

FRED This is the Berklee Oral History Project, and today we have the chairman of the Brass Department, Tom Plsek,
BOUCHARD: and we're really glad to have you here, Tom.

TOM PLESK: Glad to be here.

FRED And I'm going to start by asking you what your favorite trombone jokes are!

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Favorite trombone jokes? Well, a story that just--this is not really a joke, but it's a funny story, so it's sort of a joke. I was just telling somebody this this morning. It has to do with Alan Ostrander who was for many years the bass trombonist for the New York Philharmonic, for about forty years. And he came to Berklee some years ago and someone asked him, "Alan, you've played under Leonard Bernstein and blah blah blah and this and that conductor, what's it like playing bass trombone in the New York Philharmonic?" And he didn't say anything, he reached, picked up his trombone and went [IMITATES TROMBONE] and just kept doing it. [IMITATES TROMBONE] And then he put it down and said, "...and no one says anything until you miss one." [LAUGHTER] So that's kind of what we have to deal with as trombone players. You don't get no respect. And they don't say anything until you miss something. [LAUGHS]

FRED That does seem to be an issue. A lot of the trombone jokes are sort of disses. You know, how do you support a
BOUCHARD: family? And things of that nature. And then I remember those famous [Roger Price] Doodles, and one that was popular was the midget and the trombone booth. You see a big rectangle and there's a little hook coming out of the bottom. Why is it that trombone players, or the trombone as an instrument, does not achieve the desired respect from other sections of the orchestra, shall we say?

TOM PLSEK: Well, they're probably jealous of us. We don't have to--in the orchestra, we don't usually play as much as the violins. We get to sit back there and drink beer and make jokes. [LAUGHS] So we had lots of time.

FRED Yeah, I remember Ron Barron saying something like that.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, I don't know why, I don't know why. Because when you think about it, trombone and possibly trumpet are the two instruments that are used in the greatest variety of music. I think you can possibly add voice to that, but I'm not even sure about that. But you think about all classical, all jazz, pop/rock, trombone has a viable role. Who wants to go hear a classical saxophone player?

FRED Not much.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: You know, there's some around, it's not a big deal. But there's brass and trombone in everything. Salsa bands to reggae to ska. As I mentioned, Jimmy Pankow was in Chicago, you know, all the varieties of jazz. All the orchestras, brass quintets, I mean, we're everywhere.

FRED Marching bands.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Marching bands, Balkan music, New Orleans Street bands. It's there.

FRED Bavarian...

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Bavarian oompah bands. Where my family came from, the Czech Republic, they have a terrific brass band tradition. Each of the small towns seems to have a brass band and the ones I've heard are very, very good.

FRED I even ran across them in Mexico and the Balkans...

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: In the Balkans it's fantastic brass things, absolutely. And we mentioned just a little while ago, Willy Colon, the king of salsa, trombone player.

FRED Now there's another thing, too. Trombone has a very lengthy history, I mean it's one of the earliest instruments

BOUCHARD: that has changed less than others. I went to the MFA [Museum of Fine Arts] the other day and went into their historical collection. There was a seventeenth century trombone made by Niccolo somebody; it had a big ornate fish head, or it might have been a seahorse or something like that. But tell us about the sackbut and its origins.

TOM PLSEK: Well, the sackbut goes back probably at least to the fourteenth century, if not earlier. And the word "sackbut" comes from, as far as I understand, a French word sacquer-bouter. I think it literally means push pull, push pull. So that became corrupted into the Anglicized version, sackbut. Before that, we could go back to perhaps the lur, an instrument that existed in early Celtic music in Scandinavia. We find them buried in bogs, and they can be three to four thousand years old. And they were brass instruments with a mouthpiece. They spiraled around much like a sousaphone, but they had a trombone-sized mouthpiece. And the MFA has some replicas that I've played on. So it's a short step to having that and the instrument you saw with the serpent's head on it, and making a slide, as people were able to work with metals better and create a slide. It was the easiest way to change a pitch. Valves are a much later invention.

FRED Yeah. And then from there, it's a short step to talking about, well, how has the instrument evolved how little has

BOUCHARD: it evolved since those times?

TOM PLSEK: Since the time of the sackbut, it's evolved in one way of thinking, a great deal. As metals got better, as the workmanship got better, as they added different attachments to it and triggers. But conceptually it hasn't changed at all. It's the most simple instrument: you have a slide. By changing the length, you can play a number of different notes, you can play any notes.

FRED Given the breadth of its usage in music traditions worldwide, I guess it isn't much of a stretch to understand how

BOUCHARD: this marvelous, worldwide camaraderie has evolved among the players of the instrument. Perhaps you might comment on that to some extent.

TOM PLSEK: You know, if you're in another country and you have your trombone and you're walking down the street and you see somebody carrying a trombone, invariably you'll stop them and start speaking with them. I don't know what exactly makes that happen, but trombone players have this camaraderie and they just start talking to each other. It's just the way we are. We don't have the egos of the trumpet player, typically.

FRED And the case is very distinctive.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: The case is very distinctive, nothing else looks like it. Yeah, you know it's a trombone. And the other, another thing, carrying along that theme, is it's the only instrument I know where the jazz and the classical folks get along and respect each other to a great extent. I know that happens in other places, but they really respect each other and what they do. And not only jazz and classical, but people who are into different things as well. More experimental types of stuff. We all get along, we all share ideas and learn from each other.

FRED BOUCHARD: It probably has to do with the playing technique and the embouchure, rather than...

TOM PLSEK: Right. As someone called it, the great equalizer, the slide.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, I mean pianists have a zillion different kinds of technical things that they have to deal with.

TOM PLSEK: And they mostly learn to play by themselves. You don't learn to play piano in an ensemble until after you've learned to play. When you're playing trombone and other brass instruments, you usually start in a band. So you're part of an ensemble and you're part of a group.

FRED BOUCHARD: So the socializing aspect begins very early.

TOM PLSEK: It begins very early.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's a key.

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely.

FRED BOUCHARD: The sociology would...And then now, it's burgeoned into organizations which are both local, such as the long-standing, if now somewhat inactive sackbut, Boston Sackbut Ensemble, to the international groups which you were just talking about before we went on mic here.

TOM PLSEK: Right. For thirteen or fourteen years we had a Boston Sackbut Week. Started in '73, if memory serves me correct, by Tom Everett and Phil Wilson, and then the very next year I came on board and the three of us started organizing it. We haven't had it for awhile, but as an--well, not as an outgrowth of that really, but relating to it--we started the International Trombone Association about that same year. And that has grown into an organization of some roughly 5,000 members worldwide.

FRED BOUCHARD: Wow.

TOM PLSEK: From all different aspects of trombone playing. From students up to professionals, to people who do it as an avocation and just like to play. So...

FRED BOUCHARD: Perhaps you might regale us with some of the exploits of the Sackbut Ensemble locally, in its prime.

TOM PLSEK: Well, there was actually a Boston Sackbut Ensemble that I wasn't part of, but the group that we had, it was Tom Everett and Phil Wilson and myself. We started organizing these events. It was a beautiful community event done mainly between Harvard, Berklee, and [the] New England Conservatory played a role in it at the beginning. And BU [Boston University] to a certain extent because Ron Barron was--still is--the principal of the Boston Symphony then. So we decided to have a week of performances culminating in a day, a Saturday of events all day of trombone things. Usually with some public event to put us in the media, one of which was we played for the Boston Red Sox. We had seventy-six trombones come out and play the national anthem.

FRED It was in April, one year. I remember going, I was there.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It was in April. One year, the very first year perhaps, we went to the Museum of Science and did something in front of the old steam locomotive that was there. I'm not sure it's still there. But I have a picture on my wall in my office of me and Steve Turre. We were standing side by side, he had been passing through town doing a performance, I guess with Rahsaan Roland Kirk, and he was a young trombone player then. And there we are.

FRED They were at Sandy's in 1977, '78 timeframe.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, this was probably even before that, I'm thinking, a few years before that. So people would come in, drop by and then there we were. [LAUGHS] So everybody took part in town, all the trombone players got together.

FRED And what happens with the international groups now?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: The international groups, the main event that we do is the International Trombone Festival which I'm on the board of trustees for. There are three of us. And that is to produce international festivals throughout the world. We had four of them last year, four mini events in different places throughout the world. And this year we're going to have one in Salt Lake City, one large event. And we're actually working now on how we're going to organize these: are we going to have one event a year in different places, or one big event every few years and smaller satellite events throughout the world, For example Japan, Australia. We do have one coming up in two years in Singapore and in Europe before that. So that's an event where anywhere from five to seven, eight hundred trombonists, usually professionals, serious trombone players get together and have four or five days to share. Listen to each other, share ideas, talk about equipment, talk about new approaches, to hear new young players, to recognize the traditional players, the ones that have been around for a long time. So it's just a great, great week.

FRED Is there a difficulty in keeping up interest among young players? I know at Berklee, everything is sort of secondary to guitar and voice. Brass seems to me to be not as big an issue as it maybe was twenty years ago?

TOM PLSEK: Well it's... yeah, that's certainly true, at least at Berklee. But our enrollment has not changed significantly for the last ten or fifteen years for brass players. We've been very steady--with one year where we had kind of an odd glitch, an increase of about sixty-five percent in new brass enrollment. About four years ago that happened, never had that explained.

FRED Was that from a certain area of the world?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: No, not that I've been able to tell. It just was from all over. But we're still getting many good, young players.

FRED Good to hear.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: If the quantity is down, the quality is still there, if not better than it has been.

FRED What about crossing the sex boundary? You don't see a lot of women--well, you see a few trumpeters nowadays.

BOUCHARD: Maria Schneider showed up, she'll show up with either Ingrid Jensen or Laurie Frink. And we have at least one lady trombonist locally, Leslie, who plays...

TOM PLSEK: Leslie Havens, and also on our faculty we have Robin Almy.

FRED Of course, Robin, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Who's a wonderful trombone player. And we also have Christine Fawson, trumpet player there on the faculty. A few years ago, we graduated Karen Harris, who went on to win in the Thelonious Monk Competition, International Jazz Trombone. She came in, I think, third in that. So she helped put us on the map there. She came back to Berklee to teach for a while and then moved back to the West Coast.

FRED Is there any perceived barrier, why a woman can't pick up a trombone and blast it as well as the next guy?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: No, absolutely not. I know one of the things that you discover at the trombone festivals, that while it's mostly a male event, there are some female trombone players who come and who are absolutely first rate. Good friend of mine, Abby Conant, in Germany, she's an American, she's one of the best you'll ever hear. And there are just numerous others, both in jazz and in the classical.

FRED Great.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Probably more now than ever before.

FRED Splendid.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: We always want more. And right now we have a number--some of our best students, trombone students at Berklee now, are our female students.

FRED Excellent.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: And that has been that way for a few years. Very often they're right up there. One of our trombonists, Aubrey Logan, is now with the acapella group Syncopation, that Christine Fawson was in, so... She's a wonderful trombone player and vocalist.

FRED I haven't run into the group in a year or two so I need to catch up.

BOUCHARD:

How did you get started on trombone?

TOM PLSEK: Good question and an interesting question. I wanted to be probably a football player or a baseball player or something like that in the fifth grade. And I went to a Catholic school, and the Catholic school quite unusually had an agreement with the public school that we could go over and start in the beginners band with them. My friends did that; they went and they all for some reason picked trombone. And then they came back to me and said, "Hey, you know this is great fun, we're really having fun, come on and do it!" So I said, "Okay." So the next week I went. And they said, "Tell him, tell the band director you want to play trombone." And I got kind of nervous at the time and I couldn't remember what it was, I said, "I want one of these." [GESTURES] So I made the motion. "Oh, trombone!" So he brought me the trombone, and within a month they had all quit, and it's something that I took to and just really enjoyed it from the very beginning. Because you could make all these great sounds. You know, you could sound like dive bombers and trucks and cars--and actually play notes, too. [LAUGHS]

FRED BOUCHARD: Well, yeah, the emotive range of the instrument is profound and when you stop playing with all the different kinds of mutes and little drapery and pieces of chamois, and things like that...

TOM PLSEK: Well they're also extended techniques, too. The things you mentioned, absolutely, the mutes, the things, but we've stolen things like from the Australian aborigines and the didgeridoo technique of the circular breathing. That's now almost accepted technique. If you're a trombone player, oh yes, you can circular breathe. We've taken multiphonics, singing and playing at the same time. That's become part of our repertoire, whether you're classical or jazz. There's all these techniques. The trombone is so close to the human voice. It's the closest instrument.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's probably why they're all jealous. [LAUGHS]

TOM PLSEK: That's it. The only difference, instead of buzzing your vocal chords, you're buzzing your lips. That's the main difference.

FRED BOUCHARD: The first time I heard [Albert] Mangelsdorff play with multiphonics, I was really shocked and thrilled.

TOM PLSEK: He was the master of that. I remember going to a concert that he did in Boston. Solo trombone. No drums, no keyboard, just him and his trombone for a whole concert, and it was fascinating. He kept you interested the whole night.

FRED BOUCHARD: And then you occasionally get pieces in the legit repertoire like Sequenza 8 by Luciano Bario.

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, that piece and a number of others from that time, I think roughly the 1960s, early '70, were all commissioned by one person, Stuart Dempster, out in the West Coast, who's still going strong. Just had his seventieth birthday and he helped put the trombone on the map in contemporary, classical music by commissioning all these wonderful avant-garde, experimental pieces from that time and performing them. That's one of the better known ones that many, many people have played.

FRED BOUCHARD: And you know, it takes a huge amount of musicianship and technique, but you can also play it for yocks. I mean that one was dedicated to a European clown.

TOM PLSEK: Grock. A clown, a famous European clown, Grock. And it was. I don't know how it was based on that, but I've seen videos of Grock. And Abby Conant has a website that has these videos, well, they're film clips of course. In the 1930s and forties, he was a wonderful, wonderful comedian and clown. To see these is just amazing.

FRED I'm sure somebody could do a marvelous soundtrack to Marcel Marceau routines as well.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Oh, sure. One of the things that Stuart did--Stuart Dempster--he commissioned Robert Erickson to write a piece, and Robert Erickson transcribed, if you will, General Douglas MacArthur's farewell speech to the cadets at West Point upon his retirement. The famous one where he had his dark glasses and the hat, and he always had his corn cob pipe with him. And he came out and he looked them over and he said, "Duty, honor, country. Those three hallowed words..." And MacArthur had a very unique way of saying that. The very first thing that happens in the piece, the trombonist comes out with the hat, the dark glasses: "Duty, honor, country." It's all played through the horn, all the speech patterns and it's absolutely brilliant. It takes your breath away to hear Stu do that. It's General Douglas MacArthur without the words, all the speech patterns are there.

FRED So the trombone is visual, visceral, and also quite vocal. It's got a lot of things going for it.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yeah. Mozart would use it to double the vocal lines in his choral pieces, the three trombones. The alto trombone doubled the altos, the tenor trombone, the tenors and the bass trombone the bass. They're playing along with these vocal lines to help support them. So, what more could you use as an example of how vocal the trombone is. And then, going along to slightly more contemporary thing, Vic Dickenson. One of the most vocal trombone players. I hear recordings of him and I forget it's a trombone sometimes.

FRED He sounds like he's scatting or something.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: He sounds like he's scatting, unbelievable.

FRED I saw him live a few times with Bobby Hackett up at the Scotch and Sirloin back in the seventies with the Drootin
BOUCHARD: Brothers.

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, I never got to see him live. Oh, I wish I had seen him live. He was just very special.

FRED And modest and companionable and jocular, what a sweet guy.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: You know, that's generally, with very few exceptions, a quality that trombone players have. They're always modest. J. J. Johnson was one of the most modest trombone players, or persons, that you would ever, ever meet. He was never one to blow his own horn. If you spoke with him, which I did many times, he wanted to know what you were doing.

FRED Yeah, and he had a sparkling wit and he was very... I met him at Harvard at one of those band luncheons when
BOUCHARD: Tom Everett had him over as one of his guests. We need to talk about Tom, but later. Let's get back to you graduating from a Catholic school and get back to your career.

TOM PLSEK: So I went to this Catholic school and finally got out and went to the public high school where I played in the band. And starting in about the seventh, or certainly by the eighth grade or so, I was gigging. My friends put together a band. For a while it was like a quasi-Dixieland band, as much as we could do in Texas at the time. I mean, there were no record stores around at that point. I grew up in an area where there's a lot of Czech immigrants who--we started playing a lot of Czech music because most of the people in the band were of Czech ancestry like myself. And so by the time I was in my first year, my ninth grade, my freshman year in high school, I was gigging most weekends. And we would play at these various places. A lot of Czech polkas and waltzes and traditional dances, but also, of course, country western.

FRED Great.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: I grew up, the town I grew up in is right next to where Willie Nelson was born.

FRED Where is this?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It's a little town called West, Texas, not in west Texas. It was named after a fellow named James West, I think, back in the late 1800s. And of course then we did Top 40 stuff too because people wanted to hear that. And we had this, at one point--this was really a beautiful story--we had this young African American student who played gorgeous alto sax and sang like Ray Charles. And so we'd come in and he'd be playing polkas and waltzes in these Czech places, and then he would go into some Ray Charles tune or something like that. And it was just...

FRED Break 'em up.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Break 'em up! And so see, I was exposed to this kind of musical diversity from day one--I mean, as a trombone player. I did the high school bands and that kind of stuff. I played in rodeos. We had a rodeo in my hometown, so we had a rodeo band. Played for all the bull riding and the barrel racing and all those things.

FRED Terrific.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: So I did everything in high school. I was already a gigging, trombone player. And when it came time to graduate and think about college, my science teacher said, "You've done really well in science, why don't you think about pre-med or something like that?" And my math teacher says, "You'll"--I won the math award in my school--"so you should consider that." And my band director said, "Don't go into music, it's a really hard life." So of course, what did I do? You know, I went into music. And after about a year at college at Texas Christian University, I was thinking, well, graduation, really probably needed a job. So I was considering changing either to some science area, taking a biology course, an honors biology course which I really liked a lot. But I really loved music. And I was driving with my dad and I was telling him, "I'm thinking of changing to music education or something." And he said, "You know, as long as you have clothes to wear, place to live, and food to eat, then do what you love." And I said, "Okay."

FRED Boy, that's a rare parent. They didn't come up with that back in those days.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: That was a very rare parent.

FRED BOUCHARD: They didn't come up with that back in those days.

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely. And that did it for me. I went back and I changed my major to music theory with a minor in trombone performance. I said, "I want to play trombone, I want to learn everything there is to know about music."

FRED BOUCHARD: This is at Texas Christian?

TOM PLSEK: Texas Christian University.

FRED BOUCHARD: Big school right?

TOM PLSEK: Oh about eight to ten thousand students, so medium size. Then for graduate school I went to the University of Houston.

FRED BOUCHARD: Did you have good experiences with the marching band and the concert band at TCU?

TOM PLSEK: I had okay experiences with that. By the time I had graduated, I had dropped out of the concert band and was just in the orchestra and brass quintet, and we had a big band. I'd gotten tired of marching by that time in concert band. [LAUGHS]

FRED BOUCHARD: I did that at Boston College, playing my clarinet.

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, and they took marching band very seriously there. It was fun while it lasted but it came to a point where I said, "Enough's enough."

FRED BOUCHARD: So you veered off into a slightly different direction with it?

TOM PLSEK: Yeah I did, I became a little more classical, but only a little bit more. I went to the University of Houston and studied with a wonderful trombone teacher there, but also still kept my major as music theory. But by this time I was making my living as a trombone player. Doing some teaching, playing all kinds of shows. I subbed with the Houston Symphony, I played Robert Goulet, Debbie Reynolds, and those types of shows. I did, what we later came to be called, GB [General Business] bands down there. I still played everything.

FRED BOUCHARD: Weddings, funerals.

TOM PLSEK: So I still did a lot of that, a lot of that. I mean, as a trombone player you do that, that's what you do.

FRED BOUCHARD: What were your favorite kinds of gigs? Did you enjoy brass quintets?

TOM PLSEK: I liked them all. I loved brass quintets. I love, I must say at that time, I loved playing in a good orchestra. Being in the middle of a hundred people, playing some great pieces, it's just, being immersed in it, is just a wonderful experience. I really liked that. I was also a composer at the time, too, so I was writing stuff.

FRED Oh that's right, you have a big long list of compositions here.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: I've been a kind of person that's hard to pigeon-hole.

FRED Good.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: The classical players when I came to Boston, they'd think, "Well, he's a jazz player, he's at Berklee." And the jazz players would say, "Well, he's not a jazz player, he's a classical player." So I said, "Okay, I'll be whatever you want me to be."

FRED Yeah, that's good for writers, too--be able to crossover, go in different directions. How did you get to Boston after

BOUCHARD: Houston?

TOM PLSEK: Well, I finished my graduate school, and my first wife at the time had been working in a lab while I went to graduate school, and I said, "Okay, I'm tired, I don't want to go onto a PhD at this point, I need a break. I've been in college six years straight." She had some relatives in the Boston area and kind of liked Boston. I said, "We'll move to Boston." So we just packed up, sold a lot of stuff and moved here. I was looking for a job when I got here. I went to an employment agency and the woman who ran it looked at my resume and said, "You should go see Richard Bobbitt," who was the dean of the college at Berklee at the time. And so I went and he took a look at my resume, and Berklee was growing then, and he said, "Okay, you're hired." I taught one course my very first semester, a traditional composition course. And then the next semester I taught a little bit more. And then a semester after that, one of the trombone teachers went on the road; they asked me, "Would you take over his trombone students?" "Sure, be happy to." So I've been doing a lot of teaching trombone. And then a little after that, I was in Phil Wilson's office--we had gotten to be good friends by this time--and a student came in to ask Phil a question and Phil said, "Well, I don't know, I'm not the chair anymore. Ask him, he's the chair." And he pointed at me. And I said, "I am?" [LAUGHTER] The next day, Richard Bobbitt, the dean, called me and says, "Phil is leaving the college, going to New England Conservatory, would you be chair of the trombone department?" Not like chairs today; it was very loose. "Sure." And so I was always asked to be in these positions. And then Phil came back and I stayed as chair, and that became the Brass department in 1989. Being in the right place at the right time.

FRED How has the trombone pedagogy evolved since you first arrived here? What's happened in the teaching or the

BOUCHARD: playing?

TOM PLSEK: Well, I think trombone players--brass players in general, trombone players in particular--have to be more versatile in what they do. The days of being just a jazz trombone player are if not over, they're--it's changed. You can't be a bebop jazz player. If you're going to play jazz, you gotta do all kinds of stuff. It's probably good if you can do some classical things as well. And if the classical players can do some jazz things as well. So I think the demands that are placed on the brass player in respect to the types of things you're expected to do, is perhaps the biggest change. You know Wynton [Marsalis] was a big reason for that, I think, with trumpet anyway, because he did both really well. But he certainly wasn't the first, there were others as well. My teacher, my own teacher, trombone teacher, was principal in the Houston Symphony but did all kinds of other gigs as well. So I think being versatile is the biggest change. And then related to that is the technical facility that people have now is just amazing compared to what people had fifty, sixty years ago. There were certainly excellent players, good players, but they were the exception rather than the rule. Nowadays so many young players have such amazing facility on the horn, the ability to get around and to do lots of things, do these extended techniques we were talking about.

FRED Is this just, does this evolve just from standing on the shoulders of your predecessors and the teaching is better?

BOUCHARD: The horns aren't any different, are they?

TOM PLSEK: Well, the horns are a little better now than they have been, but there are people that would argue that as well. Quite frankly, I think a lot of it has been the result of the ITA [International Trombone Association] and the international trombone festivals where trombone players come together. And what are you going to do when you come together with other trombone players? You're going to want to play as well as you can.

FRED And check out people.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: And check out other people and so, "Wow! did you hear so and so?" And you're going to go back and practice for a year. "I think I can do that. In fact, I think I can do better." And I think that kind of encouragement, friendly encouragement--it hasn't gotten competitive, but as I go to these things, and sometimes I miss one or two, the leaps that are made in trombone playing are truly astounding.

FRED In what category do they fall? Is it a matter of more position, embouchure combinations, being able to allow [a] more easy approach of certain notes?

TOM PLSEK: Playing higher, faster, louder, softer. But more importantly, more musically too. I've heard a great change in the musicality. Trombone players, there's always been some that had good techniques. But to hear some of the musicality that people play with. People go and give recitals or concerts, classical ones and they're thinking of it as, oh why not be like a violinist? You know, we memorize the music, we play the concerto. Christian Limberg, for example, has made a living playing solo trombone and that started with the ITA. We started hearing of him then.

FRED Does the repertoire keep pace and make increasing demands on the players?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely, absolutely. As composers write pieces, it becomes more and more demanding on the player. I think Christopher Rouse wrote, I think it won the Pulitzer Prize for Composition, it was performed numerous times, this concerto, with the New York Philharmonic and Joe Alessi, who's principal of the New York Philharmonic. And there's been others as well, major works.

FRED Let's get back to your career outside of Berklee. When you arrived and were teaching and suddenly became
BOUCHARD: department chair...

TOM PLSEK: Suddenly? Very suddenly! [LAUGHS]

FRED When Phil pointed the finger at you, what was going on for you in the world at large?
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Well I was mostly at that time, as I said, identified as a classical player. I really didn't play jazz in the sense of improvising and knowing tunes. I played in big bands and reading music and I could do little improvisation. So I came to Berklee and there's Phil, who I'd known of since I was in high school and was kind of in awe of. Other people--even Tony Lada was around at that time, he was a teacher.

FRED Sure.
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Jaxon Stock... And I said, "You know, there's these wonderful jazz players here. It might seem that I would try to do that." And I started getting into it, but you know what happened is I got bored of it before I got good enough. And I'd think, "Well, there's these people that are doing that, I'm different from that, you know, I have the things I do." So I remember going to a concert at the Old West Church that Gunter Hampel was playing, vibes player.

FRED Sure.
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: And Perry Robinson...

FRED Yeah, Perry, the clarinetist.
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: God, who else was on the gig?

FRED Was this some sort of Jazz Week thing that Mark Harvey put on?
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It was a Jazz Week thing that Mark Harvey organized, absolutely. And I went to that. And here were these jazz players and they were improvising, but they weren't playing standard tunes and I was hooked. I said, "You know, with my classical technique" and I really dug this. So I started dabbling around with that. John Voigt had a group.

FRED Of course.
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Jon Damian... and so shortly thereafter, John Voigt, Jon Damian, and myself, and Mark Harvey, we formed a group which we called the Boston New Music Ensemble and we would do all kinds of things from various notated pieces to free improvisation. Billy Elgart also played with us a lot--drummer who just came back this past August.

FRED I know, Jon Damian told me but I wasn't around, I missed it.
BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: We had a great session. Jon, John Voigt and Billy and I. It was just great fun to play with them again. What a marvelous, my favorite drummer ever to play with.

FRED He's living in Europe?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: He's living in Europe, Germany. Been there for twenty-five years.

FRED Lord knows, there's a lot more acceptance of avant-garde music in Northern Europe than there is here and than

BOUCHARD: there may ever be.

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, and he's done a lot of mainstream stuff there too. So I started doing that and just started really experimenting and at one point, I was working with some people who worked with electronics, and I was asked to take part in a performance that the Mobius Artists Group was doing. Mobius was then known as an experimental theater company. They did a performance of Orpheus, and I was to play for the Orpheus performance, which took place in the whole city of Boston. I don't know if you know the Orpheus story. There's the, Orpheus gets married to Eurydice, and they have a wedding party, and she's snatched.

FRED By Satan or Hades.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, she's sent to the underworld, she dies, by Hades, you know. And then Orpheus goes to look for her and he goes across the River Styx, the boatman Charon, I guess is how you say his name. And he convinces Hades to let her out, but he says, "Okay, but you can't look back." So he's coming out and he looks back to make sure Eurydice is behind him and of course, she's grabbed back and the story ends there. But I was to play when they were crossing the River Styx which was the Fort Point Channel. And I had a microphone, a wireless mic, and I was being picked up on a tape delay system on the other side where the Children's Museum is now. And so I'm in a parking lot, devoid of cars. It's about ten, eleven o'clock on a summer evening. And so I played my shtick as I see the boat going across carrying the audience--the audience was moving through the city, and the actor that was playing Orpheus took them. So they were going over to Hades. So I played, I finished my thing and You have to picture this: it's night, it's dark, there's a parking lot for about three hundred cars with not one car in it. There's a trombone player. And this Boston policeman drives up, pulls into the parking lot, and he starts walking towards me. And I think, what am I going to tell him? "Oh, I'm playing for Mobius, it's an experimental theater company" That's going to mean nothing to him. So he came up to me and he said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I'm playing for a theater performance." Now keep in mind, there's not a soul within three hundred feet of me anywhere. Those words came out of my mouth and it was like, "Put the cuffs on me, I can't explain my way out of this one. Hopefully somebody will rescue me." And I said, "Well, you know, there's this Orpheus thing and the audience was outside." And he said, "Well, we got a report of a lobster boat being stolen." I said, "Oh, that was us!" Then realizing what I'd said, "But we didn't steal it, you know." And he shook his head and he kept cocking it from one side to the other, and he turned around and walked off.

FRED It was too much reality for him.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It was too much reality, or too much unreality, whatever. So the next performance I had someone with me in the parking lot. But that was my introduction to the Mobius Artists Group and shortly thereafter they felt bad for me and asked me to join the group.

FRED

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It was, still is, I'm still a member and have been since the late eighties's, I think '88 or '89. And there's some wonderful people; it's a group of people from all different media who just want to do things differently. And so that's been a really fruitful tie for me to work with these people. Some musicians, some into movement, some into video, some coming from theater, performance arts. So it's always been a challenge there.

FRED Who are some of the other principals that you play with in those situations? I mean who would know that...

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Well from that group it would just... virtually all of them in some... The founder of the group, Marilyn Arsem, I've performed with. A wonderful dance person from Boston Conservatory, Margery Morgan, we had a duo for awhile. We were voted one of the top ten dance events of the year by the Boston Globe. Been working recently with a woman named Joanna Rice, who is doing some wonderful things. She has a piece going on now for two years outside the Trinity Church where she--it's called the Human Cost of War, and she's bringing small stones everyday at noon and building a pile of stones, a hundred stones a day. And she figures to represent the number of civilians killed, she has to bring a hundred stones every day for two years. So she's been doing it. It's a wonderful piece. So these wonderful people like that, who are really focused on what they do. We've done John Cage performances with the group over the years that have gained some international reputation and recognition.

FRED The avant-garde which you've espoused and which a handful of us really enjoy, what keeps people from getting into it? Why is it so inaccessible?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: First of all, I'm not sure it's that inaccessible if you give it a chance. Perhaps one reason is a lot of it demands that the audience member be more active in the process. If you go to an opera, if you go to a concert, you sit there and listen and you know what to expect. In a sense, you're not challenged as an audience member. This kind of work challenges you as an audience member to be more active. I don't mean necessarily you have to move around. Although we did have audience interactive pieces and have done that a lot. To be in different situations, to be in different places. For example, Joanna Rice and I did a series of three pieces in 2005 that were done in February, March, and April at sunrise in the Quincy Quarry. The first performance in February, we're talking about six something in the morning, it was eighteen degrees outside. And the Quincy Quarry has been turned into a park. It has been filled in from the big dig, but there still remains the large cliffs and it's like a very natural amphitheater. And we went to visit it and we said, "We have to perform here." So we did sunrise pieces. The sunrise closest to the full moon. So as we're performing, the sun's coming up on one end and the full moon is setting on the other, and it's really magical. We're in these rocks and performing. If you've seen my website, there's me throwing the trombone off the cliff, a picture of me. One of the performances, I ended by throwing my trombone off the cliff.

FRED Into what?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Into the ground, just crashed down to the ground. Just before I'd done that, I'd taken my good trombone and kind of ducked behind a rock and grabbed an older one that was still playable. I bought some that were destroyable, but playable. And so I played very ferociously, just losing control and I threw it. And there's one picture of it absolutely horizontal above me. It's the only picture of it, there's no Photoshop involved or anything, that's what happened. I threw it and it crashed down and there were gasps from the audience as I did that, who were on a rock maybe a hundred feet away on another ledge, looking down to where the trombone had been thrown. So that challenges people.

FRED Yeah, yeah it does.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: First of all, it was cold. You know, people had to come. And we had people come to all three of them, and get up at whatever hour they had to get up to be there for sunrise in February.

FRED I think we need to try to instill a little bit more adventure into people's musical consciousness. How do you
BOUCHARD: inculcate that into students?

TOM PLSEK: One thing I'm starting to do recently is, as part of the lessons, I'll sit down with students and we'll take five minutes and we'll just improvise. Not on changes, not on a tune, we'll just play. "Okay, I'll say, start, make a statement and I'll answer back." And then they'll come back and we'll have this dialogue.

FRED Tremendous.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: And I've found that they, first of all, they all love doing that. They all think it's the greatest thing since sliced bread.

FRED And what could be simpler than just feeling your way through a conversation? That's what we're doing right here!

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely. And we just, we had great fun. I think there's a certain freeing thing that happens that makes all your playing better. Wouldn't it be great if all our playing, even the classical players in the symphony orchestra, whatever they played sounded improvised? Had that freeness to it, that freshness that improvisation has. Even if it's written out and you've practiced it, you know, it just flows and seems to come forth.

FRED That's the kind of ease and comfort that all the teachers want to get with everything they do. I like the kids who
BOUCHARD: take music journalism to be able to free themselves from the strictures of grammar and syntax and just make a statement out of pure air. You know, dig into the deep consciousness for the right adjective or verb that they hadn't thought of before. Maybe that's the kind of thing that would work on a very basic level. It's some sort of, you know, cross-sectional, institutional, awareness-building, meeting here.

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely. Some years ago, this kind of relates to that, Phil Wilson and I decided to put together a duo which we did for a couple years. We performed in a number of places--the BPC [Berklee Performance Center], the New York Brass Conference, a few other places. We called ourselves Bare Bones for obvious reasons. [LAUGHS] It was just the two trombones. At that point I was working with my electronics a lot. But we would just get together once or twice a week in my office and start jamming and we'd create tunes. We'd take standard tunes and do unorthodox versions of them. We did J. J. [Johnson]'s "Lament," but stretched it out so that it lasted four or five minutes once through the tune. I was creating the chords, the changes with the trombone and delay and reverberations and Phil was taking the changes, the melody and soloing. So one measure may last thirty seconds and gradually morph into the next. So we did things like that, just great fun. And Phil was a trooper with it. You know, I threw some kind of interesting things at him, you know, he's used to playing the changes and stuff like that and structures. We had structures, but different kinds of structures. And that was a lot of fun.

FRED I bet!

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: We did that for a number of years and we would come up with ideas for each other. And so the way I work and the way Phil works is very different, and people would say, "Isn't that hard to do?" But I would argue and say that's what to me is the most interesting, to work with somebody who's really different from you. Why would I want to play with a trombone player who approaches the horn like I do? I'd rather work with somebody who approaches it differently, who approaches music differently. I learn more from it, I think it's a more fruitful collaboration when that happens.

FRED Absolutely, yeah. Any other coalitions or exchanges along those lines that you've managed to negotiate or pull off during your career here at Berklee?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, I mean I could go on and start talking about all kinds of pieces and performances. One I would like to mention because I think it's the best piece and the best performance I've ever been involved in and had the most meaning to me... It's a piece I did two years ago on Memorial Day 2005 called Collateral Damage Noted. This was at the point in the Iraq War where, at that time, it was estimated conservatively that at least twenty thousand civilians had been killed. And I wanted to recognize that fact. But I don't think people were getting it. As the general at the time, Tommy Franks, I think, says, "We don't do body counts," referring to civilians. So there was a website called "Iraq Body Count," and they had to have at least three instances of where deaths were reported and they tab them. So if these three sources say it happened, it probably did. So it was twenty thousand, low twenties at that time. So I said, "Okay, on Memorial Day people can have their Memorial Day observances and that's fine, but I'm going to have one." And we did it at City Hall Plaza at eleven in the morning, I think. And I had close to a hundred musicians come from all walks of life: symphony players, folk musicians, old hippies. And we formed a big circle several hundred feet wide. And I said, "For one hour, from eleven to noon, I want you to play about three notes every minute. Every note you play, you choose the note, I want you to make it the most beautiful note you can and that it represents the life of one Iraqi civilian. It has a beginning, it has a sustain, and it stops. And as you're playing it, be aware. If it's a child, play a high note, a female, slightly high, male, a low note." And I calculated it, in one hour we would play twenty thousand notes approximately. So there was this amazingly beautiful wall of sound of people playing their notes. And people came, some sat outside the circle, some came and sat inside the circle. But it was really beautiful to see all the different people that came together. A couple of the classical people came dressed in their tuxes. And one guy was on the subway meeting someone else with an instrument: "Where you going?" "Oh, I'm playing this thing." "What is it?" And they told him, he said, "Can I come and play?" "Of course." He brought his guitar and he played and it was just beautiful. I'd sent out an email notice to the Mobius mailing list and asked them to forward it, so the mailing list I found got sent to all these lists. People came by. It got a nice write up in the Globe, nice coverage on television, I was interviewed. Firstly, it was just musically a beautiful piece, I thought, if I must say so myself. A lot of people were very moved by it. I'd like to do it again, but now that number's up to almost a hundred thousand. So we either play for five hours or we get four hundred people, something like that, to play.

FRED BOUCHARD: I think you probably got the Christmas card that I just got from Roger Brown and Linda Mason.

TOM PLSEK: I did, yes.

FRED BOUCHARD: And it was a quote from Jimi Hendrix, which I quoted to my class--which is doing musical biographies and we studied Hendrix in his garage jam phase--and the quote went something like: "If there's things that need to be changed in this world, music will be the one to change it."

TOM PLSEK: That's a beautiful quote. Absolutely beautiful.

FRED BOUCHARD: I think a lot of students are here [COUGHS] at Berklee because they want to make a difference, and we've got to find ways, such as your event, to get them to become conscientious citizens through their music.

TOM PLSEK: I'm thinking of doing that piece again. Since I did it on Memorial Day, Berklee students weren't around, they'd already gone home for the summer. If I do it again, I'd do it at a time when they're here and involve them a whole lot more.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, even in the confines of the Performance Center, it could have impact. As well as a musical activist, have you been a social activist in...

TOM PLSEK: Not terribly actively, other than I like to do it through the music. I like I try to belong to and support good causes. But I've not been active and highly visible in that arena. But I'm thinking more and more of the music I do, the art performances that I do, have that element to them. Not simply self-serving.

FRED BOUCHARD: Okay, yeah, of course not. How have you seen the Brass department evolve during your tenure at Berklee? And you know, what were the goals thirty years ago, and what are your goals today?

TOM PLSEK: Well they're really in some ways haven't changed that much. My basic philosophy is we'll take a student and we'll give you the instruction, we'll have the personnel for you so that you can discover yourself and how you can be a brass player, how you can fit into the brass playing. So since I've been chair of the brass department, my hires have been done with that in mind. If I need to hire a trumpet player, am I going to find the best possible trumpet player, for Berklee, maybe a bebop trumpet player? I'm thinking, "Well no, I've got people who do that really well at the time." So for example, I hired Tiger Okoshi, he was more fusion at the time. I said, "We don't have that, I want that. Plus he's a marvelous teacher." Lin Biviano was hired by the school, I asked him to come teach in the Brass department; we didn't have a lead trumpet player.

FRED BOUCHARD: He was doing something else?

TOM PLSEK: He was hired by the Ensemble department. "Could you use him?" I said, "Yes, we don't have a lead trumpet player." Shortly after Christine Fawson graduated, she taught in our Brass Weekend, and she did such a great job, I said, "Well, she's got that vocal thing and the beautiful melodic sense." So I hired her. Then Charles Lewis, I hired about ten years ago. He has a great classical background and is a wonderful jazz player. So I've looked for people who fill niches that we needed filling. And so I think it's helped that way. I hired John Faieta in my absence; I was on sabbatical. He's one of the widely respected classical players in town. Plays with the BSO from time to time as an extra player. Went on tour with them. He loves being at Berklee, he absolutely loves the students here and they love him. He gets some of our best jazz players. Why don't you go learn the technique that he has to offer? So that's how it's changed and it's really kind of a fun department to be head of. I like all the people in it [LAUGHS] and we all get along together. You know we meet every week, we share ideas about teaching, we share concerns about students.

FRED BOUCHARD: How big a staff, how big a teaching group is it?

TOM PLSEK: I've got thirteen people teaching for me.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's a nice size.

TOM PLSEK: So it's a nice size. Some are adjunct to the Brass department. Some are in the Ensemble department like Tony Lada, Jeff Galindo, Lin Biviano, as I mentioned, Greg Hopkins. So there's seven of us that meet regularly and the other folks come from time to time. So it's a manageable group, but it's quite different as I understand from what you find at other universities, where you have multiple teachers on the same instrument. To study... To go to a university to study with one teacher, then after a year switch to another, is very bad thing to do at most universities. Here, it's not only acceptable, it's encouraged. You know, if you're a trumpet player and you come to Berklee, jeez, there's seven trumpet teachers you can study with, or trombone. We don't say that trumpet players have to study with trumpet teachers. It's Brass department. I've taught trumpet students, a lot of trumpet teachers teach trombone students. So you have such a tremendous diversity of people to choose from, and all excellent and leaders in their field. I can't think of an area we don't have covered in the department. Brass playing, it's all there.

FRED BOUCHARD: I guess we're kind of coming into the final phases of this here, and I wondered if you might talk about anything you'd like to express in terms of your career at Berklee? Mentors or great events that took place here... And then maybe talk about some of the students that you're most proud of out in the world.

TOM PLSEK: Oh, there's so many of those. But I came to Berklee, it was quite a different school for me, from what I'd been used to, the typical large colleges, liberal arts colleges with schools of music or music departments. Apart from the fact that they're mostly a jazz school at the time. It was really quite different. I frankly didn't think I would be at Berklee very long. I thought I'd be looking for another job, that it was a stepping stone along the way, and that was thirty-six years ago. And you know, the longer you drive down the road, the ruts get deeper, and the easier it is to stay in them and the harder it is to get out. And I don't mean that negatively as it sounds. I don't mean it negatively at all. After a few, some years of being there, I got to the point where I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. As I went to other schools to visit, such things would happen. I'd go there and it might be the evening, and the music building's pretty much dead, lights are off, people are gone. At Berklee it was just like buzzing, just starting to get its buzz on. So the energy of the students here, and the faculty as well, is really seducing. And it can be demanding, it can be demanding.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yep. You find yourself going to a lot of events that you'd normally pack up and go home. You say, "I got to catch this guy."

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, "I got to catch this, I got to do that, I got to hear this student, we got this rehearsal and that type of thing." And it's just, when you think, "Gosh, I wish I could relax," but if you think about the alternatives and some of the alternatives I say, no I don't think so.

FRED BOUCHARD: The community sensibility is really strong, I've picked up on that in my five or six years here.

TOM PLSEK: Right, absolutely. And at one point, I was thinking about doing doctoral work, going back to the University of Texas. And I was accepted and given some assistance-ship money, but kind of late. And I said, "No, I don't think so. I think what I'm doing here is much more valuable than getting a doctorate in music theory." So it's been great. I still can't imagine being anywhere else.

FRED BOUCHARD: Have certain people, maybe not even in the Brass department, mentored you over the years or been unusually facilitators? I mean, I'm just throwing out Larry Berk, Bob Share, Dick Bobbitt...

TOM PLSEK: There's so many. You know, Bob Share did something once that I will never forget. It kind of relates to the story I told you about my father. After being at Berklee a few years--not that many, maybe three or four, something like that--I'd just gone on to full-time. And of course there were no voicemails or emails at the time, I got a letter in my mailbox from Bob Share: "Please come up to see me." Uh oh. So I went up to see him and he brought me in and said, "I brought you up here to say that I think you're doing a really good job." In so many words. Nothing else, just wanted to let me know that he saw what I was doing, and thought it was good. and told me. You know, that made me feel so good, I didn't get a raise or anything like that, but that didn't matter.

FRED Yeah, that's better than a check.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It was just, "Boy, that was great!" And that doesn't happen enough. Usually you bring people in to complain to them about something.

FRED True enough.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Something negative. So you know, I try to keep that in my mind and emphasize the positive.

FRED That does help.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: When possible. And then being around Phil, Phil was my idol when I was a sophomore in high school. Someone brought a record in of the Woody Herman Band. I think it was My Kind of Broadway. And I don't know if you've heard that, but "It's A Lonesome Old Town." The solo, he starts on this ungodly high note and I heard that and said, "Listen to this!" I heard this sound: "What the heck is that?!" And it works its way down: "Holy Jesus! That's a trombone!" And then they put on some of the other stuff and I was like... You know, you come close to putting away the trombone at that time, but I didn't. I said, "No, I'm going to keep playing after hearing that." So then to come and be his boss and to perform with him, that's been very inspiring to me. We've become very, very good friends with perhaps the first really great trombone player that I ever heard.

FRED And there's something about Phil... he inspires confidence.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yes, he does.

FRED It's his avuncular manner and his deep voice and that hearty laugh and everything about him is just, everything's going to be just fine.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely, just fine. And then all the students, all the students are wonderful. You asked to name some names, mention some... It's just so hard, you know. Sometimes I didn't have them very often, sometimes I had them. Nick Lane was one who went on the road with Rod Stewart for many years in the rock idiom. One of the best we had is now teaching out in the West Coast--Dyne Eifertsen who came here and was just a marvelous student. Elliot Mason, who recently graduated. There's a whole bunch in New York. Steve Armour, John Wheeler, you know, these are people who are just out there doing it. And I'm sure I've forgotten a bunch.

FRED John Wheeler...

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Yeah, trombone player and engineer, recording studio and playing, I had him for a number... Delfeayo Marsalis, how could I forget Delfeayo?

FRED Yeah, what a character.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: What a character.

FRED Sweet guy.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: He's a sweetheart. A few years ago we were in New Orleans, and he was doing a clinic, and I walked and he didn't know I was there. And about a third of the way, or halfway through the clinic, he looked and says, "I see my old trombone teacher, Tom Plsek, is here. Tom, I just want to let you know I've been practicing!" and I said, "Yes, you have." [LAUGHS] I could tell because he sounded marvelous at the time. So people like that, that I've had, mostly trombone.

FRED Okay. What would you like to see happening at Berklee in the next few years?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Well, I'd like to see it keep emphasizing quality and not let quantity take over. I'd like to see it continue to grow in diversity. I would really like to see way more female students here. We're still low.

FRED Fifteen to eighteen percent?

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It's a little more than that, it's about thirty percent.

FRED Oh is it that much? Oh, good.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It's up to about thirty. I did some research a few years ago on music schools. Of course there's no school like Berklee, but I did a bunch of them and everybody else was roughly fifty-fifty. Every other music school that I could find.

FRED It's certainly higher than when I got here in '01.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Absolutely.

FRED It probably was ten or fifteen then.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: It probably was then, but we have to keep the quality up. But I can't see that being a problem with the tremendous number of applications we're getting now and the limited places we have. I'd like to see that. And I like the diversity of all the styles, I think that's what sets us apart.

FRED You've embodied that yourself.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: I hope so, I hope so, I try, yeah.

FRED Tom this has been a lot of fun.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: I thought so too, I enjoyed it.

FRED Yeah I've enjoyed it too. And we may have left a few doors open or a few things unsaid...

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: We could go on all day.

FRED Let's definitely do that, let's do it over lunch.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Cool, very good.

FRED Thanks a lot.

BOUCHARD:

TOM PLSEK: Thank you, Fred