



Clasax Victoria Podcast

Episode 5 - David Griffiths Ensemble Liaison Show notes

Melba Hall – University of Melbourne - <https://www.ohca.org.au/organs/organs/MelbaHall.html>
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Alan Vivian - <https://www.onlinevirtuoso.com/author/alan-vivian/>
Australian National Academy of Music - <https://anam.com.au/>
Alan Kay - <https://www.msmnyc.edu/faculty/alan-kay/>
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David Krakauer - <https://www.davidkrakauer.com/>
Peter Schmidl - <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/orchester-mitglieder/none-peter-schmidl/415/>
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Shalom Aleikhem Rov Fiedman by Giora Fiedman - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwNwMexWICE>
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Emily Treloar - https://ado.net.au/ado/public/concerts/2025/Emily_Treloar_bio.aspx
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International Clarinet Association ClarinetFest - <https://clarinet.org/>
Ensemble Liaison - <https://www.ensembleliaison.com/>
Dale Bartrop - <https://asq.com.au/about/dale-bartrop-violin/>
Australian String Quartet - <https://asq.com.au/>
Australia Ensemble - <https://www.music.unsw.edu.au/australia-ensemble-unsw>
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Interview Transcript between Brendan Toohey and David Griffiths:

BT - Hello, you're listening to the fifth episode of the Clasax Victoria podcast.

I'm your host, Brendan Toohey, and today I am very lucky and fortunate and happy to be talking with an incredible clarinettist. He's actually one of my former teachers and we'll get into all his accomplishments in a moment, but I'm very happy to be chatting today with David Griffiths, David, hello!

DG - Hi, how you doing, good to see you.

BT - You too. Thank you so much for taking the time to do this, finding the available time is always the hardest part of doing these interviews.

DT - I'm sure it is. Yeah, no, my pleasure.

Thanks for, keep hassling me enough so we could make it happen.

BT - Could you tell everyone listening and watching where we are right now?

DG - Oh, it's actually unusual for me now, but we're in Melba Hall.

The University of Melbourne's old music building, which we don't come to very often, but we would just up here for the Monday lunchtime concert series, hearing one of my PhD students do a lovely concert. So, I sort of took this opportunity to do this interview in this wonderful space.

BT - Fantastic. We're not sure if we're going to get kicked out of this space, so we'll see what happens. David, for those that don't know, I'm going to sort of pull the cat out of the bag. Your mom, JoAnn is currently the president of Clasax so that's an interesting little connection that you've got to the society.

DG - She certainly is, so yeah definitely. How long has she been president for?

BT - I'm not sure, you would have a better idea than me.

DG - Yeah, quite a while. Quite a while. Yeah, yeah. It's quite a quite a number of years. It's pretty cool, actually.

BT - Excellent. Well, could you tell us a little bit about your formative years growing up as a clarinet player? Yeah, just tell us a little bit about how you got started.

DG - As in, when I was a kid or?

BT - Yeah, as a kid.

DG - Yeah, I mean, now that you mentioned my mom, I just think that's really cool.

I think, you know, she was never a clarinettist to play her, but she was always a teacher.

And I love, well, I shouldn't tell her a whole story because you should interview her for one of these podcasts. So, I don't want to steal all her thunder, but she moved to Armadale in New South Wales where I'm from, and there was no clarinet teacher.

So, she bought a clarinet and a book on how to play the clarinet and she taught herself, and then she became a clarinet teacher. So fast forward to when I was a kid, there was just clarinet everywhere in the house all the time. She's teaching, I don't know, I think at one point she had 100 students a week.

BT - Oh my gosh.

DG - And just every day after school, there was clarinet lessons going on in our house.

So, she taught me, but I don't even remember having lessons. I'm sure I must have, but it was never structured or organized. But it was constant. I heard all the pieces of all the different AMEB levels happening. So, I think that really helped me develop quite easily just because it was all the time music. In addition to that, she ran the Armidale Clarinet Choir, which was Sunday afternoons, and I played in the Armidale Youth Orchestra, and then when I got good enough, I graduated to the Armidale Symphony Orchestra, which was very exciting. And so, there was just music going all the time, and Armidale's quite unique because it's, you know, relatively small and isolated place, but so much strong music's going on there. So that helped me tremendously. In a way, I became a big fish in a small pond. Let's just, you know, put it like that. So, yeah, it was, I don't know. I loved growing up there.

BT - Amazing. That's really interesting that you kind of picked up lots from listening to your mum teaching other clarinet students in the house.

DG - Yeah, and it was probably a lot of it was not even a conscious thing. And I'm a little bit competitive, let's just say, so I'd hear someone playing something that was harder, "Oh, I want to learn that piece, I want to do that piece," and it kept, I don't know, yeah, I don't really remember, except that I just wanted to, it was sort of all I knew, yeah, yeah, so yeah, it was fun.

BT - Amazing, so you're growing up as a kid, going to school, still playing clarinet, what sort of led you to decide ok, this is what I want to do as a career?

DG - I think it was around when I was about 15, my mum used to take me to all these eisteddfods and stuff around the place.

Again, in Armidale we're a bit isolated, but mum would bring in people like Mark Walton to Armidale and give these amazing weekends. She'd take me to Sydney to his big clarinet weekends and things, which sort of inspired me to do all my mega days and stuff that I'd like to do. And then I think when I was 15 she took me to the Sydney eisteddfod which was like wow that's scary like it's one thing going to all the like Tamworth and Coffs Harbor and stuff. But I think I managed to win the clarinet to you know section that year whatever it was and against all the kind of serious city kids. And I was like oh maybe I could actually do this. And so, it was around when I was 15 and then I also just thought I don't know what else I would do. You know, it was sort of more like, well, I think I'm good at this. So, and I actually didn't really know what it meant. You know, I didn't have any inside track from my mother or anyone else on what it meant to be a professional musician. Like, I knew that there were orchestras that people got paid to play in. But I had no idea. So, it was kind of like, well, let's just do this and see what happened. So it was, I had no plan. But that's sort of how it came about. Yeah.

BT - Okay, amazing, interesting. So, what about getting into studying at university? What can you tell us about that?

DG - So then I had to make some decisions and actually it was not easy because I had had like I said I knew nothing about anything and so I you know again went to Brisbane had some lessons there with Floyd Williams, Sydney with Mark (Walton) and Adelaide with David Shepard at the time. And then interestingly I didn't. I'd never had a lesson with Alan Vivian but I applied there as well because it was a really good reputation for Canberra. And then I ended up deciding to go to Canberra. I don't really remember why. I just think I had a really nice experience when I went for the audition and I met Alan and got just a nice sense for that was the place where I ... I don't know. It was just I sort of got a sense of that was the right place for me to go. And it really was. It was brilliant. And it was interesting because, you know, for me, it was like the big smoke at the time. I was like, wow, and I had some friends there that had come down from Sydney to study there and they were just always making fun of the place. It's being small, but for me, as a transition from Armidale, it was great. And Canberra was really at that time. I mean, it's really sad what's now happened to it. But it was small. There was probably only, I think, Alan only accepted two or three students per year. So, there was, I think, only sort of eight at any given time. And so, we had a lot of opportunities and it was a lot of attention from him and the other teachers. And the standard was incredibly high. And it was just an amazing atmosphere to work really hard once I kind of worked out how to do that. And then I got stuck into it. Yeah, Canberra was brilliant. So yeah, that's sort of how I ended up there. Yeah.

BT - Amazing. I can share a bit of a, not a funny story, but just a story about Alan Vivian. So, he and yourself and a bunch of other people came to Melbourne for the Australian Clarinet and Sax festival, this is what would have been 2011, I think, a long time ago now. And you two played a duet together.

DG - Was it the Ponchielli?

BT - I think it probably was and listening to that performance of you and Alan playing that piece, convinced me to come to Melbourne to study with you.

DG - That's very nice.

BT - Yeah

DG - That's excellent. Yeah, I remember that because, have you ever played it?

BT - No.

DG - Oh, you got to. We should do it together one day. I think I first played it with a friend or something in Armidale, probably badly. And then, so I sort of a new about it. And it's just a fun, kind of operatic, you know, two clarinet show-piece. And then I played it with Alan for my end of degree

recital and finished my whole recital. He came and played with me. And I'll never forget he sort of on the night of the concert without telling me.

me he sort of improvised like a second clarinet cadenza and just made me wait for him to kind of do this thing and I was, you know, it was a sort of sort of guy he was it was quite funny. And so, when we had this opportunity at this festival, I was like, because it was his recital I think and then I said, Alan, how about we get together and, you know, play the Ponchielli together again. So, yeah, there you go. I'm glad it had a positive effect. It's such a fun piece, a bit stressful at times.

BT - So, how did you find studying with Alan at ANU? Can you describe how he sort of teaches?

DG - It's funny because I talk to some other former students of his about this now and it's, I just remember thinking what a brilliant teacher he was or is, but I can't remember hardly anything that he said to me and it was, it's really strange.

Um, yeah, on the spot right now, I can't even remember. But he was just excellent.

I mean, I think one of the first things, and this is what I talk about with my students now, but it's just developing a bigger sound. You know, when you go to university, it's like you sort of have to learn. You've got like a high-school, I call it a high-school sound, and you have to develop a professional sound.

So, of course, the first thing that's all about air and developing sound, I remember he gave me Nielsen Concerto in my second year, pretty early on.

And I remember his rationale was to get me to just blow more, right? Because to play that piece, you just need to, you know, you need so much air. So that was, you know, I remember that was quite good. And then, you know, attention to detail with rhythm is so important too. So, I remember being, you know, very strict about that, you know.

Yeah, but it's sadly my actual specific recollections of lessons are very few and far between. And I, I sort of, in hindsight, wish that I'd recorded some of the lessons, or actually take a notes in a journal, which is what I ask my students now to do, but back then I didn't, you know, didn't do any of that. It would have been really interesting to look back on, you know, on what he actually taught me. I do, actually, there's a lot about phrasing, of course. I do remember one of the very first things that he taught me was, we'd start with a simple study, either like a Rose study, or an Uhl study, and really work on longer phrasing, using the air for longer phrasing. And then I also remember a fantastic exercise on sort of detache, staccato tonguing, which is something I'd never sort of thought about before. And actually, the other thing, sorry, it's coming back to me now. The other thing I remember, which brings in my mum, I had the worst embouchure in high school, right? And, because again, I'm sort of in the middle of nowhere, I'm not, like, I didn't, my only proper teacher was my mother, really, and after a couple of years, I didn't listen to her at all, like, you know. And so she kept saying oh, I need to, you know flatten my chin, point (down) you know, and I just didn't listen to it. And as you know, once you get your students to a certain age, if they haven't fixed that, it's quite hard to fix it. And so she kept trying to tell me to fix it, but I didn't listen to her, and I gave up. She gave up. And there's a hilarious photo. When I was in year 12, I won this sort of Sydney Symphony Young Artist competition where I got to play Weber 2 with the Sydney Symphony, when I was in year 12, right?

BT - Wow.

DG - Which is pretty cool, in like a recording, it was like, and you'd go to Sydney for like workshops, and then it culminated with this performance. And there's a photo of the event. And like, I've got my embouchure like this, and I've got a rubber band on my clarinet, because my A key wouldn't shut properly, because there was no one in Armidale to fix the clarinets and stuff. So, you know, it was kind of funny when I looked back at that, it was just quite embarrassing. And then, I went to Canberra, and I remember coming back to Armidale after that.

The first term, or semester, probably semester, and my embouchure was fixed. And my mum was so angry. She was just like, "I've been trying to get you to fix that and one semester with a new teacher", and I was like, "Yeah, sorry." But yeah, so he certainly fixed my embouchure as well. Oh yeah, and he fixed my expressive left shoulder, which was another, yeah, you know, that's fairly common for, yeah, you know. So, yeah, no, I mean, but he was just really, fantastic, and then he became just an ongoing mentor. I keep in touch with him, and I still keep in touch with him. And I remember the first time I got to play second clarinet to him in Canberra Symphony, which was really amazing. And some

chamber music, we did Gran Partita and some other chamber music together. And just, yeah, it just became sort of teacher to mentor, to friend. And, yeah, phenomenal clarinet player, just amazing. So, yeah.

BT - Excellent. Sounds a bit like me to you.

DG - I don't feel like that, but anyway, that's very kind to say that.

BT - So, you finished studying at ANU with Alan. What happened next after that?

DG - Okay, so for me, I knew I needed to go overseas. Back then, well, this is a bit of a tangent. Back then, ANAM, the Australian National Academy (of Music), hadn't quite started yet. It was sort of in its infancy, but there was no residential program yet. If there was, I probably would have tried to go there. And in a way, I'm sort of glad there wasn't, because there wasn't anything else. So, I needed to go and do something else. I had always planned to go to Europe. That's where Alan had studied in Vienna, and I think I was sort of like, and he had connections in France, and I thought I would do that. I ended up going to New York, because I met someone that I wanted to go hang out with. Let's put it like that.

BT - Sure.

DG - And so, I decided to go to New York, being American meant that I have a dual passport with dual citizenship with America. So, it was easier to go there and I spoke the language and so I decided to go there. I think the reason also I ended up there is I was lucky enough in my third year to get accepted into the Pacific Music Festival in Japan.

I sort of forgot about that. So that was an, that actually, you know how I said when I was 15, I was like, you know. I sort of thought, oh yeah, maybe I can be a professional.

So it was, then I showed up in Canberra and felt like I was hopeless, right? I'm sort of backing up because all of a sudden everyone else sounded really good. Better than me, and it was like I was nervous to even practice in front of people because I sort of felt embarrassed. But then I sort of eventually got over that and developed. But then I was like, what am I going to do now? I sort of am aware there's really good students in Sydney, in Brisbane and all these places. But then I got into this festival and I was here.

The only clarinettist, actually the only Australian that got into the entire festival that year and I think I was one of the like the second youngest person and the standard of this festival was kind of unbelievable. And so, then I went to that festival and I spent a month and the clarinet tutor was Peter Schmidl who was the principal of Vienna Philharmonic at the time and he was very complimentary of my playing and perhaps because of my influences of Alan and stuff like that. But that festival made me realize, ah, maybe I'm good enough to go overseas. You know, like it's weird in Australia, it's different now, I don't know. It's because we're so much more aware of what's going on overseas now with social media and stuff like that. Where (as) back then to a bit more intimidating, I think. But yeah, when I went to that festival and I'm hanging out with much older musicians and holding my own, I was like, oh actually I could do this.

And then that's when I met this person that lived in New York and I was like, New York seems like a good place, let's go there. So that's what happened and so I went to Manhattan School of Music which was my first choice. They were known for having a really good clarinet school and they had this sort of masters of orchestral performance. Ricardo Morales was teaching there in Charles Niedich, all these, and some others and so that's where I chose to go.

BT - Amazing. So, can you tell us more about those lessons and what you learnt?

DG - Of course I can! That I remember a bit more. I think it's just a bit more recent. But I first started, so my four main influences there were Alan Kay, who was my first teacher when I got there. He's the artistic director of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, teaches at Juilliard Manhattan School, New York based chamber musician basically. Wonderful musician, wonderful guy, hugely influential. I did chamber music every single week with David Krakauer, who many of you know it's like amazing klezmer clarinettist, but before he discovered klezmer in his 30s, he was really, again, major sort of chamber musician in the US. So, he was also unbelievably inspiring. I'm so lucky. The way they do it in New York, you have a lesson every week and you have a chamber music lesson every single week. So, they're equal and so, I was so lucky to work with David (Krakauer) on the Brahms Trio, the

Brahms Quintet, Messian, Quartet and some Elliott Carter I think. I still remember it like it was so formative for me actually. And then we had the Masters of Orchestral Performance Stream which Ricardo Morales was taking. So, we would have weekly or I don't know if it's weekly but it felt like it was weekly classes with him with a two or three or four of us as a clarinet section with all the different repertoire. So, one week it's like Brahms one and two next week, Brahms three and four. Next week, Tchaikovsky four-five. It was so hard to keep up and he would be really tough. If we weren't prepared, he would just, you know, he'd say to us, "Ah, you know, if you, you've got to be lucky to win a job, you've got to be more prepared than anyone else." And then you have to be lucky. So, when we'd go into these classes, if we weren't fully prepared, he would really kind of go off at us. But I found it difficult because I was sort of doing the solo and chamber music stream and then I was also coming in and doing his stream. And I remember a couple of times just like wagging the class with him because I didn't want to get yelled at. And I'm like, "I look back at it." And I was like, "What was I thinking?" Like, this is such an amazing opportunity. But it was really, I did find it hard to keep up with all the different music that I was having to learn. Yeah look, but in general, living in New York was amazing. There's concerts every single night at Carnegie Hall and Avery Fisher Hall and Alice Tully. And so just every single week, you're going to concerts, the Met Opera. Towards the very end, just before I left, I actually got a job as an usher at the Met. And so, it's an amazing job. You get really, really well paid and you just kind of help people come in and then you just watch the opera. And so that, you know, got to hear Ricardo play, you know, several times a week. So yeah, and then the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic and all the visiting orchestras in Carnegie Hall, like it's just amazing. And I, to be honest, I was never planning on leaving that, you know, I sort of ended up staying for four years. I finished my masters. I started a doctorate, started working with Charlie Neidich, Charles Neidich, at Stony Brook, and he's just a genius. I was just speaking to someone the other day about him, another former student of his, he's just a phenomenal teacher, so that opened my eyes even more to a whole 'nother kind of way of thinking about music. He's got disciples all around the world who you know, it's kind of, and we all even like, I remember playing a gig with this mandolin player, Avi Avital, and he was like, "were you a Charles Neidich student?" and I said, "Yeah, how can you tell?" and he said, "Oh you know, my closest friend was a Charles Neidich student and you just play just like him." We all have that influence and it's quite strong in the way we, you know, play. So, yeah, that was actually pretty cool. So, those four people were, I took so much from all of them as I was really, you know. Alan taught me how to play the clarinet, and then when I got to New York it was like, how to become a musician, not saying that Alan didn't do that.

But, you know, I was old enough then to start actually understanding a little bit more about what I was doing, and immersing myself in this incredible amount of culture of what goes on there. Anyway, I can just talk for hours about this stuff. So, interrupt me.

BT - No, that's perfect. That's really interesting that you've had these influences from Charlie, but also Ricardo Morales and David Krakauer as well.

DG - Yeah. They're vastly different.

BT - And Alan Kay.

DG - Vastly different. Yeah, like which is I think is actually really awesome, yeah.

BT - So, you've finished your masters you've started a PhD, what's the story behind coming back to Australia and what happens after that?

DG - It was via China. So, I've told this story a fair bit so you know, but people listeners of the podcast might not have heard it but like I said I wasn't planning on leaving New York I was in a contemporary music quintet called Proteus 5 and we were

kind of going places if you like. Flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano ensemble. We'd won some competitions and we did this big Carnegie Hall debut and we're doing all these cool things. But then at the same time I was still auditioning for orchestras because part of me still wanted to, I enjoyed playing in orchestra too so I sort of wanted to try everything and actually going back to what I was thinking about a bit earlier too I think that it's so important for all of us musicians to be open to everything like you can have your eye on a prize or a few different prizes but be open to whatever comes your way right and, and so I would at Manhattan school this is pre- all the internet stuff that

we have now, God I'm not that old but anyway. There was a there was a job book and you'd go into this office where you'd open this big folder and if anyone wanted to advertise auditions or gigs or anything they would call the sort of job office at Manhattan School and you could go look through it. So, you know, every week or whatever I'd go through and look through.

BT – It's like Facebook.

DG - Yeah, exactly.

BT – The literal book.

DG - And actually, this is not how I find out about this one, but my point is you'd hear about auditions and in New York a lot of auditions happen, for festivals and summer things and whatever, and so you just apply for everything. And actually, I remember my first ever gig in New York, this is a funny story. There was a retired, actually, wasn't even retired, but this really old guy who played accordion. He was an investment banker, absolutely loaded and his wife had recently died, and he wanted to hire someone to play duets with him, clarinet and accordion. So I was like, "Yeah, I'll do that."

BT - Cool.

DG - And so he paid me \$15 an hour, and I went to his department, his deluxe Central Park West apartment. And, you know, if we went for an hour and a half, he'd pay me \$23.50. It was really, you know, quite specific. But like, you know, that was my first ever job, I was like, yeah, okay, I'll do that. I think you eventually organized a concert for him and he, for his friends and we played and anyway, so that was my first job. But how I ended up in China, I, like I said, my colleagues and I, my friends,

I wasn't planning on leaving. In the meantime, I'd gotten a job in the ragtime orchestra, so I was, I was quite, like I was surviving as a freelancer. It's quite expensive in New York, but I was able to...I was building up more and more work and I was New York City Opera and some other really sort of nice gigs and some chamber music gigs and stuff. But then I was out on my birthday. Have you heard this story?

BT - No, I don't think so.

GD - Okay. I was out on my birthday with some friends at a bar just having a drink or whatever and I met a guy, who I never met before, who was at the bar because he was friends with a friend of mine and we're like, "Oh, what are you doing, blah, blah, blah." And he was American guy. So, I played trombone in the Shanghai Radio Orchestra and I was like, "Oh, what's that like?" So, we talked and he was telling me all about it and then he said, "I said, "what are you doing in town?" And he said, "Oh, we're holding auditions down at Juilliard tomorrow." And I said, "Oh, what positions?" And he said, "Oh, principal trumpet, principal viola and principal clarinet." And I was like, and I said, "I didn't hear about it. I must have missed the ad in the book." And I said, "Oh, is it too late for me to come down?" And he said, "Oh no, that's fine. You can come." And I said, "Oh, what are the excerpts." And he said, "Oh, I don't know off the top of my head but I can call you in the morning and tell you." I was like, "Okay." So, the night went on. It was a pretty late night. I think, honestly, I got home at three or four o'clock like it was quite late. New York's, you know, nothing closes down. I was so tired. So, he called me in the morning and said, "Oh, these are the excerpts." And I'd played all of them before except for one. One of them was, yeah, I can't remember what it was, but one of them I'd never played before. And, but everything else was fine and Mozart and stuff like that. And so, he said, "Just come down at the end. You know, we've got a schedule, but we'll fit you in at the end." And I was like, "Fine." So, we're down and the audition was down at Juilliard. And I went down, and it was interesting kind of life lesson, because I'd done quite a few auditions before that, where I put a lot of pressure, there's a lot of nerves, and I really wanted them, and I had some success, but I never actually won a job.

And this, I didn't know what I was auditioning for, I hadn't really prepared, and so I went in with absolutely nothing to lose. I even rocked up and the first thing I had to play was Mozart, and I forgot my music, and I was like, oh, well, I guess I'll just play it for a memory. Which, of course, I could do, but I never had done. I wouldn't have, if I had the music, I wouldn't have done that, but I had to, so I just did. And I guess to date, I mean, I guess I was 24 or 25 at that time, I played probably the best audition that I'd played, because I just didn't care. I had just had nothing to lose and I was so lucky

that they asked for all the excerpts except for the one that I had not played before so that was I mean seriously it was just quite I don't know how that was just luck.

BT – Do you remember what that excerpt was?

DG - I do actually, it was Bartok concerto for orchestra.

BT - Oh yeah.

DG - Which is not a standard ...

BT – Yeah.

DG - ... audition excerpt which is why I had never played it and so then after I was packing up and that the conductor was there and the principal flute and the principal trombone I think he was and they said oh you know how serious are you about this job and I said well I don't know like I know nothing and he said because I think they're gonna offer it to you and I was like kind of freaking out a little bit but then they said 'oh look, come down to Starbucks and we'll chat' you know because New York there's Starbucks on like every corner so yeah that's sort of that's what happened I said look give me a week or so to think about it and they told me all about it and how it all worked and I went home and did a bit more research but I think I knew within a day or two that I just really wanted to do it was like an amazing adventure and so yeah so I sort of left three or four months later and my plan was to do it for a year and just have that life experience principal clarinet of an orchestra major city good money learning all the repertoire and then go back to New York even to the point where I left a lot of my stuff in a friend's garage in storage but I never went back. Yeah, I after one year it went so quickly. And I thought, gee, I've really enjoyed this. I can't imagine going back to being in New York again. So, I stayed another year. And then I auditioned for the Macau orchestra.

So that was the next little chapter in my life where they were starting a new orchestra.

And anyway, blah, blah, blah, blah, it's the same sort of stuff. But then I moved to Macau. And then after that, it was sort of like, moving back to New York seemed. New York seemed, was sort of more and more in the rear-view mirror, if you know what I mean.

So that's how I ended up leaving New York, which was, oh look, I think the right thing to do in hindsight. But a bit of a sliding doors moment, because had I never left, I'd probably be still there right now, you know.

BT - So the Shanghai Radio Symphony Orchestra, is that right?

DG – Yep.

BT - And then the Macau orchestra, are they rehearsing in English or Chinese?

like how did you get around that?

DG - Yeah, it's a really good question. Mostly in English.

BT – Ok.

DG - Certainly in Shanghai, they, I mean, it's a weird situation, but it's changed now.

But they hired like 13 or 14 foreign experts.

BT – Oh.

DG - You see. So, we were paid like at a different level than the locals. There's all these terrible things with it. I don't think happened anymore. So yeah, we had an English contract. And so, for us, if we were playing, it was in English. And they would bring in a lot of guest European or American conductors. So, they had to speak English. But like my second clarinet player, he didn't speak English. Like at all. So I learned some basic Chinese. It's like enough to have basic little conversations and stuff. I should have gotten better at it. Some of my colleagues got really good at it. But yeah, it was really fun. Like, I mean, I just tend to remember the good parts. I'm sure there were bad parts. But it was quite, yeah, bonding. And all my colleagues were really excellent, excellent musicians. You know, they're all now like the flute player. I think went back and got a job in Chicago Lyric Opera (and) was playing Chicago Symphony. The horn player is playing in this amazing ensemble in New York now. And the trumpet. Oh, where did he go? Anyway, they were really, really excellent musicians. And so, we bonded and, you know, had a great time.

BT - Amazing. Incredible. So you go to Macau, orchestra. Was that also for a year and then moved on?

DG - That was for a year. That was also fun, but it was right when we had the SARS outbreak.

Oh, no!

DG – Do you remember that?

BT – Yeah.

DG - And that was sort of originating in Hong Kong, which is right next to Macau. So, it was really amazing because we were, my good friend Evan Lewis, who's a bassoonist now in the Queensland Symphony. He came to Shanghai with me. We were in New York together and I said I should come and he came and then he got the job in Macau so he, sort of, followed me around. So, we actually like rented an apartment together and it was like on the beach and so all of a sudden all our concerts were cancelled So we were just like playing tennis and swimming every day and it was pretty amazing actually. But I remember playing when the concerts got back up and running, I remember playing a chamber music concert was a wind quintet concert to an audience all wearing masks and I remember that just walking on stage and it was completely full for only 500 people and they're all wearing masks. I remember walking out going, "Oh my god, this is so weird!" And then, you know, fast forward 20 years and it became a global thing.

But the Macau was good. It was a much better orchestra than in Shanghai. It was a chamber orchestra.

We had a chamber music series, which I was involved with programming and stuff, of course cause I can't help myself. So yeah, that was a really fun. That was 2003.

So, when that happened, yeah.

BT – Wow and then I assume after that, you came back to Australia.

DG Yeah, you know, I came back and played in the Melbourne Symphony for a year, Associate Principal. Which was also an amazing experience. You know, played so much incredible repertoire, E flat clarinet, principal clarinet. Bassett Horn.

So many different things, and then... and that's obviously where I met my wife, and then we formed ensemble liaison, and then my sort of true passion for chamber music came back. And then in 2005, as when Monash was looking for a new head of woodwind, and I was very lucky enough to get that, and so that's when I sort of started learning the world of academia. And it's just what I had wanted. I actually remember thinking about this the other day. I remember when I was in Canberra thinking I want Alan's job. I want to do what you do. I looked up to him, he was clarinettist of Australia ensemble, he was principal of Australian Chamber Orchestra, he was in the Canberra Wind Soloists and so he just juggled this lovely sort of balance of teaching a nice number of students with all this really, you know, wonderful chamber music. So that's what I always wanted to do. So, when this Monash job came along and then 12, 13 years later now, the Melbourne Uni job, it's just absolutely what I've always wanted to do. So, it's kind of all worked out really nicely.

BT - Amazing. I didn't realise the Monash job was 2005.

DG – Yes.

BT - That's quite a long time.

DG - Yeah, I think it might have been, or was it 2006? So, it might be something like that, but I was there for 12 years.

BT - Okay, yeah.

DG - And now Melbourne for eight.

BT - Yeah, right.

DG - This is my 20th year doing this.

BT – Amazing.

DG – Which is ridiculous.

BT - Because I didn't come to Monash to study with you until about 2012, I think it was. DG - Yeah, so I'd already been there for a while.

BT – Long time.

DG - And even that changed and developed and things are always changing, but then in that time so much of my focus was development of Ensemble Liaison and all that sort of thing. Which, sort of, we were just the other day, you know, that's been going for 21 years so we're sort of thinking back of all the different exciting adventures that we've had together which has been really you know quite cool.

BT - Amazing. You've really done a lot of, so you've got the orchestral side, the chamber music side, the teaching side. Another side I guess that maybe some people aren't familiar with is your kind of virtuosic sort of klezmer-y, jazzy style of playing certain pieces. Where did that come from?

DG – Really good question. Sometimes people ask me if I'm Jewish because I love klezmer so much. I'm not but I don't know where that came from. When I was in high school, I used to play some jazz. I wasn't very good at it, but I think when I first heard Rhapsody in Blue, I was like, "Oh, I want to learn how to do that."

So, I taught myself to do the slide in Rhapsody in blue in high school, just by doing it.

You know, when students sometimes come to me and say, "Can you teach me how to do that?" I'm like, "No. Just work it out." And I try and teach them, but I don't know. I just worked that out. And I remember being in a little combo that we would play jazz standards in the supermarket, like busking and stuff like that. And I, when it came to study in Canberra, I did actually consider doing jazz, because I loved it. I really loved it.

and I think I was probably good enough at it that if I studied it, I would learn how to do it properly. You know, I used to do improvising to the backing tracks and stuff like that.

So, I did all of that, but again it was all completely self-taught, which in a way with jazz I think is sort of a good thing. But that's where I learnt the style, because the style is all about listening and imitating and copying. And so, I just listened a lot and then I just did it. But when it came to studying at uni, I don't know, like I said before I knew nothing about a career as a professional musician in general, but I think I knew enough that it might be safer or slightly easier to be at classical musician. You know, I just sort of thought being a jazz musician would be fun, but even sort of harder to make a living.

And then I remember pretty early on, actually Alan Vivian, and he was actually quite good at doing commercial stuff as well. But in terms of the development of my sound and all that sort of stuff, he kind of has steered me away from at that developmental point, it can be quite a bit of a conflict to try and be doing both, and so I did less and less, and then I became less and less comfortable doing it, actually, and then I realized there are people that are really good at improvising and doing all that, so I sort of then felt a bit self-conscious, and I actually wish that I had done more of that, say, 20 years ago now, so that I was sort of more comfortable doing it. But then fast forward, I don't know, I studied with David Krakauer and I used to go watching play Klezmer in New York all the time, and I was like, "Ah, I want to do that." So I got advice from him on it, and his advice was to transcribe the solos and the style and the ornaments of some of these like "Klezmer Masters", and that's what he did when he got into it, and I did a bit of that, but then I also did that of his recordings, because you know he told I should transcribe these sort of masters from the 1920s, and I was like, "No, I want to transcribe you." So I started forming my own confidence in that through his influence, and then you just do it, then you just get stuck into it and do it, and I think I want to do more and more.

I absolutely love it, and I got to meet Giora Feidman, I played in Israel some concerts where he was in the audience, and I played the Shalom Aleikhem Rov Fiedman for him, which was terrifying, but I just sort of been listening to more and more of these people and getting influenced by them. I think I absolutely love all music. I'll never get sick of playing Brahms' quintet, but it's so nice to then, "Oh, let's have a go with this, and let's have a go at that." And I think we've only got so many years on this planet, and I just want to learn how to play music that connects me.

I've just been asked to do a concert... I'm so excited about this. I don't know if I can say this on the... I will anyway. I'm doing a concert next year with an orchestra and they've asked me to do... I don't know if we're even gonna do it, but I've started practicing it anyway. Do you know there's that famous Eddie Daniels recording from like the 80s, where he does the Solfegetto? Do you know that one?

BT: Yep, Soflegietto and then his jazz thing.

DG: And then he improvises and stuff. So, someone has transcribed his solo.

BT: I think I've got it, yeah, it's notated in a book that he's put out.

DG: Yeah, and so I think I'm going to be doing that next year and I'm like so excited because as a kid like I actually had already started learning that solo from his recording and because that's that sort of crossover with classical and jazz and I love that. So yeah, I'm so excited to try and whatever, however many years left I have playing the clarinet, I mean, I'll turn 50 next year,

So, I don't know if I can play for 10 more years.

BT – Of course you can.

DG - I'm starting to get tired, but I just want to explore new things and maybe try and get better at the old ones as well, yeah.

BT - Amazing. I'm really glad you mentioned Shalom Aleikhem Rov Feidman.

It would be remiss of me not to say for the podcast.

So, the Clasax end of year concert.

A student of yours, Emily Treloar, is going to play that piece in the concert and it's going to be amazing. And she's incredible at Klezmer stuff.

I know how a few rehearsals are ready and it's sounding really, really good. So, you better come along I think.

DG - Well, I was hoping to play that concert myself. And unfortunately, as I think I told you, I'm not available to play. I wasn't available to play. But everyone else that listens need to make sure they come. But Emily auditioned this year at the conservatorium. and she played the Shalom with also some classical pieces. And I've never heard anything like it, like I said to her, "You play that better than I do." And I've played that piece like 200 times, but I was, she's very humble, but it's amazing. And so, yeah, I've got to now, I mean, she might listen to this, but I've got to find this balance now of teaching her, because I want to help her develop that. But I also want to develop the classical side of things too. And as I said before, Alan sort of, you know, steered me classical only. With Emily, I want to try and develop both. And she's really, really smart. I think she'll be able to do it. But yeah, she's amazingly talented. So, thank you for giving her the opportunity to play with Clasax because it's really awesome.

BT - I asked her how she kind of went about getting into Klezmer and she said similar to what you were saying, she just started listening to and trying to transcribe David Krakauer our stuff.

DG - Oh, really?

BT – Because he's just incredible as well. Yeah, so good.

DG – He's just, you know, inspiring, the nicest human. We had him out to Australia. Were you there, for that?

BT - Yep, yep.

DG - Oh yeah, I remember that, yeah, and he's just the nicest human and we should try and get him back, for sure.

BT - We'd better start trying to wrap things up. I think we will get kicked out of here eventually. Yeah, but I wanted to ask about your instruments.

DG - Oh, yeah.

BT - Because you are a Backun endorsed artist.

DG - Yes.

BT - One of a few now in Australia, which is great. What was the story behind getting into and eventually selecting and playing these instruments that you're on?

DG - Yeah, I'd been aware of them. Certainly in America, because Ricardo was the first main endorser and they made the clarinet for him, the MOBA. So, I sort of aware of the instruments of my time in New York. But you know, like most people, I just sort of played Buffet because that's where everybody plays. And it's easier to sort of fit in. But it was, I can't remember what year it was. It must have been 2018 or 2019, I went to the Clarinet Festival in Belgium. Was it 2018? And all of the manufacturers are there with all the instruments and I was desperately overdue for some new clarinets and I thought, right, this is a good place to go. And I can just try everything. Because in Australia, as you know, it's hard to get stuff, try stuff. And I thought, you know, sometimes if you're thinking about a job in an orchestra, people have considerations and not so much anymore. Well, if the rest of the section is playing a certain type of clarinet. I need to then they're going to want me to play that same clarinet to fit in. Like I said, I think people are not so precious anymore about that. But that's maybe as a student, you're a bit worried to kind of go off the beaten track a little bit. But like I said, I think that that's less now. You know, there's more and more people playing Yamaha or Selmer or Buffet or Backun. So, it's becoming more. But certainly when I went to that festival with the plan of buying some clarinets, And it's, I had a completely open mind. So, at this point in my career, I'm

playing 98% chamber music and solo repertoire, I don't have to worry about what other people think. I just want to pick the clarinets that I feel really connect with me. So, I tried everything, and I was there for three or four days. So, I had lots and lots of time, and I met and spoke to all the people. And at that festival, that's when Backun had just released their Lumiere clarinet. And I had tried the MoBa before and as much as I liked it, it wasn't for me. It was quite hefty, fat kind of clarinet and it just, you know.

BT - Like Ricardo.

DG - I just, yeah, it wasn't, I just sort of didn't feel comfortable for me and sort of flexible enough. And I tried the Lumiere and I was like, oh my god, like just instantly, especially like the A clarinet. I was just like, oh my god, this just, you know, I just was like, I have to have this. And like, I just knew, and then I still went and tried, you know, like when you're trying cars, I knew deep down, that's what I wanted. But I still went and kind of tried all the other clarinets. But I just knew. And so that's when I met the team, Morrie and Joel and the team at Backun. And so, in addition to the clarinet being wonderful, they're just so supportive. And that's what I love. Like they care very much about looking after their artists and their sort of development of the clarinet and the technology. They're always trying to make it better. Where some of the other companies have been doing it the same way they've been doing it for 200 years. Where they're really trying to push the envelope all the time and it's fantastic and so I've since then met like so many of their other wonderful artists like Jose Franch Ballester stairs become a good friend of mine and he's come to Australia a few times and I've gone and done things with him.

We did you know the Mendelssohn concert-piece in Spain with an orchestra together and all these, sort of, cool opportunities that have come because they're you know really, really supportive. So yeah, so that's sort of how it came about and I can't wait to try their new essence clarinet. I haven't tried it yet.

BT - I was going to say, they've got a new one now.

DG - Yeah, yeah for Anthony McGill. So, I haven't tried their barrels yet and clarinet but I'm certainly excited to and then their bass clarinet. I have tried that and it's really stunning actually with Michael Lowenstern, they made that. So, yeah it's I really like being part of the, you sort of feel like you're part of the team, you now? I enjoy that so that's how that all came about.

BT - Fantastic. I'm so glad that you found your, your fit, your golden you know what is it?

DG - My voice.

BT - The glass slipper?

DG - Yeah, yeah exactly, It's your voice and it's yeah it's a unique voice and I know it's I find it really special.

BT - Amazing yeah for any of the like gear heads that want to know, what about mouthpiece? What mouthpiece are you on?

DG - So I'm on a Backun mouthpiece, I'm on the Vocalise G, which is, they've got, what are they? The R, the G and the H, so the G is the sort of middle of the range sort of facing. I love it. I think for years I played a VanDoren M13 Lyre, and before that actually a Kaspar for the real gearheads, you know, like they're sort of very vintage American mouthpiece, but that was a bit temperamental so then I moved to the M13 Lyre, it was just easier to play, but quite similar to the Kaspar, but I've never been a big gearhead, so I'm not someone that's trying a new mouthpiece every week. I just, Alan was not like that at all, Alan was just like, play that and get good at it, and I've taken that. I've just never been into all of that stuff. So, I've tended to just play what I've got and make it work, but then when Backun brought out the, the vocalise range of course they sent me some to try, and I first played the R model, because it was very similar to the M13. And I just instantly felt so comfortable on it, because it felt exactly like the M13 Lyre, but just better. You know, so it wasn't a change for me, because I'm not good at changing, like even with the clarinet, it probably took me two years to get used to it. Like I'm just not good at being flexible, that's how I am. But when that mouthpiece came, I was like, wow, this feels exactly the same in terms of my mouth shape, but the sound just had more ring to it, which is what I love. And then so a few years later, I switched to the G, because I sort of gotten used to the R, but then the G just gave me a little bit more projection, a bit more oomph. So that's, yeah, so that's what I'm on now. I've been trying all the other new ones, which I think are all fabulous, but none of

them are connecting with me more than what I'm currently using, so. And I use a VanDoren V12 3.5 on it. And my current ligature is one of these Eddie Daniels, I can't remember what it's called, is it just, oh expressions?

BT: Expressions.

DG: Yeah yeah yeah. Again, they ... I'd been using a Silverstein Hexa which I love, I think they're amazing, they're ridiculously expensive but they're really really good, I got one of those at that festival as well, amazing ligatures. But then the Eddie Daniels people kind of encouraged me to try them and I was like, actually, I really like this.

So, again, I don't get too worried about my ligatures, but this is what I'm currently using. I really like it.

BT - Excellent. So, this big international ClarinetFest that you went to, it sounds like we need to have one in Australia, I think.

DG - Yes, let's talk.

BT - Get everyone together.

DG - I have been thinking about that.

The international festivals never been in Australia, has it ever been in the southern hemisphere?

BT - Probably not if it's never been in Australia.

DG - I think we need to try and make it happen.

BT - Excellent. David, thank you so much for your time. And do you have any gigs coming up that you want to plug really quick?

DG - Oh yea, I don't know when this is going to come out.

But on Monday the 22nd of September, so I don't know if that's too soon for this podcast to get released. But that's the one I'm very excited about.

We're doing Beethoven septet, which is one of my absolute all-time favourite pieces with Ensemble Liaison and guest Dale Barltrop from the Australian String Quartet with the exact same ensemble last year we did Schubert Octet, which is my all-time favourite piece. And we liked it so much that it was like let's bring the same group back together to do Beethoven next time. So that's Monday night, 22nd of September, at the Hanson Day Hall at the Conservatorium, but you could sort of find out about it on the Ensemble Liaison website. So yeah, definitely check that one out, but then I've got, what else is coming up? Sydney people, we've got the Australia Ensemble's last concert at the end of October. Dvorak Wind Serenade. So, I'm very excited about that cause I've got five of the Melbourne Uni students coming up to play with the Australia Ensembles. Sort of 21st of October or something like that. And then in November I'll be doing a national tour with the Australian Chamber Orchestra. So, that would be very cool to be performances all over the place of a really, really interesting program, it's a bit of a cabaret show, I think. So, yeah, I don't even know what we're playing yet, but hopefully I'll find out soon. So, quite a few things between now and the end of the year.

BT - Excellent. So, that's fantastic. I'll try and edit this really quick, so I can get it up.

Thank you again so much. And for listeners, watchers, viewers, check out all the links to everything that David's mentioned. I'll put them in the show notes for this episode and stay tuned for episode 6 which will be with a saxophone specialist, TBC. So, thanks again so much, and see you soon.

DG - Thanks Brendan, thanks for having me.

BT - No worries.

END TRANSCRIPT