boston Symphony's on-call saxophonist for 28 years can be called a gig).

In addition to all this he is an avid supporter of new music, although Radnofsky now refuses to call it new music. His support is realized through his own commissions and those of World-Wide Concurrent Premieres and Commissioning Fund, Inc. (WWCPCF, founded 12 years ago by Radnofsky).

Ken Radnofsky has had a long and distinguished teaching career, including ongoing faculty positions at all three of Boston's major private conservatories, the Longy School, Boston Conservatory and New England Conservatory.

### **KEN RADNOFSKY ON PLAYING WITH THE BSO (picture at left)**

Kenneth Radnofsky in his Boston Symphony Orchestra 1977 debut, at age 23, as a member of the concertino in David Del Tredici's *Final Alice*, with soloist Barbara Hendricks, Seiji Ozawa, conducting. Says Radnofsky, "By the third rehearsal, pictured here, the symphony had already replaced the mandolin, 1st soprano sax, and accordion members of the 5-person concertino. They flew in the accordion from Chicago, and Harvey Pittel, pictured next to Ken, from Los Angeles and all were there for this rehearsal. As a young person it became absolutely clear to come to rehearsals with the music prepared!"

Amongst the legendary wind players pictured are Armando Ghitalla, Rolf Smedvig, Andre Come (trumpet section), Charles Kavalovski (principal horn), Roland Small, Matt Ruggiero (bassoons), Ralph Gomberg, Wayne Rapier, and Al Genovese (oboe section). "Playing with these people began a wonderful education playing with the orchestra and was a dream come true. Even though it's been 28 years there's always the chance that a clarinet player in the orchestra will ask to play the sax parts. I'm glad to have done it for this long," Ken Radnofsky.

I first became acquainted with Ken Radnofsky when we collaborated on a recording project of Donald Martino's dramatic *Saxophone Concerto*, a work I didn't know. Ken's flaming passion for "music of our time" as he puts it, and this piece in particular, was the guiding light and goad for me to study and absorb the work, and to then rehearse, perform and record it with the student orchestra at New England Conservatory. His gentle, easy way with colleagues and students, concealed a steely professionalism and determination to achieve the highest possible results. Yet, there was remarkably little "ego" or *prima dona* attitude with this Ken. In fact, it seemed to me that the entire effort was never about "Ken" in Ken's mind. He had a more important mission. It was really about the music at hand. It was about supporting and encouraging the composer and through him all living composers. It was about the other performers, myself, and the young gifted students, and helping us understand our role in bringing this music and other music of our time to life. And perhaps most important of all, it was for the listeners of our time, who deserved to hear for themselves that living composers are writing music both vital to the spirit and delightful to the ear.

Almost needless to say, after this undertaking Ken and I became very close friends and have remained so for a decade now. We have worked together on many musical projects over the years. Time spent conversing with him is always lively; we share many points of view, and see other issues from differing perspectives. As the reader will soon see, Ken's deep love of teaching, or better put, supporting, nurturing, and guiding is at the core of his musicianship and his humanity. It shapes what is a great generosity of spirit. I am delighted to have this opportunity to "sound out" Ken for *Saxophone Journal* with some questions that I put to him recently.

*Let's begin by talk about some of your current activities in playing and teaching.*

Well, first of all life, and a career in music, is a long

distance run so the secret is to keep running. In the saxophone world we have lots of long distance runners. We just don't stop. Don Sinta, Fred Hemke, and Eugene Rousseau are still running as are people from my generation, such as John Sampen, Arno Bornkamp, Jean-Michel Goury, and Claude Delangle, are still running. And then of course there are the sprinters, the young ones who take the lead, some of whom studied with me like, Chien-Kwan Lin, Greg Ridlington, Eliot Gattegno, Philipp Staudlin, Randy Hall, Matt Sintchak, and Eric Hewitt.

It's so much fun to try to keep up with them! If my colleagues and I are good teachers then every generation should be better, and in the saxophone world it is so. Two years ago I formed a saxophone quartet, which is immodestly named The Radnofsky Quartet. In this case though there was a reason for

it. All the members studied with me, and though God knows we have different personalities, it's such a joy to work with musicians I helped train and now have to keep up with. I'm 30 years older than the youngest player, Eliot Gattegno, and twenty years older than the next oldest, Philipp Staudlin. Eric Hewitt, who studied with me from the age of 11, is 26. All of them have their own identities and interests as soloists, teachers, and conductors. We play virtually all music of our time. Every week we meet and play Wuorinen, Elliott Schwartz, and Felipe Lara, among others. Occasionally though, we do perform great vintage music. Just recently we performed Glazounov *Quartet* and Pierre *Introduction and Variations* for the Longy School's Fall Septemberfest.

Ken, I could not help but notice that you have chosen, deliberately I suppose, to call new music, 'music of our time,' and music of previous eras, though still the 20th century, 'vintage music.'

Well, I'm finally done with the new music appellation. Those of us who play music of our time allowed ourselves to be stigmatized with the term new music, and although not intended to be self deriding, it brings up certain negative connotations to the public. After all, it is our music, music of today. The rest is vintage music, and from now on that's what I'm calling it. We need to re-educate the public. I believe that vintage music accurately describes Brahms, Mozart, Haydn, Debussy, Mahler, Strauss, Glazounov, and Ibert.

*Do you think there is still room for new ideas in composing music?*

There's still not enough great music out there for all the instruments. You know, it's not just about the saxophone. We have to be a model for the rest of the musicians too. The average orchestral musician (the non-saxophonist) needs to be kept on their toes. In Europe they all play Mozart and Berio *Sequenzas* for their auditions. Here in the United States we still play just Mozart and excerpts.

WWPCPF doesn't commission solely works for saxophone, we've also commissioned concerti for horn and flute by Elliott Schwartz, a cello *Sonata* by Gunther Schuller and a *Horn Trio* (violin, horn, and piano by Yehudi Wyner). Commissioning works is part of my personal investment in our civilization. I am very proud that so many other musicians have teamed up with us at WWCP.

*It should be noted that at the time of this interview World-Wide Concurrent Premieres is preparing for three simultaneous World-Premiere Performances beginning February 20, 2005; Quintet for Alto Saxophone and String Quartet by John McDonald, Trio for Saxophone, Cello and Trio by Howard Frazin, and Sonata for Saxophone and Piano by Shih-Hui Chen. All three pieces, with performance scores and parts are still available for a cost of \$200, with all scores numbered and signed by the composers. You may write to participate at Ken@KenRadnofsky.com)*

*You mentioned your personal investment in our civilization, in terms of new music, and your strong feelings about this are very apparent.*

I believe we all want to help inch civilization along. We all have our own ways of doing it. One of the things I'm much more interested in now is finding ways of recapturing music for all of society. On both sides of the United States, twenty years ago, Americans naively, and I trust, unwittingly, cut back music in the schools with legislated bills such as Proposition 2, 1/2 in Massachusetts and Proposition 13 in California. In effect these bills limited the ability of local communities to raise adequate funding, through local taxes, to support the schools. I believe this began a cultural revolution of sorts which we should be ashamed of, and must correct.

Part of my volunteering these days is giving time and editorial support to reintroducing music to the young, and recapturing some the lost generation of people who didn't get an opportunity to play a musical instrument, or sing, in their public school experience as a child growing up in America. I even have a copyrighted slogan called "Be Part of the Art" (© 1998 Kenneth Radnofsky, All Rights Reserved), which I use to promote performing music.

Most of us enjoy music because someone introduced it to us and we became participants. Just like baseball or soccer, one can introduce music to young students, and keep music alive through performance. People watch and enjoy sports often because they played sports. The same is true for music. By the way, that's why I also teach as much as I physically am able to, and why I try to set up all my students with teaching as soon as they arrive at college. This is part of my obligation to society and I do it for every student with as much enthusiasm as I can muster. By the way, I teach everybody. No interviews. If I have room it's first come first served. Many of my colleagues want to teach only the talented students. Well, I wasn't talented. I was fifth out of six in my school band for seven years. We have to believe in each student. The talented are easy to teach, the others require hard work. But yet it's wonderful work because for the teacher there are more opportunities to teach! Isn't that what we're supposed to do?

*Are you playing any interesting concerts these days?*

Yes, I play all the time. Early in my career I would spend hours meeting with agents, preparing publicity, working the phone, doing mailings, etc. Now, even though there's no longer any of that, people call anyway. I am very grateful and lucky. I simply don't have time for all of the mailings, except with World-Wide Concurrent Premieres that benefits a greater number of people.

To answer your specific question, though, since I was last interviewed I've been to Cuba to perform with my daughters and composer John McDonald. Lauren is a terrific cellist doing graduate work at Eastman, playing Ligeti, Birtwhistle, etc., and Julia is a wonderful artist with a lot to say. Going to Cuba with them was a highlight in my life. I'm supposed to be talking about myself, but my children are so much more interesting!

But again, to try to answer the original question I've played with the Boston Symphony a number of times, including the Berio *Sinfonia*, Bizet *L'Arlesienne*, a *Bolero* recording with Bernard Haitink (a rehearsal recording session without a separate rehearsal or performance), and a performance at Tanglewood this summer of a suite featuring saxophone, from the movie *Taxi Driver*, conducted by John Williams. The music is by Bernard Hermann, who did most of the Hitchcock movies, as well as this one by Scorsese. Scorsese and Spielberg were at the Tanglewood performance.

I also recorded the Colgrass concerto *Dream Dancer* with the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble, under Charles Peltz, which is available on Mode, and Elliott Schwartz's *Mehitabel's Serenade for Saxophone and Orchestra* which you conducted (available on Albany Records). I've recorded a new CD with Gunther Schuller's *Sonata*, and other works written for me, but I don't have a label yet. Also, I'm continuing to commission and perform music, and I really can't keep up with my own commitments. Dana Brayton has written a new *Concerto* I'm trying to learn. Michael Gandolfi is finishing a piece, and there are the three new World-Wide Concurrent Premieres, which I will present at Boston's Jordan Hall on February 22, 2005 at 8 P.M.

It's like that every year. I learn six to ten pieces a year. I don't know how I find the time but I do. I have to fit it in. But again, there are bigger projects that are more important to me, and more important than me.

*Such as?*

I invested many years in performance, teaching, and curriculum development in Taiwan. One of my students, Lee Shyen, who now teaches there, brought me over. They have developed a country wide program which didn't exist ten years ago. I was just someone who helped, along with John Sampen, Randy Hall, and others, and in retrospect that was really gratifying. It wasn't planned that way, but it turned out that way.

Now I'm more organized with my plans and development, and I'm working with a former student, Claudio Dioguardi, and "Fundación del Estado para el Sistema Nacional de las Orquestas Juveniles e Infantiles de Venezuela," in developing a saxophone program for Venezuela. They have developed a string program which is the envy of the world. I hope that during the next ten years we can do the same with saxophone. I have enlisted the help of Selmer and



**KEN RADNOFSKY SAXOPHONE QUARTET**

Radnofsky Quartet, at a Jordan Hall performance. Pictured left to right: Philipp Staudlin (soprano), Radnofsky (alto), Eliot Gattegno (tenor), Eric Hewitt (baritone). Radnofsky says, 'This is the finest quartet I've ever had the pleasure of performing with. It's fun to try to keep up with them, playing Donatoni and Wuorinen! These fellows, are all pretty amazing. Every generation gets better!'

others. I hope to do more in more places.

*What type of teaching do you enjoy the most, the young beginner students, or college students?*

I simply can't narrow it down. I enjoy the completeness of being able to do all of these things. I have lots of young students at Longy, but also a wonderful select group of college students, both jazz and classical players at Longy, and elsewhere. At Boston Conservatory I teach a wind performance seminar in which we have weekly master classes and guests, some chosen by me, some by the students and it's all the wind instruments, not just the saxophonists. On a different day I have all the saxophonists from all my schools gather at Boston Conservatory where Eric Hewitt conducts a work we've commissioned, along with saxophone class for all. I've also started sax ensembles at Longy. We performed with a saxophonist named Tedy Bruschi at Symphony Hall last year (he also happens to be a middle linebacker for the Patriots). To me he is a great model for everyone and perhaps a throwback to the ancient Greeks, i.e., an athlete, scholar, and musician. We need more people like him. I also continue to teach a number of private students at both NEC and Boston Conservatory.

*Do you have any unrealized dreams?*

Well let's limit it to music. One of my long range goals is to fund WWCP in perpetuity so that we can commission more works long after I'm gone and charge no fee (or a very small fee) to the commissioning performers. We've done it with very hard work on a tight budget. If we could find a several million dollar angel, that'd be nice. I don't expect it-but I'm working at it. And, hope can keep one going.

*Do you have any advice for the aspiring concert saxophonist ready to conquer the world?*

Yes, start with your dreams but refine them into realistic detail. Keep your personal values as well as your musical ones. Be patient, practice, and learn the vintage repertoire as well as the music of our time. And plan on spending a portion of your professional life teaching. If you don't think you want to teach, the simple fact is, you will teach, and you owe it to your students to do your best. My students who studied with me twenty years ago should get a rebate! I'm a better teacher now. But I did my best and we all get better with time and practice.

*And what advice do you have for the seventeen year old saxophonist getting ready to enter a music school?*

There are many fine music schools in the United States, and many fine teachers. You need to personally meet the saxophone teacher, or correspond with the saxophone

teacher, or take a lesson, make a phone call, e-mail or something. Meeting you potential saxophone teacher personally is the best way to go. You need to make sure that the teacher will listen to you, care about you, and that the teacher has some ability to teach and care for your current dreams, as well as to help you discover those things you haven't yet even imagined.

*Would you agree that it is important for players to hear themselves the way a listener hears them? If so, how can students develop this ability?*

Your question is one of those that must be addressed but one which will always be impossible to answer in exact terms. We constantly are trying to put ourselves on the other side of the saxophone. That is, we must try to imagine how we sound to others, how we sound in the hall, etc. At the same time we must keep in contact with our own sense of self, and that which includes our standards for musical performance. For instance, if we play a concert that is well received and we know it was awful, then it probably was awful and we aim to do better. At the same time if the audience claps, then smile and take a bow. It would be rude to do otherwise.

On the other hand, for those of us who find ourselves in the finals, but not winning the final prize, introspection demands that extra effort of dispassionate observation putting the ego in a compartment, and finding a way to keep improving. I have a little proverb, if you'll permit me, titled "Six Measures a Day," that I use with myself and my students. It goes like this, "If at first we learn six measures a day of a piece we neither think we can play, nor wish to play, then, soon, we find that we can play anything, and wish to play everything."

So, I may be a turtle, or the Ever Ready Bunny, but I do keep going. I keep trying to go on and be better. I hope that I peak at seventy-five. Then maybe I'll slow down a bit.

*Do you have any final words for this interview that you'd like to share with us?*

I can be a little more specific, but not much. I believe in people. My list of those who care about and help others is much longer than the ones who don't. We don't always see it displayed, but it is important to me to believe that. I guess my parents, wife and children, Joe Allard, Gunther Schuller, Robert Freeman, Bill Moyer, Duncan Hale, (the list goes on and on and I know I am leaving many out) taught me to believe in myself, too.

I am also impressed daily with young people today who are so self-aware, and so altruistic. The talented composer Lei Liang is a giver of himself. There's also a young lady named Gabriela Diaz, a violinist who gave a benefit concert recently for the Leukemia Society, with an orchestra of musicians who donated their services. She is an Albert Schweitzer Fellow. She is herself a cancer survivor. What a role model she is not merely for her generation, but for all of us. I believe in these people and in my own students.

My students, just like my own children, have never let me down. I'll always believe in them and there's nothing anyone or any of them could do to change that. They know that I know that, and they respond. That carries me through any challenges I have with the rest of society or that little microcosm which embodies our profession. We

are lucky if we have one person who believes in us as we are growing up. I had several. I look upon every student as if they were not as fortunate as I have been, and I do my best to be that person who accepts and tries to understand them, and help them realize their dreams.

AUTHOR RICHARD HOENICH

Conductor Richard Hoenich began his career with the Montreal Symphony, where he was principal bassoon, in addition to associate conductor. Twelve years ago he moved to Boston to lead the orchestra program at New England Conservatory of Music.

**WORKS DEDICATED TO, PREMIERED, OR COMMISSIONED BY KENNETH RADNOFSKY  
(listed by year composed, \* indicates World-Wide Concurrent Premieres Commission)**

**2004**

- Michael Gandolfi, *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra*
- Howard Frazin, *Trio for Saxophone, Cello and Piano\**
- John McDonald, *Quintet for Saxophone and String Quartet\**
- Shih-Hui Chen, *Sonata for Saxophone and Piano\**
- Dana Brayton, *Coyote Dreams for Saxophone and Orchestra*
- Pasquale Tassone, *Five Movements for Alto Saxophone and Piano*
- Curtis Hughes, *Myopia 2 for Saxophone Ensemble*
- Felipe Lara, *Quartet for Saxophones*

**2003**

- Stan Hoffman, *Hymn to the Sun for Saxophone Ensemble*
- Armand Qualliotine, *Love Feast of the Fireflies for Soprano Saxophone and Piano*

**2002**

- John McDonald, *Capriccetti for Saxophone and Piano*
- Gunther Schuller, *Duo Concertante for Cello and Piano\**
- Colin Stack, *Several Shades of Reflection for Saxophone Ensemble\**

**2001**

- Elliott Schwartz, *Mehitabel's Serenade for Saxophone and Orchestra*
- John McDonald, *Prologue in the Form of a Qaddish*
- Michael Colgrass, *Dream Dancer for Saxophone and Wind Orchestra\**

**2000**

- John McDonald, *Barrier Music for Saxophone, Cello and Piano*
- Shih-Hui Chen, *Twice Removed for Solo Saxophone*
- Lei Liang, *Extend for Saxophone and Guanzi*
- Andy Vores, *Night Life for Saxophone, Cello and Piano*

**1999**

- Jakov Jakoulov, *The Snow Queen for 12 hands, 2 Pianos\**
- Michael Colgrass, *Chameleon for Solo Saxophone*
- Donald Martino, *Piccolo Studio for Solo Saxophone*
- David Amram, *Prologue and Scherzo for Solo Saxophone*
- Gunther Schuller, *Sonata for Saxophone and Piano\**
- Jakov Jakoulov, *Concerto for Saxophone and String Orchestra*
- Jakov Jakoulov, *Bernstein Anniversary for Saxophone and Piano*

**1998**

- Yang Yong, *Beyond the Mountains for Saxophone and*

*Orchestra*

- Armando Qualliotine, *Terzetto for Saxophone, Cello and Piano*
- Pasquale Tassone, *Divertimento for Saxophone and Piano*
- Michael Horvit, *Land of Dreams for Saxophone, Voice and Choir\**

- Yehudi Wyner, *Trio for Horn, Cello and Piano\**
- Frank Ticheli, *Blue Shades for Clarinet and Band\**
- Jaime Fatas, *Flamenco sin Limites' for Solo Saxophone*

**1996**

- Larry Thomas Bell, *Trio for Saxophone, Cello, and Piano 'Mahler in Blue Light'*

**1995**

- John Harbison, *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano 'San-Antonio' \**

**1994**

- Vincent Plush, *Gershwin on Folly Island for Saxophone Solo and Tape (or Sax ensemble)*

**1993**

- Chris Theofanidis, *Concerto 'Netherland'\**

**1992**

- Georgy Dmitriev, *Concerto 'Labyrinth'*

**1987**

- Lee Hoiby, *3 Monologues for Soprano Voice, Saxophone and Piano*
- Donald Martino, *Concerto for Alto Saxophone and Chamber Orchestra*
- Morton Subotnick, *Concerto for Electric Saxophone (and acoustic) & Orchestra*
- Milton Babbitt, *Sonata for Saxophone and Piano*

**1986**

- Allen Johnson, *'Nightsong' for Saxophone and Piano (or Chamber Orchestra)*
- Matthew Marveled, *'Improvisations on Summertime' for Solo Saxophone* **1985**

- Roger Bourland *Quintet for Soprano Saxophone and String Quartet*

**1984**

- Gunther Schuller, *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra* **1983**

- Roger Borland *'Far in the Night' for Soprano Sax, Bassoon and Str. Orch.*

**1982**

- Ezra Sims, *Sextet*

**1981**

- Ezra Sims, *Solo for Saxophone*
- David Polansky, *Madness in 3 Episodes for Solo Saxophone*
- Shirish Korde, *Spiral qfwfq for solo bass clarinet*
- David Amram, *Concerto for Saxophone and Orchestra*
- Alan Hovhaness, *Concerto for Soprano Saxophone and String Orchestra*
- Thomas Oboe Lee, *Sourmash 2 for Saxophone and Piano*

\*Indicates World-Wide Concurrent Premieres Commission, Ken Radnofsky, Founder and Executive Director.