

## Peter Magadini Oral History

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives  
50 Oak Street  
San Francisco, CA 94102

Interview conducted March 14, 2016  
Tessa Updike, Interviewer

## **San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives Oral History Project**

The Conservatory's Oral History Project has the goal of seeking out and collecting memories of historical significance to the Conservatory through recorded interviews with members of the Conservatory's community, which will then be preserved, transcribed, and made available to the public.

Among the narrators will be former administrators, faculty members, trustees, alumni, and family of former Conservatory luminaries. Through this diverse group, we will explore the growth and expansion of the Conservatory, including its departments, organization, finances and curriculum. We will capture personal memories before they are lost, fill in gaps in our understanding of the Conservatory's history, and will uncover how the Conservatory helped to shape San Francisco's musical culture through the past century.

### **Peter Magadini Interview**

This interview was conducted at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on March 14, 2016 by Tessa Updike.

### **Tessa Updike**

Tessa Updike is the archivist for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Tessa holds a B.A. in visual arts and has her Masters in Library and Information Science with a concentration in Archives Management from Simmons College in Boston. Previously she has worked for the Harvard University Botany Libraries and Archives and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

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## Peter Magadini



*Peter Magadini*

As a percussionist/drummer and acclaimed educator and author, Peter Magadini has played with some well-known artists including: Diana Ross, George Duke, Mose Allison, Sonny Stitt, Chet Baker and John Handy. He has also played percussion with the Berkshire Music Festival Orchestra at Tanglewood, The Toronto Symphony and the Fromm Festival of Contemporary Music at Carnegie Hall. In addition, he has performed as a studio musician in the US and Canada and has been featured on several recordings. His latest recording is called “the Pete Magadini trio – outside in the present” and was released in 2016 on the Quadrangle Music label.

Mr. Magadini holds degrees from both the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the University of Toronto and counts among his teachers drummers Don Bothwell, Roy Burns, timpanist Roland Kohloff, and North Indian tabla master Mahapurush Misra.

He is also the author of more than one critically acclaimed books including: The Musician’s Guide to Polyrhythms, voted 6th on Modern Drummer Magazine’s list of the 25 greatest drum books.

In addition, Peter has taught drumset at the Brubeck Institute (University of the Pacific), McGill University and Concordia University (Montreal) plus The Jazz School (Berkeley, Ca.)

**March 14, 2016**

**UPDIKE** This is Tessa Updike, and we're in the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's archives. It is March 14, 2016, and we're doing an interview for the Conservatory's Oral History Project with Peter Magadini. So Peter, thank you so much for coming in and speaking with me today.

**MAGADINI** Yes, thank you for asking me! I'm so glad the Conservatory's doing this – checking up on what the alums have been doing with their careers, and how they relate their progress to their education at the Conservatory. That's a great thing, and I applaud you for it.

**UPDIKE** Thank you. I'm going to start out by asking you to tell me about your early history – where and when you were born.

**MAGADINI** Well, briefly, I was born in Massachusetts, in the Berkshires (the home of Tanglewood) in a little town called Great Barrington, Mass. My Italian grandparents had come over from Italy and settled there. My dad met my mom in high school – at Searles High, which is still going, by the way; they still have graduates graduating from Searles High. My dad was a veteran, he flew in the Pacific. When he returned we lived in the same town for about five years, and then they moved to California, to Palm Springs.

**UPDIKE** And what were your parents' names?

**MAGADINI** Ruth and Charles Magadini.

**UPDIKE** What did your mother do?

**MAGADINI** My mother was first a housewife. I remember when I was a kid, we traveled by train to see my dad at various Air Force bases, and saw him when he came home on leave. I have recollections of traveling around by train during the war. Then when they got to Palm Springs, my dad decided to go back to school on the GI Bill, so he enrolled in the University of Southern California. What's unusual about that is that Palm Springs is about 120 miles south of Los Angeles, and we only had one car. My mother needed the car to work as a waitress at the local steak house (actually, it was a pretty well-known steak house) and my dad hitchhiked to and from Los Angeles every weekend: back on Friday nights to be with the family, and back to school on Sunday nights. He did that for four years – pretty amazing. And he became a well-known structural engineer in his career.

**UPDIKE** That's very interesting. Were your parents musical?

**MAGADINI** They were musical. They introduced me to several things when I was young – one was *Peter and the Wolf*. They had a series of albums, I think maybe 33 and 1/3 had just come out – I remember listening to the Boston Symphony play that piece of music over and over and over, it had such a big impact on me. I’m still ... why wouldn’t you be a huge fan of Prokofiev and his music? They also liked to swing dance, and so they played a lot of swing music. When we were still living back East, they would go out and dance to some of the very historically well-known important jazz bands – one being Fletcher Henderson. I remember my mom telling me one year, maybe in the ‘80s, “Boy, we liked to dance to that Fletcher Henderson band, they had such a good beat.” I thought, “Yeah, they probably did – with Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker, and some of the people in the band who all became jazz legends in their own right.” That carried over to me a lot – having that around the house. So they introduced me to music in kind of a naïve way, but it was just what I needed to light the fire.

**UPDIKE** Who was your first music teacher? Did you first start taking music lessons in school, or did you have a private teacher?

**MAGADINI** In school. In Palm Springs, at the grammar school I went to – Katherine Finchy School grades one through six. You could start in fifth grade playing an instrument, and I started on snare drum in the school band. There were about ten of us playing percussion in fifth grade, but by sixth grade there was only a couple left. I continued, and if it wasn’t for school band directors we wouldn’t be having this conversation, for sure.

**UPDIKE** Do you remember the first time you played in public?

**MAGADINI** Absolutely. Katherine Finchy’s school band, marching in the Palm Springs Rodeo Parade, with my white shirt and my new jeans and my snare drum hung over my shoulder. It was amazing! An amazing gig. I couldn’t have been more excited.

**UPDIKE** What was it like marching with the snare drum? Was it easy?

**MAGADINI** You know, I was on such a high ... I’m sure it didn’t weigh anything to me. I probably could have marched twenty miles with that thing that day. Boy, it was terrific.

**UPDIKE** What kind of music did you like to listen to as a child, growing up? I know that you mentioned *Peter and the Wolf*, but were there favorite things on the radio that you would listen to, or other records that you loved to play?

**MAGADINI** When I was a teenager, my parents moved to Los Angeles, because my dad graduated and got a job with an architectural firm as an engineer. So we moved to L.A. and now it was in the middle '50s and there was a lot of rock and roll just starting to be born. Being in L.A., which is a media city, there were local TV shows. There was a show in L.A. called the Johnny Otis Show – Johnny Otis had an hour a week where he'd have the best blues singers and blues bands you could hear anywhere in the world. I loved that program. But I also listened to Little Richard and Chuck Berry, and was totally into those guys; they had a major influence on me. I found out later that Little Richard was from New Orleans. I had a conversation once with Earl Palmer, who became a very well-known L.A. studio drummer, and we started talking about the influence of where that New Orleans beat came from. I had gone down to Brazil, and I had noticed that the drummers in Northern Brazil were playing the same kind of second-line groove as they were playing in New Orleans.

I called Earl Palmer, because I knew he was from New Orleans, and I said, "Earl, I just got back from Brazil, and I'm hearing the same beat from their music that became the Brazilian samba, as I'm hearing from New Orleans that had a big influence on our jazz!" I said, "I can't make that connection." He said, "Pete, it's real easy. The Portuguese slave traders had only two places they stopped. The easiest places for them to get to were Northern Brazil, and New Orleans in North America, and that's where those indigenous people were dropped off. That's where the connection is." (Earl Palmer's was an African American drummer.) I said, "Wow, that's fascinating. I used to listen to Little Richard, and some of those things were on his records." He said, "They should be – I'm the drummer!" I don't know if he played on everything, but he certainly played on a lot of them. That was a big influence on me.

**UPDIKE** Who were some of the percussionists that you knew of when you were growing up?

**MAGADINI** This is a great question. So, we're in L.A., and you asked me about my mom and dad and music. One night, they took me to the Hollywood Bowl, me and my little brother, and we heard the Hollywood Bowl Symphony Orchestra – maybe members of the L.A. Philharmonic, I'm not sure. I think they were playing some kind of pop concert. The Hollywood Bowl has terrific sound, and the percussionist who got up to play the snare drum – (of course, I'm still playing in school bands) this guy just blew me away. I thought, "I've got to do that! That is my job. I want to be that guy." So a percussionist had a great influence on me. I don't know who he was – I wish I did.

**UPDIKE** Do you remember what they played?

**MAGADINI** I don't remember, but it was terrific. I was turned on.

**UPDIKE**                   How old were you?

**MAGADINI**               Maybe thirteen. That was just so appealing to me. I loved the way he played; I could see he was a master. Like I said, Hollywood Bowl has great sound, and the sound of that snare drum was so ... right there and right on. And his technique was flawless. For a kid whose total training is in school bands, and only owned one snare drum, it was enough for me to appreciate a master.

**UPDIKE**                   And how did your parents feel about your love of music, and your wanting to be a musician?

**MAGADINI**               I'll tell you ... there was a period in junior high school when I noticed the cool kids weren't in band. I decided that if I was going to be a cool kid maybe I shouldn't be in band either. So I took a semester off band; I was no longer in the school band in Robert Fulton Junior High School in L.A., and I missed it ... I didn't have a gig anymore. I didn't realize that it was so important to me. So I joined an after-school marching band that did nothing but march in a parking lot after school, and march in parades – but at least I was playing. And my parents bought me a very nice drum – a brand new Slingerland marching snare drum. So they were always supportive. They didn't really get it, but they knew I liked it, and it seemed to be something that I wanted to do, so they always supported me. So I got this drum, and played in this band, and all the band did was march in parades. We actually marched in the Rose Bowl parade – that's a long haul for a fourteen-year-old kid. But it was cool, I was playing again, and shortly after that I was back in band in school.

**UPDIKE**                   And when was the first time that you were a paid musician?

**MAGADINI**               So now we jump to Phoenix, Arizona. This was in 1955/56 – my dad starts with a firm in Arizona, and my parents buy a small house. I get to high school, and the first thing I start doing is trying to identify with ... I'm from L.A. and now I'm in Phoenix, Arizona ... wow, what a different place. The school's different, the kids are different ... they're very Western-dressed.... There wasn't this urban groove that I was used to, so I had to find my own way. I started going out for sports teams – it was something I thought I could do. They were offering it, so I did it. But the other thing I did was hunt up the band director right away, and told him I was from L.A. and played in school bands, and would like to be in his band. Well, I was really lucky again, I had an excellent band director. A professional violinist who since became (and he's still perhaps doing it) the conductor of the Sedona Chamber Orchestra in Sedona, Arizona: Clarence Shaw. So I joined the high school band. This band got me started playing some serious concert music at a pretty high level. I still was a poor reader. I played a lot by ear, but usually got it if we played it a few times, and the guys helped me out a bit. I had enough going where I could still be the section leader. Then when I graduated, he gave me a small

scholarship to study privately, and that's when I had my first private teacher and my life really changed. That was in 1959.

But during that time, to answer your question, I played in a rock band. We had a rock band out of Washington High School, and we got really busy and made a lot of money. We played high school dances. We were called the IV Rockers – there were four of us, so it was Roman numerals, and of course Ivy League was the cool thing at the time, so we were the IV Rockers. From the IV Rockers, when I graduated from high school, I started doing studio work in Phoenix. Some big producers were coming down from L.A. – Lee Hazlewood and Lester Sill – both very big names in the pop music world at the time, especially later. But they were coming down to try to get that high school sound, and were looking for some kind of hook. I became the drummer for a lot of 45 records and things. I was pretty happy with the way things were going. I was also starting to play country music in country bands in nightclubs, so I had that in my DNA somewhere too – I guess from living in Arizona it sort of rubbed off after a while. But I hadn't really thought much about jazz – I didn't like it that much, to tell you the truth. Percussion – yeah, I was still there, but I had sort of drifted off into the drum set by then.

My first teacher, Don Bothwell, was the guy who said, “This is what you have to do.” He was very patient with me, and very well-schooled. He's still alive. (I have a new album coming out, and I can't wait for him to hear it because it's my best recording and I know he's going to love it.) He changed my life. He didn't force any music on me or anything, at first we just got my technique and reading up. I started becoming that guy that I wanted to be – that Hollywood Bowl snare drummer – I started seeing a path to that. But at the same time we worked at drum set drumming. He was both a percussionist and a drummer, so he was ideal for me. You have to remember, in school bands, I'm always a percussionist – never a drummer. I didn't even join the school dance band, I wasn't interested – I was too busy playing out by that time. But I was always interested in being a percussionist.

**UPDIKE**                      And when did you start studying with Don Bothwell?

**MAGADINI**                That would have been 1959, when I graduated from school.

**UPDIKE**                      What was he like as a person?

**MAGADINI**                He's great. He's one of the most beloved musicians probably in the Phoenix area. I just went down last July; they gave him a big reunion and I flew down for that. There were about 200 people there, ex-students and so forth. He went on to teach at a junior college and had had a lot of students – both as a band director and as a percussionist and drummer. But then he was only teaching percussion and drum set – he's from Michigan, and he had just arrived in the Phoenix area. I was just amazed at how well he played – kind of a Shelly



Manne, Joe Morello kind of drummer. (Joe Morello with Dave Brubeck – *Take Five* – that guy.) He’s that kind of technician, so I was very fortunate to have a guy like that in Arizona. That’s the kind of teacher you might meet in New York or L.A., but you’re fortunate to have him in Arizona.

**UPDIKE** Did he have his studio at his home?

**MAGADINI** I took lessons at the music store – Lederman’s Music Store – they had studios there. That’s how I started teaching: he got so busy with students that he asked me if I would teach the beginning students. I was honored to teach at the music store, I was into it. I think that’s how you really learn how to teach, is teaching beginners.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe his teaching style?

**MAGADINI** Very patient. Meticulous, but always interested in your ideas about expression. He made sure that your technique was solid in all areas – both the percussion end of it (the snare drum) and the drum set end of it. His choice of material I still use today, it works so well. And he always bolstered your confidence. The carrot ‘... you don’t quite have it yet, but don’t worry, you’ll get it’! He got me practicing averaging four hours a day, five or six days a week. I figured that’s what it took. I was starting late to be a serious contender so that’s what it takes. If you’re starting private lessons at age sixteen/seventeen, you’re going to have to put in that kind of time, there’s no way around it. And I didn’t grow up in the streets of New York ... there are jazz musicians who say, “Oh, I never took a lesson! I hung around listening to the best there was every night for a few bucks, and hanging out and hearing what they did.” Well, that’s a way to do it ... but you’re not going to do that in Phoenix! That’s why I eventually went to New York.

**UPDIKE** What instruments did you have at home at that point?

**MAGADINI** A nice snare drum, a drum set, and a piano.

**UPDIKE** Did you take piano lessons?

**MAGADINI** I did not. It had no mallets ... I didn’t have that third dimension in my playing yet. I was so busy. I’m thinking I’m doing pretty well with my professional life. People are saying, “This guy’s a natural! Listen to him play that rock beat! Listen to him play that country beat!” The country guys and the rock guys were all giving me thumbs up, and I thought, “Well, it looks like I’ve arrived.” And one day my teacher said, “I want you to listen to something,” and he put on a Max Roach album. I listened to that, and I went, “My life’s over. I’m going to be doing nothing but practicing now!” That’s when my four hours a day kicked in,

because I heard it for the first time. I really heard it. There are a lot of drummers around who get a lot of attention who probably haven't had those experiences and don't play at that level. But boy, once you hear it, and you can hear the depths of that music ... you realize you're sort of just swimming on the surface ... but you need to put on some scuba gear and go down there and check it out. That's what I did. I also got a scholarship to Arizona State University in '60/61. I stayed there for one year, but I had enough marching.

By the way: the marching band was, as half-time shows go, as good as any other Southwestern universities were ... but just a little side note, we had one ace in the hold that nobody else had. We had Harley Judy. Harley Judy was a baton twirler – an enigma. We never even saw her except at the games, and then we would be hidden in the dark and Harley Judy would run out into the middle of the field in a gold lame outfit. We would play night games in Arizona because it's too hot to play in the daytime. She'd throw those batons up so high they'd escape the spot lights in the stadium – then come back down and she would catch them while spinning and doing flips and grabbing the batons as they came down – it was something to behold! Where with most bands, the people left their seats during their half-time shows – very few left the stands during our half time shows. I have no idea whatever happened to Harley Judy. I had never seen her, except in her outfit, and only at shows. She never rehearsed with us, and I never saw her on campus.

**UPDIKE**                      So you studied with Don Bothwell for a year?

**MAGADINI**                  Two years. I stayed with him while I was at Arizona State as well and the next year I moved to New York City. I drove until I saw big buildings, got an apartment, and went for it! I was nineteen. I went down to the Henry Adler Drum Shop – he had a drum school upstairs. I called one of my drumming heroes from one of my books that I used with Don – Jim Chapin. He said, “Gee, I can't take you – I'm going to Europe for a couple of months.” But he said, “I recommend you call Roy Burns.” So I gave Roy a call; I had known about him and he was really a great drummer (still with us). He now heads one of the biggest drum head companies there are. I started studying with Roy, and studied with him for almost a year in New York. And I also started taking mallet lessons while I was there – Doug Allan was my teacher.

I met a young man [Larry Morton] who had been playing in major jazz festivals with the Marshall Brown Youth Band. They opened the Newport Jazz Festival several years in a row. They were these young, great jazz players from New York City and the East Coast. They were all kids – I think you could only be sixteen or younger. He had played in this band, and somehow we met. He was now seventeen or eighteen, and we started hanging out in New York. He was born there, so it was great – we'd go to all the major clubs, and listen to all the major people. A lot of times people would recognize him and bring him up on the bandstand! I'd go – “God! I'm here in the Village Vanguard – one of the biggest clubs known in the jazz world anywhere, and

they're calling Larry Morton up to play a tune with them!" And he could hold his own, he was good. He said to me, "You've got to go back to school." I said, "Really?" I'm down here in New York ..." I had found a gig in a bar, I was taking lessons, I had a place to live. I said, "Well, if he's telling me that, maybe I should think seriously about it." I tried to get into school in New York. I started with Hunter's College because I could afford it, but I didn't have enough language requirements, and some of the requirements they had to get into the school I didn't have my from high school. So I had to make up some classes, and I decided to come back to Arizona and make those classes up at junior college, and then I came up here. That would have been 1962.

**UPDIKE** Did you know of the Conservatory?

**MAGADINI** I did not.

**UPDIKE** How did you first hear of it?

**MAGADINI** Here's the deal. I had arranged for an audition at San Francisco State, because in my percussion studies I had heard about Saul Goodman, who at that time was the solo timpanist with the New York Philharmonic, and I had been studying from his timpani book. I also knew that one of his prize students from Julliard, Roland Koloff, was playing with the San Francisco Symphony and teaching at San Francisco State. So I arranged through San Francisco State an audition to come up and study at the school and with Roland. I drove up from Arizona for my audition, all excited – I had never been to San Francisco before. I had to find the school ... I showed up for my audition, and nobody's there! No one. I finally tracked down a choral teacher and told him the story, and showed him my letter. He said, "I don't know what happened, but maybe I could listen to you play something, and I could tell them." So I played a snare drum roll for him on a stool, and he said, "Well, it sounds good to me." I thought, "This is not my idea of an audition...."

I'm heading back down 19th Avenue, and I saw the sign for the Conservatory! So I pulled in. The semester hadn't started, it was July or August, and Dr. Laufer was there in his office. I said, "You know, I drove all the way here from Arizona to audition at San Francisco State, and they somehow had a mix-up on my time. I'm a guy who's waiting to go to school, and I'm not too impressed with them anymore. What's going on here?" He said, "Well, what do you play?" I said, "I'm a percussionist." He lit up – he said, "Oh! A percussionist! We need one, we don't have any." So we talked a while, and he said, "Let's see if we can make it work." I didn't audition – I didn't play anything for him – but I had some letters of recommendation, and my grades, and all that. They got back to me and said, "We'll accept you in the school." I had come to study with Roland, but they still had a very good teacher here, Peggy Lucchesi. She was also in the Symphony, and she was great. I studied with her for only a few lessons, and then she was

going to have another child, and said, “I’m sorry, I can’t go on, but we’ve asked Roland Koloff, and he said yes, he would take you here too.” So I wound up with Roland at the Conservatory, all to myself.

**UPDIKE** Oh, my goodness. You were the only percussion student at the time?

**MAGADINI** I was – the whole time I was here.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe Roland as a person, and as a teacher?

**MAGADINI** This is a different kind of individual, here. You have to remember; now I’m with one of the finest symphonic percussionists in the world – especially on his instrument. Anybody who studied with him will attest to that: he was a fabulous teacher. You had to play things right – really right. Not ‘pretty close to right’ or ‘close enough right for what you’re trying to do with your career’ – this was as right as it can possibly be, no matter what you were working on. He was intense sometimes; not in an angry way, but you could see that he had done this – he had been there, he had done it. He wanted you to be there, and he’s showing you how to get there. I just felt honored to be his student, it was just incredible to be studying with this guy. I’m sure there are great timpanists, and guys who studied with people who equally influenced them, but this was my guy – this was the musician I wanted to study with, and now I was studying with him. I was already playing plenty of jazz and drums – I didn’t need to go to a school that had a jazz department, I was already doing that at a high level by this time. And I had already played with pop musicians and country musicians – I kind of knew my craft by then, well enough to be a professional at it. So I would play at night, (I had a child by then) and study with Roland and go to school at the Conservatory in the daytime. That’s what I did until I graduated. It was a great experience being at the Conservatory – fabulous.

**UPDIKE** What was the character of the school like back then?

**MAGADINI** Well, it was small, maybe 75 students only. But what did we have was 75 serious students. Everybody was dedicated to what they were doing. It was also considered a fairly expensive school at the time, \$500 a semester! I think the tuition at Arizona State was \$250 a year. So the character of the school was serious students that got along with each other with an equally serious faculty. I didn’t have any competition from any other percussionists – I was the only one so didn’t have to sign up for a practice time; it was all mine, anytime I wanted it. We had professional percussion instruments, we had an excellent marimba, a good xylophone, the timpani were excellent – I can’t remember what they were, but they were symphonic caliber.

**UPDIKE** And you played in the school orchestra?

**MAGADINI** I played in the school orchestra.

**UPDIKE** Do you remember who the conductor was?

**MAGADINI** Baruch Klein.

**UPDIKE** Could you describe him?

**MAGADINI** A nice man, a good musician, a cellist (he and I were both playing in the Oakland Symphony Orchestra one season while I was still in school). He made the most out of our orchestra at the Conservatory. We didn't have a full orchestra; we were more like a chamber orchestra with percussion. We sounded good; I thought it was an OK orchestra. Some people doubled – some of the pianists who played violin as a second instrument would play violin in the orchestra, or any other instrument they might play. I don't remember having another percussionist, so everything we played had timpani parts, and that was pretty much it.

**UPDIKE** And where did the orchestra play at that time? That was before Hellman Hall was built.

**MAGADINI** We had a space for recitals and for the orchestra to play. It was sort of where Hellman Hall is now, but it was more like – you had to set up folding chairs, and we had a stage. We had a rehearsal spot too, for the orchestra, in the school. We weren't lacking. You have to remember, it wasn't a big school, so there weren't hundreds of people milling around looking for places to practice – everybody had a practice room. A lot of emphasis was put on individual instruction – private lessons. Pianists ... you'd see them at the beginning of the year, and you'd only see them come up for air now and then. They'd be in the practice rooms and they'd paper off the windows so you couldn't even see who was in there. My fellow graduate friend Tomoko [Hagiwara] was one of them, and I hardly ever saw Tomoko – she was always coming in or out of a practice room, that's when I saw her.

**UPDIKE** And where did you live when you were studying at the Conservatory?

**MAGADINI** Oh, various places. I first came up here by myself, and I got a room with a lady who was renting rooms. I did that, and then I had a room-mate and lived on McAllister Street with him. He was a bass player, and he wound up working down at the repair shop on Market Street for string instruments – Cremona Music, I think it's called. Somewhere along the line I got married, and then I lived in Stuart's place – Stuart Dempster. He bought two flats, and was going to rent one. I said, "How much are you going to ask for it?" He said, "\$125 a month." I said, "I'd like to have it," and he said, "It's yours!" So that's how that started – Stuart was my landlord. I could practice all I wanted, he didn't mind. I said, "I'll practice under the house," and

he said, “Why do that? Just practice at home.” I said, “OK! You don’t mind?” No – the trombone was going on all day upstairs, and the drums downstairs.

You know, I met George Duke here at the Conservatory, and we started a trio. And I also got a call from John Handy to play with his band, which was a pretty big deal, and I did that for a while. We started playing major clubs in San Francisco. But I was also the house drummer at the Hungry Eye, which was just one of the things that sort of happened when I was working around the city. That was late in the Hungry Eye’s history – then they had moved from North Beach to Ghirardelli Square. They had built the Ghirardelli Square so the Hungry Eye was the star of the show, it was a big, beautiful theater. And it didn’t work out – it stayed open for a couple of months, and then it closed. It was a real shock to everybody.

**UPDIKE** Let’s talk about some of the other students who were here at the same time. Let’s start with George Duke. Do you want to talk about how you first met George at the Conservatory, and how you started a friendship and an ensemble with him?

**MAGADINI** I had one year’s credit from all my other credits at junior colleges and Arizona State, so I came in as a second year student. I was a third year student when George came in, and he was so elevated that he wound up in some of my third year classes. I thought, “My God!” Dictation ... we were in the same musicianship class ... some people could get the rhythm, some people could get the melody, some people could get the harmonies ... but very few people could just write it all down as they heard it the first time and be all perfect. That was George. He was just an incredibly gifted guy, and just a nice person. So we just naturally gravitated towards each other. I don’t know what our first conversation was, but we just got together and started doing some playing. We liked the way we played, and decided to form a little group. One thing led to another and it became the George Duke Trio. As you may know George eventually went on to play with Frank Zappa and gained a lot of international attention in doing so.

A lot of people go, “Wow! Frank Zappa with an African American musician who comes out of the jazz world ... what a strange combination.” I don’t know if that crossed everybody’s minds, but I think it crossed some people’s minds. How’d that happen? I’d say, “That’s easy!” George majored in trombone in school, he played in all the New Music Ensembles, and he was totally into it. So you go to Frank Zappa, who’s this very experimental composer, who mixes in his rock lyrics and rock-based songs, but they trip out into some very serious 20th century music ... that’s George! He had been doing that for four years, and he was good at it. He liked it. So that was a natural fit for him – that was no problem. And could George read and play all of those difficult polyrhythmic parts? And did he have any trouble with them? No, not at all! He could kill it. He was a well-trained musician, and that’s because of here [the Conservatory]. Me too – I wound up playing with Gunther Schuller at the Fromm Festival of Contemporary Music that came from

Tanglewood in '68 – but the nucleus of the percussionists, we went on to play in Carnegie Hall and I was pretty good at it, because of what my training was here at the school. I still like outside music – I'll call it 21st century music now. That's still where it's at for me!

**UPDIKE**                   Where are some of the places that you would perform with the George Duke Trio?

**MAGADINI**               Well, we performed at a club called the Half Note Club for several years.

**UPDIKE**                   Where was that?

**MAGADINI**               On Divisadero and Hayes. It's a place called The Independent now ... it's still there, but The Independent is a big, large concert space. The Half Note was an intimate club. It was almost all African American clientele, but some of those customers became really well-known later on. Alex Haley was one of our customers ... Danny Glover ... half the baseball or football teams that played here and came to town. Wilt Chamberlin came in a bunch of times and we got a photograph of us, the trio, with Wilt. I'm on my drum stool standing next to Wilt with my arm around his shoulder – but I'm standing on a three-foot drum stool! It looks like we're both seven feet tall. George and John [Heard] are down below at the piano. We played there four nights a week for 3 years.

**UPDIKE**                   Could you talk a little bit about the atmosphere of places like that at that time – in the '60s?

**MAGADINI**               Well, you know, it was funny because that was in the midst of all the stuff going on in Haight Street – the bands that were coming on, and so forth. I really thought that someone was going to come in and discover this young giant of a pianist and his trio. We got a little bit of press now and then if we went out and did a festival or something, but it took George going to L.A. for him to really get known. I went to L.A. as well and a lot happened for me as well – it was a big change, at the time. Now, there is not so much live music as there was then, but in those days, in San Francisco, we did have journalists and people going and checking out new bands, and the new sounds, and giving a lot of press to the Haight Ashbury bands that were starting to make it. But bands who were playing serious music in black clubs – well they (journalists) just didn't drop around like they would to some of the other places.

But this trio was really good, and George would book the Conservatory auditorium, and we would sell tickets – we would do the publicity, everything. We'd work on a concert for months, play it, have a room full of people ... everybody paid \$5 or \$10 or something per ticket. We'd make enough to make twice of what we might make in a week at the Half Note, and play something we really worked hard on. And that would be the end of it – we'd be on to something

else. We did three of those since I had been with him. But also, I started playing with some of the new music ensembles at the conservatory after I graduated, because I was now teaching here. The Robert Erickson *Piano Concerto* – we did that – George played trombone in that. Loren Rush played piano – he was one of my teachers and was a professor here at the school, and a composer in his own right. Alan Johnson conducted that – I used to have a recording of that performance, and I don't have it anymore, unfortunately.

**UPDIKE**                    Could you talk a little about some of those composers who were here at that time? Maybe starting with Robert Erickson?

**MAGADINI**                I wasn't a composition major, so I didn't know everybody unless they were one of my professors – and he was one of my professors. He was a big supporter of me and what I did. He was so different from Sol Joseph, who was this fabulous proponent of counterpoint, and species counterpoint. He was so engrossed in it that if you were in his class, you were going to be engrossed in it too – you couldn't help it. You couldn't sit in there and think about anything else – you couldn't possibly! I didn't even read bass clef when I got into his class – I had to learn on the fly. But I did, because I didn't want to have anything wrong on my assignments. When you got up in the front, he always played your music – if you had a mistake and he would say, “You like that? You like that sound?! Parallel fifths! Parallel octaves!” [mimics playing the mistakes] ... “Nooo! Nooo! It was an accident!” But he got me thinking about music in an entirely different way; I just loved studying with that guy.

Then I get with Robert Erickson, and anything goes! His musicianship class was hard, but as far as playing music you liked, or writing something for him, he was almost the opposite of Sol Joseph. They were a good contrast for each other – that was a very interesting combination, those two. But I got to know his music by playing it. I thought, “Wow, this guy's amazing! He's so ahead of so many people.” After you spent some time working with his compositions ... he's just a major composer. I think they realized it in whoever brought him down to San Diego – because he started that program at UCSD. That's still going, and that's all based on Robert Erickson's influence. He was a very interesting person, and a very easy person to know – very casual, and a real artist. And you're studying with a composer who's composing. However, he didn't have time for people who were just doing it because they wanted to get a degree from the Conservatory. If you were in school for that, he'd find you out, and you wouldn't want to be in his class ... he could make it hard on you. He'd call you on that. But if you're here because you love it, and you have to be here, he'd help you any way he could to bring everything you had out of you as a musician. That's what I liked about him.

**UPDIKE**                    Margaret Fabrizio told a story about the performance of *In C* at the Conservatory. Is there anything that you'd like to say about that?



**MAGADINI** That was kind of a mini *Rite of Spring* performance ... it goes on and on. The audience is with you for about fifteen minutes, and then they start to get a little restless. Maybe you're a third of the way through... People started leaving ... some. There was some activity in the audience, and some audience members were getting angry with them and moving closer to the stage so they could hear. One student at the school (I had graduated by then so he wasn't one of my peers) I remember him screaming, "I can't stand it!" and bolting out of the auditorium. And somebody tried to close the curtain on us. Then the curtain was opened, and somebody came on stage and starting dancing.

**UPDIKE** This was all during *In C*?

**MAGADINI** All during *In C*.

**UPDIKE** Did you work at all with Terry Riley before the performance?

**MAGADINI** Not that I remember. Loren Rush put it on. I had played with Terry Riley – he plays some jazz piano, and I had jammed with him now and then when I was a student. I didn't even know him as a composer at first, I just sort of knew him as a local piano player that I played with once in a while. He may have come to a rehearsal, but I don't remember him being there, offhand. But yeah ... if you were there, you would have remembered that concert! For sure.

**UPDIKE** How were new music performances ... were they written up by critics a lot? Were they usually received by audiences like that?

**MAGADINI** No ... *In C* ... that perhaps can tax some listeners. But normally the audiences knew why they were there.

One thing that really sticks out in my mind – talking about performances at the school – one year, while I was a student we all had mostly first chair orchestra players as private teachers – Roland Kohloff being one. Not sure how it happened, but one year Dr. Laufer wound up conducting *L'Histoire du soldat* by Stravinsky. That has a real demanding percussion part. My teacher, Roland, was the percussionist. The piece calls for one percussionist and six other instruments. It has very syncopated parts on different percussion instruments [sings the rhythm]. So Roland had to re-schedule a lesson and had asked me to come by the rehearsal – they're rehearsing at school, and Dr. Laufer is conducting. Then while piece is going on, he has about a ten bar rest that's going by [sings] and in that ten bar rest he says, "OK, I'm going to change it from 1:30 to 2:30, and we'll make that on Wednesday. Is that OK?" I said, "Yeah, that'll be fine." Then he goes right back at it – comes in perfectly at the next percussion entrance. I was like ... "Come on, did that really just happen?" That was amazing.

**UPDIKE**                    Would you like to talk about your time playing with John Handy?

**MAGADINI**                He had a band that was playing around town in some major jazz clubs, and he asked me to play. Charlie Hayden was the bass player, and Freddie Red was the pianist. We were playing the Both And club, and then we went down and did a concert in Palo Alto somewhere, I think it was Stanford. It was recorded– it never got released, unfortunately. It was for World Pacific Records. I don't know how John Handy had heard about me, but he did. And when I returned to the Bay Area in 1997, he has asked me to play with him a few times since; for a few important gigs. I'm honored. He's in his eighties and he's still playing great. He has a lot of retrospectives that he can talk about, but I still think of him as a guy who's still on the scene, playing at a high level.

Teachers at the Conservatory ... we had our fair share of the academics and languages. Senior Menche, who was quite a character (he was an opera singer from Italy, and he was also the Italian teacher) so I took Italian with him. We had a history teacher who came from somewhere (other institution) else to teach here at the school. I liked the class, it was done very well. We had a chef ... plus a little cafeteria area, and this man lived at the school and he lived with his wife out behind the Conservatory where they had a set of buildings that they also used as the women's dorm. Mr. Olson. Nobody would go off campus to eat because it was so good here.

There was a violinist, Haig Balian, he was a student from Armenia who was a friend of Zubin Mehta and his brother. He left here (San Francisco) to become one of the first chair violinists with the Los Angeles Philharmonic when Zubin Mehta was conducting. He also had been the first violinist in our orchestra – so you know we had a really good first violinist!

**UPDIKE**                    Was there anything that you wanted to say about Stuart Dempster?

**MAGADINI**                Stuart was a trombonist that was very, very into the new music scene. Pauline Oliveros wrote a piece once just for him; I went to that performance, it was amazing. He is probably one of the best known modern music trombonists there is; certainly on the West Coast.

Charles Burrell, string bass. Charles was the only African American playing in the Symphony orchestra here, and he was George Duke's uncle. George was very proud of Charles Burrell. He finally left to play with the Denver orchestra, but I remember him.

We had our librarian Mr. Biskin. I had a class with him too; Performance Practices, I think it was called. If you went to school here you knew Mr. Biskin, because you had to use the library. He

was very helpful, and he knew his stuff. He wrote program notes for the Symphony – he had that much knowledge.

I had composer Loren Rush as my piano instructor – he’s still with us, we have become friends, and I still see him. You know he taught all of us, who studied with him, a great deal about the actual mechanics of playing the piano: hand position, posture, arm weight. He really made me realize that piano is also a percussion instrument because you strike it.

**UPDIKE** Do you remember ever meeting Lillian Hodghead?

**MAGADINI** I did not, but after Robin Laufer passed away, then Milton Salkind took over. He was a classy guy. He had his own high level performing career – one piano, four hands, with his wife. They were performing at important events. It was kind of cool to have a performer as the head of the school. By that time I was no longer a student, but I was teaching the percussion ensemble and drum set. The Conservatory had few percussionists by that time, and I also taught a beginning Music Theory and Fundamentals class; after two years of Species Counterpoint and a year of Form and Analysis with Sol Joseph I was good at that. I remember one of the well-known bands, Country Joe and the Fish – their bass player was in my music fundamentals class!

It was also the year of the mini skirt ... Milton Salkind had a secretary who wore a mini skirt. I’ll tell you, every time she went out to the hall to check the mailboxes or something, there always seemed to be a head peering around to see if she was out there. The mini skirt era was funny at the Conservatory – it didn’t mix with the school. It did and it didn’t, but some of the girls were wearing short skirts. I’ve never seen that happen again, it was just that little window about ‘65/67.

**UPDIKE** Were there any student groups or organizations that you remember?

**MAGADINI** There could have been, but I wasn’t involved with them. There was a little political upheaval at one point when I first got into school, but I really stayed clear of that – that didn’t interest me at all. Some people thought it was important, but I can’t even remember what the problem was. I don’t remember if there was anything after that that ruffled anybody’s feathers. Everybody was serious about what they were doing, and the teachers were so serious about what they were doing. That’s why you go to a conservatory. If you want to be in a sorority or a fraternity, go to some other school, don’t come to a conservatory. That’s crazy – you can spend that time practicing!

**UPDIKE** I know you've talked a little about the jazz scene in the Bay Area at that time – some of the clubs. Is there anything else that you'd like to say about that – or even the percussion scene in the Bay Area outside of the Conservatory?

**MAGADINI** Outside of a few shows I played as a percussionist ... at that time I was pretty much a drummer, but I was a drummer with a percussionist background, so I always felt that made me a better drummer. I looked at the instrument not only as a drummer would look at it, but also as a percussion instrument, and what I can do with it. Occasionally I would play with new music groups, or free music, or free jazz or something, which allows you to do that sort of thing with your instrument – what kinds of sounds you can get from it, and all the different parameters that the instrument offers, which is a great deal. But as far as in the city itself ... there were a few major jazz clubs at that time, and you could go any given night and hear a major artist perform at one of these clubs. I heard John Coltrane many times, and Miles [Davis] many times here in San Francisco. Thelonious Monk, and Bill Evans, and Mose Allison, who I played with for many years – I just produced his last album, it was released September 15th 2015. That will be his last album, because he's not performing any longer.

There were some local groups – Denny Zeitlin is still with us. He used John Heard and myself for a few gigs when we were playing with George Duke; that was the only time John and I played together with someone else. We played with Denny Zeitlin at the Trident in Sausalito for a few weekends. I also played at Mills College – a new music concert with the oboe player from the Symphony at the time was the conductor ... Louis LeRoux, I think his name was. He was conducting new music programs. Then I performed another one at Cal Berkeley with another conductor, and that was a straight percussion gig as well. So I was getting calls from time to time to play with some new music ensembles. I remember there were a lot of people – they had big audiences.

From what I played as a drummer I could bring over to the new music, and what I learned as a percussionist, I could bring over as well. Improvising was nothing new to me – that's not a challenge to me. When you're playing new music, sometimes it calls on that ability. The Conservatory allowed me to be that, and hopefully now they have new music ensembles as well. That's so important, I think, to be a complete artist.

**UPDIKE** Absolutely. Are there any local composers from that time who you remember working with?

**MAGADINI** Warner Jepson, Loren Rush, Terry Riley, Pauline Olivaris, Darius Milhaud, and Robert Erickson, of course. Then there were several composers who came into the school just about the time I left. Robert Helps was one but unfortunately I can't remember all their names, but some were still here when I came back in '97. It's rough now, because there are

less and less avenues to perform new music, and less and less listeners. We're just getting wiped away with pop music, and pop artists, and electronic sounds and simple beats. Students don't have band directors in school anymore, and there's no chance to have any dreams in school anymore – it's all taken away from you. All the things that are so important to artists ... the artists are still going to school, but they're not given the tools like I was, it's really a shame. I think that's the real challenge right now.

I wrote a book called *Music We can See and Hear*. It was the ability to have a schoolteacher who's teaching in a public school to have the courage to learn enough about the parameters of music to teach it to their children. I always figured that one of the big stumbling blocks we have about teaching music to people is that for some reason people think that you can only learn music by learning how to read music, and the only way you can learn to read music is to sit at a piano and learn how to read notes. So unfortunately until we have the ability to do that, we can't move from there. So what happens is a lot of people drop off, and I think that you can teach a heck of a lot about music, and about how music works, without having to have someone go through the ordeal of learning how to play an instrument. People who play instruments are always going to be around – that's never going to change.

We need more listeners, that's the problem. We need a way to make it simple for schoolteachers. So I wrote this book, and it identifies sounds that are around us in musical terms, and objects that are around us in rhythmic terms. You can look around this room and see rhythm all over the place – steady rhythms, uniform rhythms, un-uniform rhythms – random rhythms. If you get into random rhythms, kids can understand that and they get real creative with it. Random sound, random rhythm – organized sound, organized rhythms ... high and low pitch, and loud and soft. There are a whole lot of things you can teach to kids to open their ears up. I found out that if you take them from about kindergarten to third grade, and work with them, it will stay with them. Because they're open to anything – they're very abstract! What happens is, we take all that abstract away from them, and then they think – “Well, I guess I have to be like everybody else.” I think that's where we have the biggest problem. Music conservatories aren't going away, and composers aren't going away – what's going away is audiences.

**UPDIKE**                      Would you like to talk a little about your *Polyrhythms* book – and then we'll talk about some of the things you've done in your career since school.

**MAGADINI**                 Bob Erickson told me about the Society for Eastern Arts having Ali Akbar Kahn coming to California Institute of the Arts; a summer program put on by this group that worked out of the University of California, Berkeley. So I signed up for a tabla course and spent six weeks studying with a tabla master. I'd never heard anybody so skilled at stacking rhythms on top of each other and playing in all of these different meters, and all these complicated Indian compositions. I was like, “Whoa! I wish I could do that. But I'm not going to do it on tabla

drums ... that's going to take forever." That isn't written out, it's all passed on from one generation to the next – that's why you have to study with a master to learn how these things work. He allowed me to stay after class with him, and we talked about polymeters.

Once I learned the concept a little, I thought, "Wow – this is easy. We can do this somewhat with our system of notation, but first we have to get to the polymeter." So if you have 3 over 4, you have two meters going at the same time. You can subdivide either one into quarters, eighths, triplets, and sixteenths. So we have all these new possibilities we can do with our time signatures that we aren't doing, because we're doing 1 to 1 ratio rhythms – dividing the quarter note. But how about dividing the quarter note triplet? Or dividing the half note triplet? Or subdividing a seven or a five? Once I learned that, I thought, "My gosh – it's all here! Everything is possible." So I started writing a book about it, and then there was a sequel to it. The first book sort of got musicians thinking about it – it dealt with the most basic ones, 1 ½ to 1, which is quarter note triplets, and ¾ to 1, which is half note triplets, and then 5, 1 ¼ to 1. The other one dealt with 7, 11, and 13 – 11 and 13 are very abstract, I call them dissonant polymeters. But the other ones are more consonant.

Other cultures have been doing it for a long time, but our culture is now doing it ... I'm hearing some musicians who have really gotten into it. What it does, is it allows you to have a much deeper relationship with rhythm than just the quarter note, it expands you on both sides. It becomes a very simple process to hear the subdivision of a quarter note. If that's all you have, you have kind of a narrow line that you're operating on. But if you can expand it, you're a much more comfortable performing musician – even if you never play one of these things. Frank Zappa – he used a lot of them in his music, as did Elliot Carter and some other modern composers. But I wrote the books ... I had a hard time finding a publisher, but finally a guy who published drum books (it's not a drum book, it's for all musicians) published it first, and now it's published by Hal Leonard Publishing. I'm a drummer, so a lot of people still consider it a percussion book, but I try to convince people it's for all musicians. John Schofield, a pretty well-known jazz guitarist, came up to me once and said, "I liked your book." And Frank Zappa – I sent him a *Polyrhythm* book once and said, "I never heard back from you," he said, "I already had it!"

**UPDIKE** Our next question is broad – I'll ask you to pick some highlights from your career – some of the musicians you've worked with, memorable performances, tours, recording projects – just some of the big things that stand out to you since you left school.

**MAGADINI** Buddy DeFranco – I did an album with him – an award-winning jazz clarinetist, considered by some to be the best, and by me too. I became Bobbie Gentry's drummer and musical director at one time, and that was sort of my country and New Orleans roots came in handy with that gig. Al Jarreau was our singer at the Half Note Club, that's where

he started. He and George went on and collaborated on a lot after that, in L.A. Some guys in Canada that I played with – Joe Sealy, Sonny Stitt for a couple engagements, that was enlightening. A great jazz saxophone player. Also, Buddy Tate, I did an album with him – he was with the original Count Basie band – played well into his 80s. It was a great experience to play with him. Chet Baker – I did a couple of engagements with him. George Coleman, who played with Miles Davis for quite a while – I got to play with him for two weeks in Canada. That was a pretty amazing gig too, he liked to play fast tempos. After a couple nights with him I could play any fast tempo he wanted. First I was worried about it, but after a while I got into it.

I played with Don Ellis – I subbed for the drummer who was going out on the road for a while – it was a band known for very contemporary jazz ... taking chances with music that nobody took chances with in jazz big-band before. Odd times, and different harmonies that people weren't using – that was quite a good experience, playing with him. Barney Kessel, a jazz guitarist I played with a lot up here – that was a great gig. Don Menza, who played with the Buddy Rich Band when I first heard him – boy, I'd never heard anybody play with the Buddy Rich Band like this guy did. As a matter of fact, after a concert when I first heard him, I didn't want to meet Buddy Rich – I wanted to go talk to Don Menza! He's on a lot of my albums, and he's still a great player, he's still doing it. Smokey Robinson – the only reason I played with him was because his rhythm section got caught in a snow storm, and I was at the time playing with Diana Ross, so they asked the Diana Ross rhythm section to go down to Disney Land and help Smokey Robinson's show out, because he was in a pickle. They had a big band, but no rhythm section. I think it was just me and a bass player who went down there. But here's where all my training and all my classical experience came in handy, because I had to sight read the Smokey Robinson show at Disney Land in front of a huge crowd. I'd never even heard the music before – it was just, "Sit down and play it." It went OK – he was happy. Jimmy Witherspoon – I played with him up here, a big time blues singer at the time.

And then while I was in Montreal the show *Les Misérables* was running – it was 1991, and it was doing well in New York. They had put it out on the road, but they wanted to start it over again from scratch in Montreal, because it was the first time they were going to do it in French and in English. So they picked a brand new bilingual cast in Quebec, and a brand new orchestra – nobody who had played it before. So we were learning it for the first time, and it was a pretty demanding show. They gave me some misinformation – they said, "We can't get all the set up that they have for New York into our pit. It's not big enough." They gave me a tape – "Listen to the show, here's the music, figure it out, and then you play it the way you want to, on instruments that will fit into this cubicle." So that's what I did, and when we started rehearsing it – we rehearsed it for a few days in the lobby of the theater, and then we moved down into the pit, and I got called out to the front after rehearsal was over. Now, I had been working on this for months, because we didn't have a lot of time to rehearse it with the whole orchestra. They called me into the theater and said, "We're not hearing the drums the way we're used to hearing them

in New York.” I said, “What are you talking about?” They said, “We’re very sorry, we gave you some misinformation, because we can’t have it like it is now.”

**UPDIKE** Oh, no.

**MAGADINI** That’s what I said! I said, “What are we going to do?” They said, “Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to bring up one of the subs from New York. He’s going to play it, then you’re going to play it. We have two previews, and then the dress rehearsal, and we’ll see how it goes for that dress rehearsal.” So I had three days to relearn every move that I worked out. Every drum had to be changed – everything had to be changed. I was under tremendous pressure. The first time I did it, he had copious notes ... then he did it, and I had some notes ... then I did it again, and he still had a lot of notes. Finally, the last day, he was either going to fly out or he was going to stay – I knew that was going to come down. I was supposed to play the rehearsal, and he was going to do the dress rehearsal. I thought, “I need to hear him do it one more time.” So I said, “You do the rehearsal, I’ll do the dress rehearsal.” He said, “Really? Oh gosh, I had a couple drinks for lunch!” He said, “That’s all right, I’ve done it enough, I’ll be OK.” So he played it, and I got the chance to work on a few things. Mind you, this is just a Broadway show, but it was demanding enough – it was considered the hardest drum part for a show up to that point – at least the most demanding one I had. It called on me to be a percussionist at the same as being a drummer – that’s what I liked about the part. And so I got it down ... he flew away the next day, and my wife and I went to the opening night party. We were so happy that that little time of terror was over.

**UPDIKE** What an ordeal.

**MAGADINI** That really was an ordeal. I had to call on absolutely everything professional that week. After about three months I was going, “Why did I have trouble with this?! I could show the cab driver how to do this.” I knew it so well I no longer needed the music.

**UPDIKE** Do you have any favorite stories from tours that you’d like to tell?

**MAGADINI** The Diana Ross tour was interesting, because it was such a big deal – her first year as a soloist.

**UPDIKE** How did you start playing with them?

**MAGADINI** God, I was teaching at the drum shop in L.A., and after a lesson the owner of the drum shop (it was right across from the union on Vine Street in Hollywood) said, “They’re auditioning for Diana Ross this afternoon. You want to go do it? It’s not far from here.” I said,



“OK.” I happened to have my drums in the car, and I went to the audition. It was her and the conductor in the back of a little deli – they had a room back there they rented out for things like this. We played a couple songs, and I got the job! They called me that night. I said, “All right – great!” So that started that engagement, and that was a big deal because she had never played as a single before and it was a lot of pressure for her and everybody. We got this note – we were in Boston to open a show, and had been rehearsing quite a bit – “We want to see the rhythm section.” ... “OK ... now what?” ... “They’re not happy with the Supremes medley. They’re going to fly the Supremes rhythm section in to show you how it goes.” We were like, “Can you believe that?!” These guys were the nicest guys ever ... “Oh, this is so easy, Pete! It’s just this, and eighth notes on the high hat, and a rim shot on two and four. It’s simple.” It was just a little piece in the show that had to be done exact because she was known for these songs; it lasted about ten minutes. Then they flew away, and that was fine.

She was nice. We didn’t talk to her a lot, but I knocked on her dressing room one day, and I said, “People are getting us confused with the house band that’s already here. Do you think you could introduce your rhythm section?” I didn’t want to be playing with Diana Ross and be incognito – this was a big gig for me. She said, “No problem,” and after that she introduced us at the end of the show, which was nice. We flew into Las Vegas once, it was her birthday and Motown had a light metallic blue convertible Rolls Royce the tarmac – it was her birthday present. We’d go to parties once in a while, if they’d have some event Motown wanted her at – if we were on the road, they generally invited us to go. I wound up at one talking to Marvin Gay. I didn’t know it was him, I was just talking to a guy about everyday stuff. We both knew we were musicians, but we hardly talked about that. I said, “That was a nice guy, who was he?” – “Oh, that’s Marvin Gay.” So it was like that, working with them. We did all of her TV shows, and specials and stuff. She kept on us retainer, so when we weren’t working we got paid and could do whatever we wanted, but we were on call. They’d use it once in a while – “Tomorrow we’re flying out at midnight – be at the airport.” That would happen sometimes. But after being on the road ... I’m glad I did those gigs, but I was getting further and further away from playing music that meant a lot to me.

My first wife was from Canada, and I’d been to Toronto and had some shows up there – I thought, “This is happening up here.” There was just a lot of work. I thought, “I’ll apply to the university and work on a Master’s degree. If I happen to get busy in Toronto, great – if not, at least I won’t have wasted my time.” It was an experiment, and I wanted to be back in school to continue percussion. I had another great experience up there at the University of Toronto – great teachers, they had put together a stellar program and I just happened to walk into it. The two guys teaching percussion became the head of the group Nexus – a really well-known percussion group out of Canada. John Wyre was a timpanist with the Toronto Symphony. I wound up subbing with the Symphony and they offered me the job. I said, “No, I don’t think so”. I still didn’t feel like I was ready to do this full time.

Percussionists never know what's going to be thrown at them – you're constantly learning a new instrument all the time. They're the same instruments you know, but you've got to put this one there, this one there, hit that one with this, put this thing down, pick that up, remember where you put that, grab this, drop that so you can catch that ... there's a lot of that, and it takes a lot of experience to get comfortable with that routine. Except for the timpanist – he's generally playing the same instrument all the time, but the problem there is you'd better have some great ears, because you have to tune those things when everybody else is in another key, and you have to keep track of where you are. And when you come to your part in the key that you've just tuned it to, you've got to be dead on. The really great guys don't use gauges so much. David Herbert was one of Roland's students who was with the San Francisco Symphony – now he's with the Chicago orchestra – he's just one of the greatest timpanists ever. He carried on where Roland left off, as far as I'm concerned. He still uses natural calf heads, which are affected by weather! Crazy. When I was going to school we had natural heads – we didn't have synthetic heads yet. On a damp day they're going flat, and on a hot day they're going sharp. You've got to constantly be at them, it's a big deal.

**UPDIKE** I think we've gotten to the end here. The last question that I'll ask you is – do you have any advice for young musicians or music students today?

**MAGADINI** Get yourself a *Polyrhythm* book. I'm serious – you should!

As for any other advice; not really. Anyone who goes to a conservatory to study music knows why they are here ... if they don't then they're in the wrong place. That's what I loved about studying the Conservatory. I'm so glad I had that mishap. It was fate, it really was. Thank you, it's been a great interview.

**UPDIKE** Thank you very much.