

nobody could understand it. What had happened – and the two French horn players knew it all along, was that the French horn sound, being a mass of harmonics, requires all these harmonics to be heard in their correct balance. If they're not you get a false note. Now the acoustic tiling, which soak everything up, had taken these harmonics away. In the end they had to cut the French horns out of the chord!

It gets worse for the mandolin. All mics should start recording at 14.7 pounds per square inch. In the bigger studios you'll find the mics don't activate till you get past that; anything less isn't recorded. You make a note on the mandolin and then move your finger back and you've made a grace note after the impact note. Now everybody in the studio can hear that but they can't in the witness box. You see, all mics, if they are to capture these delicate finger nuances, should start recording at a lower pressure. The guitar is a more fundamental sound, nearer to the human range, and the mic technique there appears to be satisfactory.

Hugo's parents had a totally different career planned for Hugo and his two brothers – tea planters in Africa where their father was a governmental medical officer. However, mass media, albeit in its infancy, interceded on their behalf and, for all Hugo's grumbling about microphones, it is to this instrument that he owes his musical life:

I was living as a little boy, in Alderney. I had come away from school at the age of eight – I never went back to school after that by the way – and because it was all the rage I made this crystal set. When I finally got it working and tuned in to a station the first thing I heard was a mandolin! I remember thinking "that's it, whatever that is that's what I like." You see, any boy at some period is like a boiler ready to be lit. Someone unwittingly puts a match to the boiler and fires him off in his imagination, and from then on you're not going to stop that boiler wanting to burst. They pick up the sound they love or thing they've been fired away to, and from then on they'll never let it drop, not if they're really keen boys. So, mandolin, trombone . . . anything, that individualism is now within them. You see that force in your greater artists any time; it's the inner strength they have that captures you.

Anyway I eventually found out what instrument that was and luckily there was a captain who was an MD and who also played the mandolin. I was able to have lessons with him for the first three years. I had already had keyboard at school from five years till about seven and a half. Now, the person responsible for lighting my boiler was Mario Pietra, the then virtuoso living in London and who happened to be broadcasting from Bournemouth. That sound had travelled 84 miles to be picked up by my crystal set.

Well, then I went off to study with Mario himself, on and off for seven years. Playing with him, recording with him, films . . . everything you can name – we were there.

Was the teacher as much a virtuoso as his pupil had turned out to be I asked. Considerably more. Virtuosity gets eradicated, the more you study music, that is taken away from you . . . we don't want that, all we want is music. Mario was such a virtuoso that whatever the piece was it had to be full of his cadenzas. And even in the famous *Serenade in Don Giovanni* he complained he didn't like the part at all, he had to have a great big cadenza before he started and then he'd break off in the middle for another cadenza and the singer would have to wait for him. And of course, they didn't like that in opera.

Although obviously a superior musician than his famous teacher I recognised a certain kindred spirit which might explain Hugo's own reputation for waywardness; turning up late, ticking off conductors – things like that.

It's true, I have this reputation. I have been awkward' confessed Hugo, 'So, if they can't have me they'll have to have next best . . . that's a terrible thing for me to say, isn't it. But you see, it's as simple as this: the mandolin's the mouse. Now if you want to kick something you don't go and kick an elephant, do you? – you go and kick a mouse. Maybe conductors thought I'll kick this little mouse; and boy, they've been sorry for it – Klemperer included. You mentioned Klemperer so you may as well get the facts right.

I was up at the Edinburgh Festival to play Mahler, and I was in the company of a professor of music at the University. And he said to me "There's no sense in you sitting through this lot, come with me and I'll take you round the University; which he did and managed to get me back in time. It came to my part and I played it,

and old Klemperer stops the orchestra and says, to nobody in particular "Mandolin? – it's in the score but I don't hear it." Such a remark is ridiculous because the scoring was of Mahler's *Song of the Earth*. Well, I stood up and said 'My dear Doctor, if only you would keep your orchestra quieter I could hear myself play – let along you hear me.' Speechless – he didn't expect it. Then I saw him in the coffee break and I went up to him and said 'My dear Doctor, you don't go up to a woman with an unborn child in her tummy and kick, do you?' "No" "Well don't do it to the mandolin player, it's the unborn child in music, you know bloody well it is, you wouldn't use those words in front of the orchestra otherwise. What I want is an apology from you. And don't go and try that again, you'll get a sharper remark back next time." "Oh well, I'm sorry" said Klemperer. 'Yes you will be because you're going to make the same apology in front of the orchestra afterwards.' And he did, said Hugo with some satisfaction. 'He shouldn't have made such a remark' Hugo went on, 'and the reason he shouldn't – and I know it was deliberate – was this: the orchestra was fortissimo against one mandolin. Now the intention of the mandolin being in that part by Mahler, I can only surmise, is that it gives him the opportunity of warming up. Also there are strict instructions in the score that all the fiddles must sound like mandolins. So whether Klemperer wanted to overlook that I don't know, but it was a direct insult.'

Hugo's frank appraisal of himself was not exaggerated; mandolin players are very thin on the ground – in fact he's the only one mentioned in connection with orchestral or ensemble work; and it must be tough for the other mandolin player, but is there enough work for another? I asked.

I'll give you a straight out answer to that. No. Although I've brought up a family of four mainly on my earnings, I've had to do other things in life, not menial jobs, but other jobs certainly. Engineering for one. I took it up as a hobby; I've been at it since I was eight – and that was sixty years ago; and I studied it at the College of Technology, Northampton. At that time my work was involving contracts worth a lot of money – a quarter of a million pounds I remember for one contract. But I found I was becoming schizophrenic so I made a choice and into music I went fulltime. But my wife goes to work, and if she didn't I wouldn't be able to survive. Freelance work for any musician isn't what it was. Whereas a fiddle player – that's the general instrument used – would have been employed three times a day ten years ago, they're lucky if they work twice a week today.'

Evidence of Hugo's engineering skill (and his inventiveness) is the string making machine against the wall in his practice room. 'I long ago became fed-up with the strings on the market; and besides, I can wind them to whatever gauge I want.' We were looking for some photographs to use with the profile – 'If you want one that show how I look when I'm working, take this' – and I turned up an old press picture of himself with the Russian born American composer and conductor Igor Stravinsky taken during a rehearsal for a concert of the composer's own music at the Festival Hall in 1958.

'That takes me back' said Hugo, taking the photograph from me. 'When he wrote the ballet *Agon*, he included mandolin and I was intensely interested, of course, and I actually had a three quarter hour interview with him and I told him that I was so grateful to have the Master behind the instrument. And he said he really loved the mandolin, and I said that's marvellous, but why only once? Apparently he had written for it before in an opera, and then finally *Agon* where the mandolin is the only instrument to carry all of the twelve tone row. In one movement the mandolin and harp are virtually carrying the piece.

'Whatever Stravinsky wrote had the master's touch and he is one of the people I most admire, in the modern compositional sense. He had all the old tradition and he never ignored that, or the beauty within him. He admitted that he was very commercial, and told me about the harmonica concerto which never came to fruition. He said "As you know there are quite a few in the world and they all want writing from me. But they're all so greedy; they only want it for themselves." I said that's understandable Igor and he said "Yes, but if I am to be commissioned I can't work for the lesser fee. I have to go for the greater fee. If they had all been good boys and got together they could all have had the concerto very readily from me. And how much would each of them had by now?" You see. Igor wasn't a fool, he knew his own value. Now, you may ask why I didn't commission him to write a work? Okay, if at that period – I'm talking about twenty years ago – if I'd have gone to the bank manager and asked him to lend me the money to commission a