

Camilla Hoitenga - A Versatile Flutist

Camilla Hoitenga says that if she had to use one word to sum up her career, it would be 'interesting!'. 'Any time I've tried to actually 'plan' part of my career, it's never really worked out. I've always just followed what interested me' she says 'and then the teachers and opportunities just seemed to fall into place'. Following her interests has lead Camilla to work with many of the major composers of our time, collaborations with important visual artists, concerts in a wide variety of venues, and sharing her knowledge and energy with young flutists all over the world.

Camilla started playing the flute at age 8, when her family lived in Pennsylvania, but they soon moved to Michigan, and Camilla ended up changing teachers 4 times before the age of 13. She can't help but think that this might have contributed to her openness towards new and different ideas.

It was very clear after high school that music and flute were what she wanted to study, but her parents said no to Julliard. 'They wanted to be sure that I had a good liberal arts education. Their idea was that I probably wouldn't go back later and study philosophy, history, etc. My mother also wanted me to have a degree in education to 'fall back on'. Camilla said she couldn't see herself teaching a room full of children, and didn't think education needed someone who was 'falling back', so while she did attend Calvin College, she did keep flute as her major. Looking back she's very glad about that. 'Calvin was a good school, with good professors. I received a very good, well-rounded liberal arts education. And my parents sent me to summer music camps, like Aspen where I got to study with Albert Tipton, and keep up with what the 'conservatory' flute students were doing.'

By the time she started looking at graduate schools, Camilla didn't even consider Julliard. 'University of Illinois was the first school to have an electronic music studio, and contemporary music already interested me. And, George Delaney, the teacher there, did have several very good students, so I was interested in him as a teacher'. But by the time she arrived in Illinois, Delaney had already left for another post. He offered her an assistantship at his new school, but she chose to stay in Illinois to see who the new professor would be.

The new professor turned out to be Alexander Murray. Camilla said their first year together was quite trying. Murray is known for his work with Alexander technique, and he had also developed his own flute system, based on Boehm's original ideas. At the time, Camilla was interested in neither. Nor was she used to his method of teaching. But, neither completely gave up on the other, and after that first rough year, they did manage to find common ground.

Today, Camilla considers Murray to be her most influential teacher, and a good friend as well. And there is a lot of Alexander technique incorporated into her own teaching now, from the way she helps a student find a balanced stance, to comfortable hand position, to breathing. Camilla would love to see a new breath mark come into use – in the shape of a small open sack , to help the player remember how to take the breath! And Camilla still consults with Murray 'We taught together recently in London, and I played some Stockhausen for him. At 81, he's

still as fit and on the ball as ever, and was able to give me some wonderful ideas. The man is a genius!

Eventually, Camilla also took part in some Julius Baker masterclasses, to see what she was missing at Julliard and also took lessons with him at his home. One thing she remembers was the strong sense of competition between the students at those classes. 'It made me glad that I didn't go to Julliard and get caught up in it'. She also played for Marcel Moyse. 'Moyse was both fantastic, and frustrating' she said. 'His approach to music was very modern – very close attention to the score, and rhythm above everything.' She played Syrinx for him, and as Moyse had played Syrinx for Debussy, she considers herself to be the 'Granddaughter' of that tradition. Moyse was very impressed with her playing, invited her to visit him at his home in St. Amour

During her doctoral studies, Camilla started to realize that she was maybe not as interested in an orchestral or teaching career as she once thought. She decided to go to Germany to audition for a few teachers and play with a group of musicians who were working with Stockhausen and playing a wide range of music together. 'My idea was to first go to Germany and play for some people I wanted to study with, before I applied for my Fulbright scholarship'. Things didn't quite work out the way she had planned, she ended up stranded in Germany, missing the scholarship application deadline, with no money, no teacher, and only the new ensemble with the Stockhausen musicians. It turned out to be one of the turning points in her career.

Camilla started playing on the street to make some money, and was 'discovered'. She started getting teaching jobs and paying gigs. When the ensemble eventually broke up, someone suggested she should put together a program for the Gadeaumus International Interpreters competition. Stockhausen had just published 'In Freundschaft' for flute, and sent it to her. She played the piece as part of her competition program, and ended up winning a prize. Later, she played the piece for Stockhausen as well, leading to their collaboration - first on 'Amour' for flute, and then on the operas Monday and Tuesday. She also worked for a while in Stockhausen's publishing house.

While her days were spent playing modern music and working with Stockhausen, her evenings were often spent in clubs or performing on the radio playing folk-rock with a bouzouki player. Later, with this player and his soprano wife, Camilla played some of the first classical music concerts in Abu Dhabi. 'There are no concert halls, so we play mainly at hotels or schools. I remember in particular one concert at a women's university. It was quite moving playing for a sea of women wrapped in black, and to be presenting the first live classical music these women had ever heard.'

After one concert in Cologne, Aila Gothóni came up to Camilla and invited her to join a group of musicians who were preparing to play a series of concerts in China 'So my first trip to Finland was actually to practice for this project!' which led to concerts in the Forbidden City. Camilla also spends a lot of time in Japan. Again, her connection to Japan began with her following an interest 'I found a piece that I liked by a Japanese composer, so I wrote to him, which eventually led to my playing for him, then his writing a concerto for me to perform with the Kyoto Symphony Orchestra in Osaka. Camilla has since spent a lot of time playing and

traveling in Japan, studying shakuhachi music and the influence it and other ancient Japanese music has on modern flute compositions. She is fascinated by the Japanese philosophy of life, and enjoys spending time there, where she is often asked to perform and teach.

It was at the Darmstadt courses for new music where Camilla first met Kaija Saariaho. They became friends right away, but Camilla was at first a little unsure of Saariaho's music. 'After working with Stockhausen so intensively, I was used to his type of notation and expectations. When I first asked Kaija about her music, what she wanted in a certain point in the score, her responses seemed vague to me, and I thought, well she's a nice girl, but she can't really compose!' Obviously, that first impression has changed, and their collaboration, and friendship, continues to this day.

Camilla considers that even under the heading of 'modern' music there are at least two major traditions of performance practice. 'There's a line coming from Debussy and one coming from Varèse. . Debussy grows out of the tradition of 19th century romanticism, which is where Saariaho fits, along with most of the Japanese modern works. Varèse's music stems from his work with 'music concrète', blocks of sound, with very exact notation, 'tones as durations' instead of "phrases". Stockhausen, of course, fits in this school, along with Messaien. Camilla warns that that still does not allow the performer complete freedom in Debussy's work, for example. 'Debussy is very exact in his rhythmic notation in *Syrinx*, and even though this is a work that each flute player should make their own, it is possible to do that and be true to the score as well'. In her opinion, too many performers take too many rhythmical freedoms when playing this work.

Her collaborations with visual artists began with an exhibition in Den Haag. 'There were 3 artists, and one very definitely wanted me to play Debussy, the other Stockhausen. The third was unsure, but after seeing his work, I was inspired to take out my alto flute and start improvising. It was a very otherworldly experience.' Camilla's experience that night led to work with other artists, and the development of a structured approach to this kind of collaboration. Sometimes she will use previously composed works, but more often it involves a form of 'informed improvisation', or composing a new piece to go along with the art. She begins by talking with the artist, to discover their philosophical approach to their work. This initial interview may lead to her choosing already composed pieces for their works, or composing something that corresponds to their philosophical approach.

Other times it's the artist's technique that inspires Camilla's music, the method of applying paint or creating sculpture that she recreates in sound. She remembers in particular an artist who applied several layers of paint to their canvases, scraping off the layers of paint to create the finished canvas. The proceedings and sound of this technique helped to inspire the music she created to go along with it.

Sometimes it's the finished work itself that inspires her playing. She uses the painting or sculpture as a graphic score, reading the structure of the work as she plays. A block of color may inspire one sort of sound, wavy lines another. The sculptor Ansgar Nierhoff (1941-2010) even created a large iron sculpture entitled 'Anlehn' (To lean on) specifically for Camilla to

play. 'I can actually climb onto the work, moving to different points on the sculpture as I play it'.

Camilla finally did go back to Illinois, to substitute for Alexander Murray, and eventually also finished her doctorate. During the process she was then hired by the New York State University at Potsdam as flute professor, but soon found herself missing her 'free' life as a freelancer in Europe, so back she went. 'I like that I can live without a car, traveling by bike, or then train or plane when necessary'. Now, Camilla admits, as she gives masterclasses all over the world, that she sometimes regrets not having the 'home base' of a school where she could invite students to continue their work together, but she also loves the freedom that not being tied to a school provides.

Camilla does have a group of young students that she teaches. 'I love it! At some point I had quit teaching just to do concerts and of course there's a certain freedom in this. But when I recently took an opportunity to teach again, I realized I had missed it! And now I'm really enjoying it. ' The parents of her students know from the start that she travels a lot, and Camilla says she has a wonderful assistant who is always ready to jump in and take over her teaching when she travels. 'I make it up to them by having 'flute days' at my home, where we all get together to play, listen, and have fun together'.

The one thing that Camilla would like to leave with flutists is a reminder of the versatility of the flute. 'It doesn't have to be 'just' the orchestral position' she reminds young players, 'there are so many different possibilities for the flutist who is willing to explore their own interests.' Camilla's career is certainly a testimony to that!

By Kathleen Weidenfeller, American flutist living in Finland.