

## INTERVIEW

Pat Spencer: Tell us about your program: how did you choose these pieces for the NYFC listeners? What considerations will you have as you decide on the order of the works? Why do these pieces fit together?

When I came off the stage after playing my “Savage Aural Hotbed” program at the NFA convention in Nashville last year, Jayn Rosenfeld introduced herself and various NY flutists (you were also there, Pat) to me and said (exclaimed) “we want you to play this program for the flute club in New York!”. So that was easy!

I had chosen the pieces for NFA mostly on the basis of my relationship to the pieces and composers, i.e. that that I both liked the pieces, and that they were either written for me or I had worked closely with the composer. I thought that that would be the best way of making a distinctive program in the context of all the great music presented at a convention.

PS: You have worked with some of today's most exciting composers, especially of course Kaija Saariaho and Karlheinz Stockhausen, but also many others. Can you tell us what you consider the biggest musical "plus" of working closely with composers of our own time?

The biggest plus is being part of the creative process, whether during the actual writing or in being the first to interpret the finished score, of being able to explore various musical languages and worlds while having “direct access” to the source.

PS: Are there any "minuses"? (that you'd care to tell us about!)

The “minus” may be the occasional frustration that come with being a “pioneer”, of having to figure out how to put up the house rather than how to renovate an old one. It can take awhile (several performances!) before a piece really “stands”, before one is comfortable with the basic structure and can then have fun with the “decorating”.

PS: Can you tell us about some of the special insights that you've gained?

The importance of time in developing the music—with a good piece, more and more becomes clear with subsequent performances....(like the bouquet that unfolds with the decanting of a wine...)

The value of hearing other interpretations, whether by students or by colleagues, of the same work, Through both these factors of time and exchange, one gains more insight to the elusive “it” of music...

PS: What are some of the particularly memorable interactions, either with these composers or with others?

When did you first meet Kaija Saariaho? (I remember you telling me about her years ago!) Was Aile du songe written for you? You had already played NoaNoa a number of times, and had worked with her extensively; (was NoaNoa the first piece of hers that you played?) Does she ask you questions while the work is still in the formative stages, or does she check things only after she really knows what she is after? (and then make adjustments?) Composers (as we know!) have a wide range of positions on this issue!

1b. Is it terrifying to have a composer rely on your command of a particular technique, or your reaction to a particular sonority in the piece, for his or her own development of it? What advice would you have to offer to a talented young flutist who is interested in working with composers but frightened of this responsibility?

I must say, the first time I really worked intensively with a composer, it was terrifying. I happened to have come into contact with an Oberlin graduate whom I'd known to be particularly gifted and to have worked with genius flutists at Oberlin before we met at the University of Illinois. But my curiosity and interest in the project outweighed my fear, so I jumped in and ended up learning a lot.

Sometimes, however, one doesn't know if difficulties in realizing a score lies in one's own limitations or in the composer's writing of impossibilities. Both are possible! With (decades of) experience, this of course gets easier to figure out. Now, in fact, I encourage composers to write what they (think) they'd like to hear. In the process of trying to find a solution for some "impossible" technique, other interesting musical events may come into being.

Young flutists could approach the collaboration in a similar spirit and meanwhile draw from the ample documentation both written and recorded of what is possible in the way of "extended techniques". One can develop one's abilities step by step, just as one does in moving from playing one-octave scales to three-octave scales.

2. In approaching the technical challenges of today's music, do you have any special practice techniques or advice? (for instance, those fantastic tremolos you did in the program for the NFA in Nashville last year?)

Short answer:

Divide and conquer! Go through the piece measure by measure and take note of exactly which techniques may present a challenge, then choose one to figure out and practice every place in the piece in which it occurs. Then the next, then maybe 2 or 3 together, etc..

I had fantastic teachers, but when it came to modern music, I had to be self-taught. I read the instructions and tried to figure out how to translate them into music. The only recordings available when I was a student were Harvey Sollberger's "Twentieth Century Flute Music" and one by Sam Baron. All of the extended techniques used in NoaNoa, for example, (including that tremelo!) I demonstrate in short videos found on the CD Rom "Prisma", the Musical Universe of Kaija Saariaho, Plus there are many recordings of today's music which young flutists can listen to and try to imitate with the help of the score and performance instructions,

just like I used to do with first recordings of Kincaid and Rampal. But—as in any technique, whether in developing a sufficiently “French” tone for Debussy, or working out trick fingerings for a Tchaikowsky passage, one is finally left to oneself to listen and experiment.

3. How about the musical challenges -- any special advice or practice techniques for dealing with those? How would you describe the interaction (if any) between the technical and musical challenges of today's music?

“Musical challenges”. This means making sense out of the “language” the piece is “spoken in”. It helps to hear other pieces of the composer, if possible, also to try to learn about the context of the composition, the circumstances under which the composer was writing or for which he/she was writing.

4. How do you work to develop a structural feeling for a piece that doesn't have the familiar tonic-dominant and other tonal underpinnings that we have in traditional repertoire? How do you then convey that structural feeling to the listener?

If I haven't had success with my own analyses (I draw heavily on the methods I gleaned from Cogan and Escot's book *Sonic Design*) nor been able to discuss with the composer, I have to trust that it will eventually become clear to both myself and the listening through the performances. (ex.—beginners may not understand Bach's structures, but they can still be discerned by listeners)

I try to place the writing in some kind of tradition—does it convey a spirit of Debussy? Varese? Berio? Stockhausen? (a quarter note is a very different thing to each of these composers, for example...)

5. Tell us about your own background -- we know you have worked with Darlene Dugan, Alex Murray, Peter Lloyd, and Marcel Moyse. Are there any special warm-ups or other exercises that you have kept from them? What is your favorite way to start your practice day?

What a loaded question. I should write a book on all the amazing things I've learned from these teachers!!! I'm continually quoting them in my own teaching. To mention only one thing from each: Darlene Dugan had me listen to two recordings of the Poulenc sonata, Rampal's and Nicolet's, and to analyze minutely the differences in their interpretations. This is how I became aware of the possibilities not only of color, vibrato, dynamics and breathing, but also of the effect of agogic placement. From Alex Murray I learned systematic approaches for everything from tackling new scores to dealing with tone, technique and (most importantly) one's self! From Peter Lloyd I learned the value of Moyse's “de la sonorité”, and from Moyse himself I learned to consider the musical value and quality of every single note in the context of the score.

My favorite way to start my practice day is with playing through a movement or two of favorite music, most often Bach, Marais, Telemann or Blavet, but at the moment it happens to be Carter!

6. Who are some of the exciting up-and-coming European composers, that we may not have heard about yet?

**Yan Maresz, Bruno Mantovani, Philippe Hurel—DISCUSS ON PHONE**

7. Have you learned anything from your European perspective that might be especially helpful or interesting to American flutists -- whether students, orchestral players, amateurs, or perhaps especially chamber music players (who so often need to deal with the organizing side of things!)? For example, is it true that European professionals in other fields (physics, religion) play much more informal chamber music than their US counterparts?

**It is true that not only European professionals in other fields but also “normal housewives” play much more informal (or semi-formal) chamber music than their US counterparts. This takes the form of friends meeting weekly just to read through things, or amateur chamber groups giving concerts in local churches or schools, or even full-scale, semi-professional orchestras. The Ford factory has their own orchestra (and this is an orchestra, not a wind-band!), for example, and there is also one made up of doctors specializing in of “throat-nose-and-ear”.**

Do chamber groups and other presenters there struggle with the same audience development issues (namely how to build/attract and keep an audience), or is there in fact, as we are often told, a naturally high interest level there? If so, do you think this comes from better music in the schools, a general/historical societal interest, or from some other factor?

**The struggle is increasing...American “values” are overtaking the globe...**

8. Any special anecdotes about interactions with NYFC flutists? [Kathy Saenger notes that these might be especially interesting] [Do you remember the convention where we met, when you played the Wuorinen Variations II for a master class I gave? I sure do -- you were dynamite!]

**You were probably my one of my first contacts and also “role models”. I remember playing Wuorinen’s Variations II for you, at the NFA convention 1979 in Dallas. I remember feeling like “just a girl from the Midwest” in the midst of all these New York flutists. And I still did, when in the following year I was a performer at Julius Baker’s masterclass in Brewster. I had wanted to go to Juilliard, but my parents preferred that I first get a “solid liberal arts education” at Calvin College. Now here I was with all these Juilliard kids...DISCUSS ON PHONE:::**