

# Accomplished musician had start in engineering

By Eric Peterson

**Editor's Note:** The Daily Nebraskan will be printing profiles on the five UNL alumni who are at the university this week as a part of Master's Week, an annual event sponsored by the Innocents Society and Mortar Board. Three profiles will run today, with the final two in Friday's paper.

Frank Tirro, Yale School of Music dean and a jazz historian, started college at UNL wanting to be an engineer.

Tirro is here in Lincoln with four other UNL alumni for Master's Week, which gives students a chance to talk to someone who has done well in his or her field.

"I think engineering for me was a mistake in the first place," Tirro said, noting that his high school counselor had steered him into engineering as a major because it was "the good job area."

Tirro finished his undergraduate degree in music education, however, and he's been teaching music ever since, from grade school to graduate courses.

Tirro plays the clarinet and saxophone, but much less now than in the past. "I just don't have time for practice," Tirro said. "I just push people and paper."

Tirro started lecturing and researching years ago on Renaissance music, but American jazz has become an equally important study.

### Jazz great American form

"Jazz is maybe the greatest form of American music, and was the great popular genre from the '30s to the '50s." Tirro noted that great jazz music is still being written, although its commercial success faded by the end of the 1950s.

Tirro pointed out Miles Davis and Benny Goodman as two jazz greats who are still doing new work, although



Frank Tirro

Staff Photo by Dave Bentz

Goodman has worked with classical music as well recently.

"He's a great musician, and jazz was the kind of music he was most popular with and with which he made the most money," he said.

Music faculty should be aware of all genres of music and not restrict themselves to classical or Western European sources, he said. However, the need to specialize

limits how an instructor's ability to know all areas. "People specialize in the universities, and may know other genres than their own only superficially."

Job opportunities for students of music vary, Tirro said. Good string players have a very good job market, he said. "The orchestras sop up all there are."

Music educators face a more restricted field, Tirro added.

One large new job area in music is arts management, he said. "The financial and business aspects (of a performance's production) need to be handled by someone sensitive to artistic issues and who can deal with unions," he said.

Tirro said he has a high-powered faculty and interested students to work with at Yale. "There are always unfulfilled dreams," he said, stressing that scholarship funding hasn't been good enough.

### UNL faculty supportive

Tirro said he has good memories of studying at UNL in the 1950s. "I had very close personal associations with the faculty," he said. Tirro pointed out that university enrollment was only about 9,000 then, so it was easier to get to know a larger part of the faculty and student body.

"It was very supportive," he said. Most of his instructors are still on the UNL music faculty, and he has continued to hear from some of them.

"That sort of caring relationship that the music faculty provided me was just a great thing."

Tirro said that graduate study proved to be much more competitive. "You were much more on your own then. Graduate study is different and maybe it has to be."

Tirro said he still feels like a Nebraskan. He is originally from Omaha and said he still has a lot of family ties in the state.

This visit is Tirro's first campus visit in some years, he said, although he came back to UNL twice during the 1960s for musical performances, one of them a production of one of his compositions.

Tirro is married and has two children.

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*Sartor Hamann*

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