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Aldemaro Romero Jr.

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Regional

To one local man, clarinet more than a "stick"

The clarinet is one of the most melodious and popular instruments among the woodwind family. From classical music to jazz, the clarinet has always stood out because of the many popular compositions that have been written for it.

"I think that it has a soulful sound to it that seems to be appealing to emotion," said James McCardell "Mac" Hinson, a professor of music at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. "In jazz versus classical you usually have a wide range of individual sounds, individual styles and different types of emotion. And I think that from the popularity of Benny Goodman in particular, that he sort of set the way of how to play an emotional clarinet. I think Benny Goodman really put the clarinet on the map with his solo ability and his emotional presentation."

A native of Charlotte, N.C., Hinson obtained his bachelor's in music from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his master's of music from the prestigious Julliard School in New York and his doctorate in music from Florida State University. Although he did not originally plan to become a teacher, the more he taught the more he liked the idea.

"I hadn't thought about it as a career because I was trained so much as a performer," he said. "But when I actually started becoming more involved in teaching classes then I thought that I would actually like to see about this position as a career." After graduating Julliard, Hinson was working in Charleston, S.C., as a performer playing principal clarinet in the symphony while also teaching music appreciation at the college level. After leaving Charleston, he taught music appreciation and private classes in Colorado Springs, Colo.

"I loved the aspect of teaching them and watching them learn," he said. "I still keep up my performing, but I found a different path to take that I didn't



McCardell "Mac" Hinson with his clarinet.

Photo by Bill Brinson

really think about when I was at Julliard. I decided that this was more of what I really wanted to do as a career." Hinson started to play when he was ten years old, although there was no family tradition of music.

"We didn't have any piano or anything like that except for a huge collection of opera records," he said. "So I grew up with that on the stereo. Then I went to the school band. I wanted to play trumpet. The band teacher told me they were all filled up, so I asked what the easiest instrument was and she told me clarinet. And that's how I started with that."

Hinson has recently recorded a CD titled "Low Blow" together with SIUE piano teacher Kris Pineda. There were three motivations behind the project, he explained.

"One was to have a model and research a repertoire for my students who play bass clarinet," he said. "The second idea was to produce the CD and have myself get more familiar with that type of clarinet, which is a secondary instrument for me. I wanted to become more familiar with the instrument and be able to teach it better. The third reason was a more practical one. I wanted to have enough CDs that I could send out to area band directors and area musicians so that they could play it for their students." But is the clarinet really the instrument of choice for today's students?

"I have one of the largest studios in the music department between the clarinet and the saxophone," Hinson said. "Clarinet seems to be a strong instrument in the high schools. You have a number of them — maybe 20 or so — in the bands in Collinsville and Alton.

"I think saxophone is maybe prettier or easier to play or even sexier, and the clarinet is just this stick," he said. "It doesn't quite look like the saxophone. But there are still enough people who like to play

Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

it in high school that we have a pretty good interest here. When they come to SIUE we generally have the B flat clarinet, the soprano instruments, but about every year I'll have about one or two bass clarinets that will come and audition. They usually have an instrument from their high school that they play on," he explained. SIUE has different bands and there is always demand for clarinet players, he added.

"There are a lot of problems with bass clarinet in high school," Hinson explained. "And sometimes here at SIUE we will have to move somebody over to bass clarinet to play in the band or in the orchestra if there is not one available. Both the band and the orchestra use a bass clarinet at all times. You have got to have one or maybe two in those ensembles." Hinson is now thinking about future projects.

"My first recording in '96 was a recording of trios for clarinet, viola and piano. We did a number of compositions that had never been recorded before. At that time I was doing research on clarinet, viola, and piano music and I got about a hundred pieces that I wanted to do. In there was an early piece that was relatively unknown, has not been printed, and I think needs to be worked out in finale, sent to a printer, published and be known in the clarinet world."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.