

**David Baldwin**  
Narrator

**Rob Hahn**  
Interviewer

**January 9, 2019**

**Al's Breakfast, Minneapolis, MN**

**DB:** I'm David Baldwin and I taught trumpet at the University of Minnesota School of Music for 44 years. Just retired last May, but I still have a few students this year. I'll be fully retired at the end of this semester.

**RH:** And I'm Rob Hahn. I'll be asking the questions. Today is Wednesday, January 9, 2019, and we are at Al's Breakfast in Dinkytown, Minneapolis, Minnesota. You came to the U in '74.

**DB:** '74.

**RH:** Yeah. What was your first impression when you came to Dinkytown, and what brought you here?

**DB:** Well, you know, I didn't start coming here until '78. A colleague of mine—we had our office just down the street here in the Music Ed building, which has since been torn down. I would pick up Martha Haley, who taught Class Piano, and we'd come to Al's. It was just really nice to get away from the university area and come here. It's a whole world when you come to Al's.

**RH:** How would you describe the camaraderie among the regulars, or maybe even the non-regulars here at Al's?

**DB:** Well, you just interviewed Doug and every time I walk in he has a fresh insult for me. I came in and he said, "Oh, hey, your parole officer was looking for you," so everybody turns. Another time I came in, I sat down next to a girl student and he said, "I hope you don't mind sitting next to an ax murderer." That's the usual. There are worse ones that I can't repeat.

**RH:** We were talking to Doug a little bit about some of the well known individuals who've eaten here. Who are some of the more recognizable figures or names that you recall dining with during the years?

**DB:** Yes. Bad question. I really don't—I haven't been here when the famous people have been here.

**RH:** Let's talk about the music element. You actually composed a piece about Al's Breakfast. What led you to do that?

**DB:** It's such an iconic place and I just thought, yeah, there should be a piece of music based on the situation at Al's Breakfast, so, yeah, in 1982 I wrote *Music For Al's Breakfast* as a five movement brass quintet and we played it many, many times. We made a CD and because of that I think I may be the only person that has a cup of their own who hasn't worked here. Usually you have to work here a certain number of years before you get your own cup. It says "Professor Lips."

**RH:** How long, out of curiosity, did that take you to compose?

**DB:** I'd be guessing. Six months, you know. So then it was successful enough that I did another one in '84 and a third one in '87 and then did a concerto for euphonium in '92. That's what's on the CD: four large pieces for brass quintet.

**RH:** I know the music in some ways can probably speak for itself. Nonetheless, I'll ask you a question and hope that you can explain if possible. What were you trying to capture musically when you were putting pieces together as it related to Al's?

**DB:** Sure. I mean, the five movements are all named after usually something at the restaurant. The first movement is "Coffee" question mark. You sit down and it's usually, "Coffee?" and so forth. Let's see. One of the movements is "Here, Eat This." What Doug would say when he threw the food at you. I don't think you talked about this, but Doug would very often juggle back here and I have a picture of him on the CD. He's juggling a raw egg, a pancake, and a bottle of hot sauce, so it's always entertaining.

**RH:** Yeah. What was the reaction when you first performed it or recorded it and shared the recording with people, whether it was Doug or other regulars here?

**UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER:** Most of them said, "Is that classical music?"

**DB:** That's right. It was my attempt to write pop sounding classical music, so it would be up to somebody else to say how successful I was.

**RH:** What keeps you coming back?

**DB:** Oh. The food, seeing Doug. Allison now is the co-owner. Yeah. It's a wonderful atmosphere. I come here at least three or four times a week.

**RH:** Are you a guy who has the same thing off the menu every day or do you like to rotate it?

**DB:** I almost always have the same thing.

**RH:** And what is it?

**DB:** It's a scrambled egg with mushrooms and tomatoes and then usually orange juice and coffee.

**RH:** Now a little birdie told me this story. You can confirm if it's true or not. The joke goes—and I may be way off, so that's the value of recording something—that at some point you had some sort of bypass and the joke was, I think, that moving a little further away from Dinkytown to the West Bank, where the music offices are now, might have saved your life.

**DB:** All right. Yeah, I like that. It reminds me of the story that—because when I first came to Al's, Al himself would come in sometimes and I saw Al a number of times come in. I know he was in his 90s when he died and his story was that his longevity was because he never ate at Al's. But, yeah, I did have quadruple heart bypass in 2002 and the surgeon at that time said, "It's good for 10 or 12 years." I'm coming up on my 17th anniversary and it's probably because I eat at Al's.

**RH:** Anything about Al's or Dinkytown that I'm forgetting to ask that you want to add?

**DB:** Well, I don't know if you talked about the books.

**RH:** No.

**DB:** Yeah. Now, you can see 100 or so of these yellow books. You can prepay and then you don't have to bring cash or anything and they just mark it out of your book. I came in yesterday

and I had just taught a couple of lessons and the people paid me with a couple of hundred dollar bills, so I put a hundred dollars on my book. Now I'm good for a few days and they just take it out of the book.

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WATER  
LAND &  
LEGACY  
AMENDMENT**

