

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

August 14, 2014

JOAN BRICCETTI BY BLANCHE TOUHILL

Blanche Touhill: Would you introduce yourself?

Joan Briccetti: I'm Joan Briccetti, I'm former general manager of the St. Louis Symphony and managing director of Metro Theater Company and I'm retired.

Blanche Touhill: Joan, would you talk about your early life: where you grew up; what was your family like; who did you play with; your grandparents; your cousins; your school mates in elementary and secondary school, and what I'm asking you to reminisce on is, who really encouraged you to do sort of what you felt you wanted to do?

Joan Briccetti: Well, I was born and grew up in Somers, New York, birth place of the American Circus, which is 55 miles due north of New York City in a completely rural country. It's a beautiful spot and I've always considered it the best of two worlds. We had three acres of land and neighbor children were as you found them, which meant that it was already kind of a diverse situation. People needed to be who they were and find out who they were and so forth and I enjoyed it very much. I'm the youngest of three. I have two much older brothers who were very influential in my life, beginning with the fact that I always figured out what a really good tease was because they teased me incessantly and their jokes spilled over so that I considered being silly and funny and having a good joke a very important thing in life. I played with them and I played with my friends a lot. I was a real tomboy but one of the biggest influences on me was my oldest brother, Tom, who was 13 years older than I was and was a musician, a pianist, composer and conductor and he was just a real presence. He was a very dynamic and charismatic guy and I can remember from my earliest days, when I would go to bed at night, instead of, like, counting sheep or listening to the sounds of nature, I would hear him practicing the piano and I would count the notes in Chopin's Minute Waltz or Beethoven's Sonata, whatever, and then when

I was awake and he was practicing...because he practiced many hours a day...I would curl up either under the piano, which was the most fantastic sound; I was in, like, a little cocoon with these beautiful resonant basses and trebles, or I would lie on the sofa when I had a bad headache and his music would make it go away. So that was a very important connection for me. I grew up in this very small public central school which was fantastic at that time and I was lucky enough to go on to Bryn Mawr College which is a very small, all women school just outside of Philadelphia.

Blanche Touhill: Go back to your...did you take music lessons when you were young?

Joan Briccetti: Yes, I was kind of a crazy jack-of-all-trades. I started off on the piano and I practiced. I realized, from all of my musical endeavors, that I wasn't that great, that I was a much better audience person but I played the piano, of sorts; I played in the school band. We didn't have an orchestra. It was that small a school. I started off on the flute and after one year of flute playing, I came home and announced to my mother that I was making a change the next year, I was going to trombone, which didn't make her very...she had qualms about that. Then I picked up string base and I learned to play a little bit of many different instruments. I never was big on a string instrument but I learned to play brass and percussion and so forth. I was just always drawn to music. The reason really was of just the whole aura around my family, my family would go to concerts; we would go down to New York City in an hour and ten minutes where it was a wonderland of cultural opportunities: the opera; Lincoln Center, before that, Carnegie Hall. I remember very well when Lincoln Center was built and how fantastic it was. I'm still heartbroken that the old Metropolitan Opera is torn down because I have some of my most visceral, intensely wonderful moments thinking of times at the old Metropolitan Opera House. So I had a lot of music. We used to play games in the car of, who was that composer from WQXR and that, actually, is a more memorable, better learning experience for me than even all the music that I have heard since then, in trying to identify composers in academics music history and so forth, but learning to distinguish what the voice and the flavor of a particular composer was was really great and my mom and I used to engage in that little endeavor a lot.

Blanche Touhill: How did your playmates look upon you since you knew so much music?

Joan Briccetti: Well, a little oddly, actually. I was sort of, again, humorous, sort of a comedian in school but they thought...you know, in a rural area like that, they looked a bit askance on somebody whose time was spent going to concerts and so forth and not just involved in sports or whatever. In Somers, they had a group of people who went to different churches. They were really involved in the Catholic church and in the Protestant church and I was raised Catholic, Roman Catholic but my mom didn't really involve herself in this Holy Rosary Society or whatever. So that was okay and we lived in a part of town that was not an area that was really densely populated with kids. So I grew up playing ball with my neighbors and riding bikes and climbing trees, and they were enough to make me very happy, actually. I'm still in touch with some of my neighbor friends who also went to the school but they were way different ages than I. We had a kind of "our gang" of age ranges from 5 to 14, three or four people.

Blanche Touhill: When you went to school, was there a teacher or more than one that encouraged you in music or encouraged you to follow your dream?

Joan Briccetti: Well, there were a few, not so much in music...and I'll explain that later on, because they didn't really understand, unless you actually a gifted musician. They didn't really know about other options in the music and the arts realm but there were a couple of teachers who were incredibly special and I remember them quite vividly because they formed the profile of just tremendous...mostly women. There was one art teacher...and I was terrible at drawing and visual art...a wonderful fellow though, he was as an art teacher but several: my fourth grade teacher; my middle high, my math teacher was just terrific, really kind and sweet but very firm and set a very high standard of integrity and responsibility for your studies and so forth. I remember both of them quite well. In fact, my favorite teacher of all's son was also in my class, it didn't make him very happy with the relationship being...Mama was the teacher in his class but nonetheless, we got past that and he and I are still acquaintances. I'm just starting, the last few years, to reach back and make connection with old friends.

Blanche Touhill: So, in those days, then, you weren't thinking necessarily of a career in music?

Joan Briccetti: No, I wasn't actually at all. I didn't know at all what I would do but something told me that that was actually an opportunity, that if there

was time for that, that I wanted to go and get a wonderful education, and I was leaning actually to a math and science and in our little school, they had accelerated programs in math and science and I was in those but when I was in college...

Blanche Touhill: Well, then, talk about college. Why did you select Bryn Mawr?

Joan Briccetti: Well, actually, that's a particularly funny story and an interesting coincidence. When I was in seventh grade, we were involved in the American Field Service Program. My mom was very civically involved in all those sorts of things and they were really looking for a family to host a year-round or school year student and so it was hard to find one and so we volunteered and, even though I was in seventh grade, we brought in this wonderful woman from Ecuador and for her to have such a difference in age between her American sibling was a little unusual.

Blanche Touhill: How old was she?

Joan Briccetti: She was a junior or senior then and I was in seventh or eighth grade but that was fine. I mean, we got over the initial awkwardness of a new family and we became the very best of friends. So she went back, of course, and then, after a year, she got a scholarship, an international scholarship to every one of the Ivy League women's schools, the Seven Sister schools and because of the size of her country and the distance and so forth, she just chose the smallest one and that happened to be Bryn Mawr and that was under two hours from my home. So we became the American headquarters for her in a way. She came up to visit us on holidays and it was wonderful and then one day, when I was maybe a sophomore in high school or so, I went and visited her for a long weekend and at that time, I was feeling the frustration, I guess, and the disappointment of being sort of not part of the gang in school, accepted but not really in the swim of things but I went down there and I found a remarkable environment of terrific young women who were all authentically themselves, regardless of their socio-economic or geographical background or racial background, but they were the real thing. They were fascinating and wonderful and I thought, my goodness, this is the place for me to be. So that's how I ended up at Bryn Mawr, in particular. I applied to some other schools but I really fell in love with it. It's a very attractive, very traditional collegiate Gothic campus and it was small and I was comfortable with that. My high school was very small. I

had 80 people in my high school class and then at Bryn Mawr, I think there were about 120 in my college class.

Blanche Touhill: How many were in your elementary school, in your class?

Joan Briccetti: It was the same. I was in the last class in this school to go from kindergarten through senior high in the same building. Then they started building a middle school and an elementary school. But it was really a traditional brick building with a belfry and very charming. I feel like it really was almost a fictional place from the past. So I had small surroundings and I think that it's a very different kind of dynamic that's set up when you are part of a small but dynamic community as opposed to a huge community where you don't need to find your...I'm about 5' tall and I've always believed that small is very mighty and wonderful. So it's a survival mechanism.

Blanche Touhill: Talk about Bryn Mawr. Did you find music at Bryn Mawr?

Joan Briccetti: Yes, I did. Actually, it was an interesting kind of yin-yang experience. The music department at Bryn Mawr was very traditional and it was not really terrific; it's become much better, it's really fleshed out, but some old professors, but there I studied music theory which I loved. The connection between physics and the harmonic process is just tremendous to me and how music is so universal because it's predicated on all these fundamental and universal principles and I loved the whole idea of music theory. I took a course in romantic music with a very bizarre professor but I really got involved in learning about Wagner and Brahms and Chopin and that whole particular period. I started one year with my trombone and I auditioned for the orchestra and I failed. So I didn't really spend that much time but I was in the chorus a lot and it was a wonderful experience. We toured and so forth. But that really wasn't the reason that I got into music. The reason, again, was my brother, Tom, who at that point in his career had evolved into being a conductor and he was a conductor of a small orchestra and when I would visit him...particularly he was a Ford Foundation fellow and they had a very major program in the '60s of placing composers in residence with high schools and creating new works for students and he was assigned to St. Petersburg, Florida. Well, you know, a child who's in high school and early college and from the north couldn't think of anything better than an older brother who lives in the Gulf Coast of Florida. So I would go down there to visit him

and I would spend my time, as I always had, tagging along. He was kind of a Pied Piper, "Come with me, Joanie, let's go..." "Sure, whatever you say" and it would be all kinds of adventures. So one thing that just hit me so hard, when I would go to his rehearsals and hear the musicians having a half-baked situation. They didn't have music stands or they couldn't find the right lights or the music isn't working, and then they would finally get it all together and they would produce these wonderful compositions and it struck me that the last thing that they needed, those people who were gifted, to come together and make such wonderful music was to find out about all these other very mundane trappings and it seemed to me as ridiculous. They needed to be supported by somebody who could provide them all the best working conditions, whether that meant music stands or a full house or benefits or a sense of fulfillment or a life career. It all, to me, figured into the concept of supporting the musician, in this case, the orchestral musician. So I decided then and there, I think that was probably when I really...it all hit home when I was probably a sophomore in college and I decided that's what I wanted to be. Now, to figure out that you wanted to be going to orchestra management in a pretty rigorous academic institution in the '60s was kind of funny. I remember going into...when I was a junior in college, they had a sort of...not perfunctory but an automatic individual session with the guidance counselor so when I went in, the woman asked me if I had given any thought to what I wanted to do and, at that time, even then, about 80% of the graduating class from Bryn Mawr went to graduate school and either in law or medicine or some kind of rigorous other program...PhD and philosophy or archeology or whatever and I said, "Oh, yes, I know what I want to do," and "What's that?" she asked. I said, "I want to be an orchestra manager," and the perplexity that crossed her face was priceless. I can still remember that, like, "What am I going to do with this person?" So, they were very dear. Again, after I had that session, about two weeks later, I got a call from the class dean who said, "Well, dear, I don't really know about orchestra management but my mother's on the board of the New Jersey Symphony so if you would like to have an interview..."...I thought that was really terrific and that shows the kind of gentle guidance that they provided there. I did go ultimately and I had an interview with a fellow who turned out to be a great colleague of mine and he said at that time...many asked from other interviews I had, they say, "Well, what do you want to do?" and I said I

wanted to go on the staff and they asked me if I could type and the usual answer was, "Well, a young girl with a college level typing, I don't see that you have any future," but that didn't daunt me at all. I really wanted to do this and I tried some volunteer work, but mostly, when I graduated...well, I began my senior year of school and I thought, oh, what am I going to do? My brother, Tom, once again, popped up and at Christmastime, he gave me a gift of a little tuition to a one-week, very intensive program on orchestra management that was provided by the American Symphony Orchestra League which now is known as the League, and at that point, there were no training programs; there were no easy paths or vehicles to help one find the right place and position in orchestra management. So I went to that, I was able to do that over a break period and it was a phenomenal experience. I knew exactly what I wanted to do and it was led by a woman, actually, who was very interesting. She was the first manager of the New York Philharmonic, first woman manager of the New York Philharmonic. There's a very big difference, and she was, for many years, the executive director of the American Symphony Orchestra League and she basically said, "If you can go through this week..." ...which were all day interviews and discussions and seminars..."and then go to concerts each night, that's part of what you're going to experience. If you don't mind that, you may not mind the profession." Well, not only did I not mind it; I just loved it and I thought that would be it.

Blanche Touhill: Where was this?

Joan Briccetti: That was in New York. They had this right at the Philharmonic Hall, so I was right in the roar of the grease paint, the smell of the violin rosin, and it was a fantastic experience.

Blanche Touhill: Were the students in the group men, women, all ages?

Joan Briccetti: It was a mixture. Well, the ages were from, at that point, I guess, from 20's to 35 and they were maybe two-thirds men, one-third women, which was pretty good. There aren't that many...there were more women than I expected them to be, but I don't know, everybody had found their own unique path to being there. It wasn't like an obvious, prescribed route. So, they all had interesting stories and I did maintain friendships with one or two people for many, many years throughout my career. After I had that experience, I was looking at graduation and, as I said, I

had several interviews, not to very successful ends, and I said to my mother, "You know, I just wish I could spend a couple of years with Tom in really learning a lot about the whole profession as his Girl Friday," whatever you wanted to call them at the time, and about a week or two later...and I know it was his own idea, not my mom's, the phone rang and he said, "You know, Joan, I've been thinking. After you graduate from college, I really need somebody to organize my library and help me get parts marked and just be..." ...because he was, at that time, the associate conductor of the Indianapolis symphony and the music director of the Ft. Wayne symphony. He had moved out to the Midwest for these jobs and he was a very busy guy. He also tried to continue his composition work on the side. So I said, "Done deal," and I spent two years with him, learning a lot about what to do and what not to do, not from him but from the whole orchestra management, the relationship between the administration and the musicians, the marketing people, everything about what's involved in the process of the hall opening and people going and hearing a concert. There is a lot involved. That is really the tip of the iceberg. At that time, there was a horrendous strike of the Indianapolis symphony. It went on for, like, four or five months. That was in 1971 or 2 and I learned a lot from that about what I never wanted to do, I never wanted to see happen, and how things like that could be prevented and what forward progress you could make in a situation like this. The orchestra world is really challenged and I think, now more than ever. For many years in the '70s and the '80s, when Leonard Bernstein had risen to the post of music director of the New York Philharmonic, they used to say, "Oh, our symphony orchestra dinosaur." That was a quip that was overused at the time but I don't think of it as a dinosaur; I just think of it as a really...I don't want to say unworkable because I will never say that, but a really challenging business model, when you have 100 people in the orchestra only as your personnel, excluding the staff, 100 people who all have one of the higher level salaries, or contract commitments. So that's lopsided in the first place. It's like an inverted pyramid, a salary, you have 100 people maybe in smaller orchestras, 60 or 70, or still, in all, have the highest salary and it goes down to the administration and so forth. So, it was a very interesting situation and fundraising challenge, marketing challenge, 1 or 2% of the population really attends concerts, and of course that's evolved tremendously in the last 40 years and I'd like to

think that I was a part of it. What happened was, I worked with my brother, Tom, for two years and then I decided...

Blanche Touhill: Did he pay you?

Joan Briccetti: Well...

Blanche Touhill: Well, room and board?

Joan Briccetti: It was room and board and he paid me something; I don't even remember what. I survived quite happily and...

Blanche Touhill: You were learning?

Joan Briccetti: I was learning. I was learning a tremendous amount and not just about the dynamics. He was not a fire brand but he was an outspoken person, usually in support of the musicians but also, he demanded a certain level of excellence so he had some issues on both sides of the fence and it's very interesting to take that in and assess it, evaluate it and assess it and say, well, what's really right? What's the right balance?

Blanche Touhill: Are there universities now that provide those kinds of graduate degrees?

Joan Briccetti: Absolutely. In fact, I was just a couple of years out of college, there were the beginnings of all kinds of good arts administration programs, particularly the University of Wisconsin, Yale University, not just for art, for drama and so forth, but for arts administration and Duke. They have a lot of wonderful programs now which they call music management and a lot of schools really teach you the fundamentals but even in my life as the manager of the St. Louis Symphony, I realize that the academic avenue was an okay but it was just a springboard. If you don't know how to be involved with people...musicians whom I always considered like a little herd of stallions, you know, fantastic, beautiful to look at, beautiful to watch, but a little skittish and if you just don't have the right kind of communication, they get all riled up and they can sometimes get out of control but you just need to have a good rapport with them.

Blanche Touhill: Were there many women in that field before you entered it?

Joan Briccetti: Very few, very, very few. When I first entered the field, I can practically remember the three or four women that were in there. One was an older woman who was an incredibly distinguished manager from Colorado

Springs, a regional orchestra. It still is kind of a b-level, budget level orchestra, but she had been there for 25, 30 years. There was, of course, Helen Thompson herself who was in a way a role model. She was like an old school marm. It was very interesting. She could have been the dean of a college, of my college: very staunch and very serious. There was a wonderful person who is still a very dear friend of mine who had just gotten to be...she was the executive assistant of Leopold Stokowski because he was still alive and full of energy and creativity at the American Symphony and there's another wonderful woman who has since passed who was the manager of the Cincinnati Orchestra and went on to become the executive director or the CEO of Carnegie Hall and then had a very untimely encounter with cancer and passed.

Blanche Touhill: So you graduated from college, you spent two years really learning...

Joan Briccetti: ...the ropes, mm-hmm.

Blanche Touhill: And then what happened?

Joan Briccetti: Well, then I decided that I needed to go out in the world and get a bona fide job and the American Symphony Orchestra League, again, that service organization has been the glue of all of the administrative people. They had a wonderful program and it's even more so now but they have an annual conference and part of that conference would be a kind of horse trading addition to the regular seminars and workshops which involved people looking for jobs, a little job center and at that time I had interviews with an orchestra in Springfield, Massachusetts; Richmond, Virginia, and Toledo, Ohio. Again, people always say, "Well, how did you get to St. Louis?" I said, "Well, you know, there's no place that has a couple of orchestras in town, or you just don't say, 'I'm going to go to Boston and get a job with the orchestra.' You go where there's a good position and you work your way up." So I took a wonderful car ride and I went to interview with all of these places and I loved Richmond, Virginia. It's a very elegant, very beautiful and historic city, and by the way, I was an American history major ultimately and so I was quite intrigued by the contradictory and colorful history of Richmond, Virginia. There was a slot there and I was offered it and I had went to Richmond to become part of the staff and I was offered the job, it was called assistant to the manager. I went there and I found out that my real slot was "new girl in the office," and the manager of the orchestra was...the kindest thing I can say about

him was he was like a used car salesman. You don't ever know, what you see is never what you get so quite rapidly...and, of course, there's the small staff of a couple of really lovely people but other people who were really suspicious because not only was I very young and Italian American, but I was also, and worst of all, I was a Yankee and so they looked at me with a scant eye. I very quickly broke through a lot of that and I created there...I started doing publicity because they didn't have any kind of in-house publicity and that was when a mentor of mine from Indianapolis, where I'd worked with my brother, who was a PR director of the Indianapolis symphony, really was tremendously helpful. She gave me a lot of excellent tips on the rudiments of public relations. So I was there the first year as a PR director. I also learned a lot. I learned how to really mismanage...I mean, I didn't learn it but I observed how to really mismanage budgets and give the board one set of information and the orchestra another set of information and I was horrified, frankly, and of course, I was just trying to do my best and this was classically interpreted by this gentleman as a huge threat. He used to call me in and accuse me of "filching" the files and, of course, I was 21 or 22...no, at that point I was 23 but I was still like, oh, my God, this is the end of the world! My father had just passed so I couldn't talk to him about this sort of thing. So I was just very upset so I started looking around and I found a position for assistant director of public relations at the Cincinnati Symphony whose manager at the time has become a beloved friend. He went on to become the manager of the New York Philharmonic, a very distinguished fellow and he actually offered me the job and I was getting ready to pack, so when I got the job, I approached the board personally and I said, "I'm leaving. I'm very sorry. I'm going to be going in the next season," and then I said something to this...I had a couple of very important male figures in my life who were board members in Richmond and this one fellow who was the executive vice president in charge of personnel, I said, "Whatever you do, really pay attention to this orchestra; it's a great orchestra; it's a great city; just be really careful," or something like that and he called me in his office two days later and said, "Miss Briccetti, I would like you to write down everything you think of that's wrong with this symphony that could be improved with this symphony and bring it to me the next day." I said, "Are you sure?" because it was uncomfortable for me to go around the boss but I had absolutely no respect for him at that point. So I did that and then a day or two later than that, he called

me up and said, "Miss Briccetti, I know that you're going to Cincinnati and so forth but I would like to counter that, I'd like to offer you the position of manager of the Richmond symphony. We have just released so-and-so from his position..."...and rightly so because he was really a big problem, "and I don't want you to say anything to anybody but I want..."...I don't know if they were going to fire him, but anyway, it was a very sort of cloak-and-dagger sort of thing "but I'd like you to commit" and so I thought about it and it's the only time in my life I've ever sort of reneged on something but I called up Nick Webster in Cincinnati, I said, "I'm sorry, I just had this opportunity," he said, "I would never want to keep you from it." So instead of going off to Cincinnati, I stayed in Richmond for seven years and I was manager of that orchestra. Right about the time in the '70s when interest rates skyrocketed, they had price fixing by Nixon and Jimmy Carter had the whole oil crisis that just inflated the economy and at that same point, the previous manager, my predecessor, had just mismanaged so much funds that we had to take out loans. So I went from a little college bank account to having a 22% interest rate on a loan that we had to take out. That was a good experience too, and the long and the short of it was, we straightened all of that out. My predecessor had created this huge deficit by hiring a corps of musicians on a full-time basis and it was a smart thing to do but it was way too fast and the process wasn't good. Does that not sound familiar? But in any case, there were no concerts for them. We created a lot of concerts for them. They became a state-wide touring chamber group and we created a new concert series and it all worked out in the end pretty well. The budget grew and everything seemed to be fine. I was feeling a little restless, that I knew that the orchestra was going to be taken so far. Everyone was happy with the conductor and the conductor was pretty well content with the level of the musicians and I knew that I would really want it to have a much better quality, not in the budget or not in the hall, although our hall was pretty awful in Richmond, but in the orchestra itself and to do that, you had to have a great conductor and to have more resource and so I was looking around. I was really not even looking. I was just thinking about, well, where would I go? How would I...I knew I could not just go immediately into becoming the number one administrative person of a major orchestra but I wanted to go to a major orchestra and one day David Hislum from St. Louis gave me a call...and I'll never forget our conversation. He said, "Hey Joan, we need a new manager and I don't

know if you know much about St. Louis but..."...and I quote him..."but this band really wails." He was an old jazzer and he used to have all these kind of lingo, jazz lingo, so he said, "This band really wails," and I said to him, "Well, go to hell, Hislum, you know that..."...right then we were negotiating for an historical theater to convert into a concert hall which, at that time, was a little bit more on the cutting edge than it is now...and I said, "I can't do that." He said, "Well, listen, we have the same thing. We just converted this theater into a phenomenal concert hall. It's now called Powell Hall. Just come out and listen to, just listen and have an interview. It can't hurt you" and I said, "Well, I'll use that as an excuse. That's okay." So I came out here. Honest to God, I thought I was going to St. Louis, I had no idea I was going to Missouri. I mean...this is embarrassing, I was so ethnocentric from being on the eastern corridor but I have learned a lot from that experience and it took me quite a while to even figure that out. The hair on the back of my neck stood up when I saw road signs to Tulsa and to Memphis. I go, where am I? You know, it was just...again, it's embarrassing but it was really funny. But I went into that hall and I heard that orchestra and they had just had a brand new conductor who had actually been there for years but had worked his way up and then went away and came back and his name was Leonard Slatkin and he was an American conductor and he loved American music and, of course, I had been imbued with not only a love of, but a real...almost a commitment to creating, being part of the creation of music by living American composers; that is an important legacy that we have that's flourished in the last forty years, and before then, but really flourished since then.

Blanche Touhill: The last 40 years?

Joan Briccetti: Yeah, well, it's 30...40 years. Well, I came here...actually, I took the job in May of 1980 so that's now 35 years and I just fell in love with it. I had to be there. I couldn't say no. So I came to St. Louis and it was very interesting because the whole level of orchestra relations, board activities, volunteer experience, was a whole other level but I felt instinctively at home with it. As far as the board was concerned, I went to my first board meeting where I heard one of the most wonderful people I've ever met, Hadley Griffin, say, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have to tell you that we're nearing the end of our fiscal year and we're \$700,000 in debt right now" and I thought, oh, boy, that made Richmond, Virginia

look like peanuts. The orchestra had been a very active orchestra in union relations. It was one of the original orchestras to be part of what's called "ICSOM" which is the International Conference of Symphony and Orchestra Musicians and it is like a caucus in a way of union musicians who really understand and know quite well the difference between just a regular union guy and what it means to be in an orchestra and a lot of the union people, the union administrators, don't always get that, and again, this is back in the '70s and the early '80s which was much more of an ignorant time for union people too. They've all become quite more sophisticated these days. But in any case, our orchestra was at the forefront of that particular conference anyway, caucus or conference, and so it meant for establishing myself right away, needing to establish myself in the form of being trustworthy, being very straightforward and honest because that's the most that they can rely on. They get their information from the manager and I felt that it was extremely important and my predecessor had had some real issues with the orchestra. So I was lucky in that I was coming from a place where it was not so bad to look good but I had a lot of uphill slopes to climb and I was at the St. Louis Symphony for 13 years and I loved every minute of it. I had a medical episode that caused me to break away for a while but I have still, to this day, such a tremendous regard for those musicians and for the sound that they make and for what they really do and there's just a lot of misconception about the effort and the pressure and the demand that's put on an orchestra musician, even if there's somebody in the back of the second violins in the section, every time they perform, they go on stage, they have to be 100%. They're not supposed to make any mistakes. The concert is supposed to go on time. I mean, people don't realize that those who work in the symphony orchestra or the theater of the performing arts have an unwritten demand that they need to have it all together at a very high level of performance at the right moment in time, ready to go. You can't say, "Well, it's going to be two days late." It doesn't work that way and I just acquired a great deal of respect for all people in the performing arts.

Blanche Touhill:

Let me change the subject for just a minute to ask two or three questions: If you had been born 50 years earlier, what would your life be like?

Joan Briccetti: Fifty years early, okay, so that would have been in the '30s. Well, my life would have been giving my family and the situation, would have been probably like my mother's life. My mother had a gift for language and she had hoped to go on to go to college in linguistics and go to the UN and be an interpreter but she wasn't able to do that. My father was going to be an inventor and go on to chemistry but he became the proprietor, through a great deal of effort, of an appliance store. They had to deal with the Depression. I think that 50 years earlier, I would have had no notion at all about going into orchestra management. Women didn't really have the opportunity to carve out their path. I literally was a path finder in the early '70s, to go into orchestra management but even musicians in that time period were really...I know this is a little dramatic...but really an oppressed group, symphony musicians. The managements ran ragged over them. People would be called in before a concert and told that it would be their last concert, you know, things like that that I just learned about and was aware of that I never, ever would do. That was one of my cardinal principles: no matter how heinous the situation, do not do that, particularly before a performance or during a performance. That, to me, is outrageous. How can you expect somebody to do their best? Little rules of thumb like that but...

Blanche Touhill: Let me ask another question: Have you received some special awards over the years that you really treasure?

Joan Briccetti: Well, not really. I have to think about that.

Blanche Touhill: Let's go on to another question. We'll come back. What would you say about the IWF?

Joan Briccetti: The International Women's Forum, I think it's a fantastic opportunity for us because, for a long time, we were able to garner people with fantastic minds. It's the collection of people of the most wonderful intellectual curiosity that I know of in St. Louis and our point in the Missouri chapter is to just communicate and share experiences and I have learned a wonderful amount from these people and I think that it's also reinforced our infrastructure, of placing people on commissions and boards and keeping women in mind who are terrific but would never be thought of for positions of influence and power and I think it's a great experience.

Blanche Touhill: Would you like to talk to me about awards? Have you received any special award over the years?

Joan Briccetti: That's very interesting. When I was in St. Louis years ago, I had a very special mentor who was the manager of the Chicago Symphony. He was [inaudible 49:36] his legacy is the dean of the American Orchestras, American orchestra management and he said to me one time, "You know, Joan, a manager needs to have a passion for anonymity" and I've always felt that way. My happiest moments were spent in the wings, just listening really up close and intimately connected to this fantastic sound where nobody could see me. I was just sort of tucked away. My other passion was to be in the concert hall all by myself and just to be surrounded by that sound. So I really...I think an orchestra manager's person is like being at the top of the puppet show, trying to work the strings in a positive way, not terribly manipulative but to make it all work but never be seen. So I haven't received too many up front awards that way.

Blanche Touhill: And do you want to talk a little bit more about the St. Louis Symphony when you were manager?

Joan Briccetti: Well, no, except to say that I think it's a fantastic orchestra. I hope that people really appreciate how extraordinary a spirit, esprit de corps this orchestra has and it boils down to each musician and they still have it and it's still one of the world's great orchestras. It's been distinguished by having two great American conductors and that is very hard to find in the American symphony orchestra world.

Blanche Touhill: And who were those?

Joan Briccetti: Leonard Slatkin and then after, Hans Vonk was here for a while but now it's David Robertson, two very, very outstanding American conductors who, of course, imbue their performances, their programs with a lot of American music and I always felt it very important that, in the Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, which is, like, the definitive compendium, there should be a very healthy chapter on American music post 1940. I mean, for a while there, I was afraid that it would be, like, three pages long but we have really built a tremendous (cadre?) of wonderful composers.

Blanche Touhill: What did you do after you retired from the symphony?

Joan Briccetti: Well, after I retired from the symphony...

Blanche Touhill: The St. Louis Symphony?

Joan Briccetti: Yeah, the St. Louis Symphony, I went on the board of an extraordinary company called Metro Theater Company which is a professional touring theater for young people and there I found a lot of things and a lot of values that had impressed me when I was with the orchestra: regard for the artist, in this case, the actor; an appreciation for new work. The Metro Theater Company only does new work. It's had a distinguished history of 35 commissions in his 40 years and also presented with a lot of challenges. They had toured all over the country, once before in Europe but while I was there, we toured twice to the Far East, to Japan and Taiwan; we toured to all the major venues that I had toured with as an orchestra manager, except part of their program was Broadway; part of their program was young audiences, and so we were on the young audiences series and I felt that I could lend a lot of experience to that and I love the people very much who were there and I think they have a fantastic influence in St. Louis and in the country. They're one of the most distinguished companies in the country but they're small and mighty, as visible as they need to be but they don't really want to be; they just do their thing and they're a fantastic group.

Blanche Touhill: Is there anything else you want to add, as you're looking back on your life?

Joan Briccetti: Well, you know, the only thing I would say is that it's important for me to judge people as they are in the present. Now, I know that sounds silly but, people make mistakes or people have issues. In my case, I had a medical situation and I find that from time to time, these episodes stick with people. You can never get rid of it. It's like a reputation, it's part of their history and people change. They either evolve to not make the mistakes or they, thank goodness, grow out of their disabilities and so forth and I believe that one of the reasons that I have had...well, there are two reasons I'm still in St. Louis: one is, I chose to be for personal reasons, but also, because they'd probably say, "Oh, well, Joan Briccetti had this issue in 1992; she can't do it." Well, that's not true. I was able to...I'm still a very fully functioning person and from that I've learned that you really need to take people on face value and you can't mark them off forever over a period of time when their situations were less than ideal,

and I think that's important for people. I think they need support sometimes.

Blanche Touhill: What do you think is the future of symphonic music?

Joan Briccetti: I don't know. That was what I was talking about as the flawed business model. I don't know if they...the only future is to have a huge endowment or, in a special place like St. Louis, I still believe they should find a way to have some tax-based support as St. Louis is, not uniquely but rarely able to do through the property tax if the zoo/museum district. We tried that one time right when I was not well and we failed and people say, "Oh, the orchestra failed to vote by two-to-one," and I say...we put this together very quickly and I said, "My God, how amazing it is that for a campaign to be put together so quickly. Thirty-three percent of the people voted, "Yes, let's add a new property tax to cover symphony orchestras," and I think with very careful...a lot of paradigm changes in terms of admission and this and that, but careful and thoughtful planning, there is a way, perhaps not right now when any notion of tax money is verboten, but in the future, when people finally learn to respect the fact that that kind of support can really lead to very wonderful and...I would like to say, immortal cultural institutions. Some of our institutions, the art museum, the history museum, the zoo, are not what they ever would be without that tax money and they are really accessible to all people. I think it's one of the great legacies that St. Louis has.

Blanche Touhill: Don't you think the St. Louis Symphony has done more of an outreach to the community?

Joan Briccetti: Absolutely. That began just before I kind of took ill and had to leave, where they initiated a community partners program and they were at the forefront of community engagement but the whole aspect of music education, of arts education, that kind of music you have to have some kind of connection to it, some kind of grounding in it to start to learn to appreciate it, at least exposure, and these days, that is an issue in itself. Now, what the St. Louis Symphony is doing is taking small ensembles from within the orchestra and going to places and that's what I loved about Metro Theater Company. We did not have a home; we did not have a theater, but we've always said, "We go to the people. They don't need to come to us" and we went in a housing authority, in a major university, anywhere you wanted.

Blanche Touhill: Joan, you've had a really exciting life and you really were a path finder. Is there anything you want to say in closing?

Joan Briccetti: No, except that I am very proud of what I've done. I'd like to continue to be as purposeful as I felt I have been when I was an active professional and I'd like to continue to do that now with whatever good works, and it's been wonderful to be part of the International Women's Forum, Missouri Chapter.

Blanche Touhill: Thank you very much.

Joan Briccetti: You're welcome.