

Harry J Brabec ~1927 - 2005

Professional Background

This document, which originates at <http://TheDrummerDrives.com>, is excerpted from the Appendix of the book, *The Drummer Drives! Everybody Else Rides—The Musical Life and Times of Harry Brabec, Legendary Chicago Symphony Percussionist and Humorist*, a memoir and biography by Barbara Brabec. [Visit Amazon](#) to read the book's glowing five-star reviews and purchase the book.

Author's Note: Harry never had occasion to need a formal resume of his entire life's work experience, so I had a difficult time after his death in trying to reconstruct his working life and music activities year by year. I began by pulling out all the bits and pieces of information he had shared in his nostalgic letters, added information from my journal notes and scrapbooks, and then turned to his scrapbooks, which included other letters and copies of work contracts. Orchestra archivists provided me with details about his tenure with the Civic, Chicago Symphony, and National Symphony orchestras, and I prevailed upon many of his friends to help me piece together his past before I met him.

I'm sure even Harry would have had a hard time coming up with the exacting details I managed to pull together here, and I'm just as sure that he quickly would have pointed out where I had erred in making assumptions about some periods of his life before we met. I also know he would forgive me for any errors I may have made.

- **Graduated from J. Sterling Morton High School in 1944.** While in school, Harry performed professionally as a marimba soloist, at community functions as a member of the school's bands and concert orchestra, and as a jobbing musician in the area.
- **Civic Orchestra** (Chicago Symphony's training orchestra), 1944–1945; and Grant Park Orchestra in the summers.
- **Chuck Foster Orchestra**, February 1945 to May 1946. (May have gone back to Civic as an extra playing timpani; perhaps played Grant Park in 1946 as well.)
- **National Symphony Orchestra**, Washington D.C. Premier percussionist (June 1946 to April 1949), working with conductor Hans Kindler during the regular seasons. During the Symphony's summer Watergate season, he worked with conductors Richard Bales (1947) and Howard Mitchell (1948).
- **Grant Park Orchestra and Lyric Opera.** In the off seasons of the National Symphony in 1948–1949, Harry played with the Grant Park Orchestra (June and July) and the Lyric Opera in Chicago (September–November). He continued to play with both orchestras off and on until the mid-eighties.

- **Wayne King Orchestra**, 1949–1951. Toured with the band and played “The Wayne King TV Show,” broadcasted from Chicago.
- **NBC Studio Orchestra**, Chicago. On staff part-time in 1949–1951 when not working with Wayne King; on staff full time in the latter part of 1959–1960 until Studio closed. (During these periods, also apparently did extra percussionist work with the Chicago Symphony, Grant Park Orchestra, Lyric Opera, and some jingles and recordings at Universal.)
- **Chicago Symphony Orchestra**. Section percussionist (1951–1952); principal percussionist (1952–1956), working with Rafael Kubelik, Fritz Reiner, and many guest conductors; extra percussionist (1957–1965). Assistant stage librarian (1966–1968), and stage manager (1968–1971) who also performed as an extra percussionist during this period.
- **Activities unknown**, 1957–1959. This is a blank spot in Harry’s working life. No records available to indicate whether he played anywhere at all during this period of his life. Believed to have been doing part-time menial work of one kind or another for awhile. Also worked as a salesman for Proctor & Gamble for about a year.
- **Full-time jobbing musician in Chicago**, 1961–1965. Did recordings, worked as an extra man with the Chicago Symphony, Grant Park, and the Milwaukee Symphony; played the Lyric opera, the ballet, and other entertainment events in the city, plus the Shubert and Melody Top Tent theatres (1962–1965) before going back into the Chicago Symphony in 1966.
- **Teaching in Chicago area** (percussion classes and private instruction): North Park College (1963–1966); Maine Township North and South High Schools (1964–1965); Northwestern University (1966).
- **Walt Disney World Marching Band** and drummer in other Disney venues, 1971.
- **Freelance musician and teacher**, Orlando area, 1972–1973; taught percussion classes at Valencia College for these two years and had a few private students as well.
- **Silver Dollar City**, Branson, MO, (1973–1974). Coordinator of the City’s annual fall “National Festival of Craftsmen. On the faculty at the School of the Ozarks for the 1974 summer term.
- **Independent Crafts Show Producer**. Produced Busch Gardens’ “International Crafts Exposition” (1976–1977); and crafts festival for Marriott’s Great America Theme Park (1978).
- **Freelance jobbing musician**, Chicago area (1978–1982).
- **Springfield Symphony Orchestra**, General Manager, 1982.
- **Barbara Brabec Productions** (1982–1995). Office assistant and manager of the company’s mail order division.
- **Freelance jobbing musician**, Chicago area (1984–1995). Member of the Windjammer’s Circus Band (1981 to mid-nineties); and the Bensenville/Wood Dale Concert Band (1982–1992); retired from performing in 1995.

FROM THE BOOK'S BACK COVER . . .



Harry J. Brabec (1927-2005) was a percussionist and virtuoso snare drummer greatly admired by his peers not only for his talents as a musician, but for his keen sense of humor and gutsy approach to life. His name became legend when, at the peak of his career as Principal Percussionist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1956, Fritz Reiner dismissed him for purely personal reasons, effectively destroying his career and leading to the failure of his first marriage.

Barbara met and married Harry in 1961. Beat by beat in this autobiographic narrative and biography, she tells his comeback story as a freelance percussionist in Chicago in the sixties, then flashes back to his career before they met before going on to tell how her career path and their marriage changed when life forced Harry to move in new entrepreneurial directions in the seventies and beyond.

The Drummer Drives! offers a unique view of a colorful period of Chicago's musical entertainment history that is spiced with romance, drama, and Harry's wit and humor. The book revolves around the author's lifetime of journals and Harry's scrapbooks and nostalgic letters, which are filled with historical "music biz" stories and remembrances of the days when he was playing with the big bands and doing recordings in Chicago; his comments about many of the musicians, entertainers, and conductors he worked with; his thoughts on being Czech; his love of good food, fine books, record collecting, band music and the circus; and how he felt about getting old and being forced to lay down his sticks because of ill health. The book also includes colorful anecdotes shared by many musicians who knew and worked with Harry.

There is much to enjoy in this informative and humor-laden memoir, but you may also find yourself tearing up at times as you read this honestly-told story of the author's unusual life journey with a man who was "no ordinary Joe," an individual so complex that she was still trying to figure him out after nearly 44 years of marriage and five years as his widow.

Barbara Brabec is the author of several small business books. This is her first memoir.

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Visit the book's product page on Amazon.com and check the images for the book's Table of Contents, or download it on the book's companion website, <http://thedrummerdrives.com>, along with the free Book Sampler offered on the BOOK page.

Thank you for passing this document on to others who might be interested in the book. – Barbara Brabec, [Barbara Brabec's World](http://BarbaraBrabec'sWorld.com)