



Texas Flute Society

THE
newsletter.

Spring 2018

Carolyn Keyes, Editor



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Letter from the President



Greetings all,

Many of you are getting ready for Spring break or just coming off break and entering the last stretch of the semester before Summer! We know what that means, the Flute Festival is just around the corner. Be on the lookout for updates both from emails and on the website.

This year there have been a few changes to the scheduling of the festival, so be sure to catch those as you are planning. One of the biggest changes is that all solos, (Graduate, Undergraduate, adult, professional, beginner, junior high, high school, etc.) have been moved to Saturday. Friday night we will have a few breakout sessions, the college and adult masterclass with Sarah Jackson, and of course the Finals for

the Myrna Brown Artists Competition. For more information and a detailed schedule of events be sure to check our website.

Be on the look for snippets of our guest artists on our social media pages as we count down to the festival!

Sincerely,
Chris Cox

Upcoming Events!

TFS Flute Festival
May 17-19
Texas Woman's University

[CLICK FOR MORE EVENTS](#)





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Interview with Sarah Jackson



Tell me about your first job as second flute and later as assistant principal flute and piccolo with the Vancouver Symphony. When and why did you switch over to the piccolo?

My first professional job was as second flute with the Vancouver Symphony. I was doing post-graduate work at McGill University when I took the audition. I thought, on one hand a job, and on the other hand, a degree to get a job. I took the job. I love playing second flute! I think you have to be even more flexible and intuitive than for principal flute. On second you can be playing many different roles, or wearing different hats as I like to call it, all within one phrase. You have to play one way when you are in unison with the first, soloistic

when your line becomes more prominent, and quick on the draw if the principal decides to move the line one way or another. Personally, I think everyone should have to play second before they get a principal job. All that experience in flexibility paid off when I got a job where piccolo was my main instrument. When I was second flute there were, of course, many opportunities to play piccolo. I hadn't spent much time working on piccolo before this job, but I stepped up and did a lot of piccolo practicing after. I found I loved the piccolo! When the piccolo/assistant principal flute position became available I didn't hesitate.

What do you enjoy about playing the piccolo?

What I love most about playing piccolo is how flexible you must be to play it; especially in orchestra. Sure, we all know you can bury the orchestra, and don't get me wrong, that's fun! But there is so much more. The piccolo is capable of so many colors. Are you playing like a fife with oboe, or pure and transparent with harmonic strings? Maybe you need to sound like a flute just playing the top of a chord, or, like frequently found in Tchaikovsky, simply extending the top range of the flute so it follows the violin line. My favorite color is the low, earthy register of the piccolo. It can be so haunting. That's a wonderful pairing with clarinet.

Also in being flexible you have to carefully match your dynamics. You may not actually want to play a true forte in the upper register of the piccolo depending on the instrumentation. On the other hand, if the winds are marked mezzo piano, and you're in the low register, very frequently you'll have to play louder than that to be heard. It's all balance and flexibility.

What is scary?

I think what makes piccolo players quake in their boots are the quiet, high register entrances. You sit forever in a piece, getting cold, then have to make a delicate, quiet, high register entrance. Even if it's not a high

register note, it's still nerve-wracking to sit for 3 movements then play. I used to try to play a few notes during the previous movements to keep warmed up, but I don't like that. I find the way I would need to play, to not hear me at all, is not how I'm going to play anyway. Since I'm hiding it also won't tell me anything about pitch either. What's the point? To practice doing cold entrances I always suggest to my students to put their instrument down, go do something for 10 mins, then come back. Physically warm up your instrument as you would if you were sitting in orchestra, then play the first bar of your entrance. No more! You're not practicing the passage, just the entrance. Fix what may not have gone well then put your instrument down again. Come back in 10 mins, etc. it works great for flute too.

Do you call yourself a flutist or a piccoloist when introduced?

It depends on who I'm talking to. It may seem unimaginable to us, but some people don't know what a piccolo is. If that's the case I say I play flute and piccolo with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. If I'm speaking to another musician I say I play piccolo with the Los Angeles Philharmonic as that's what my actual title is. They know I would also play flute in my life or in my job.

Your section has had a lot of personnel changes in the last few years. Do you have any advice for getting through those periods and working with new people?

My advice is to always be flexible and kind. Give your new colleague the benefit of the doubt. Everyone is going to have their own take on how to approach a piece or relate to the section.

During piccolo (or flute) master classes, are there any issues that keep coming up?

Breathing! The piccolo takes a little less air than the flute, but not a lot less air. Too many play with not enough air. This is our support and

ultimately our sound! If you take too small a breath you won't breathe low enough, you won't have enough support, you will then squeeze your embouchure to get any control, then you wind up with a thin sound. Frequently students will come to me with sound complaints. I almost always fix it with breathing.

What was your early training like? How old were you when you started playing flute, and piccolo? Did you have an early interest in the piccolo?

This is probably my longest story.

I had always been interested in music and especially singing. I was always singing as a kid. Right from grade 1 we had music classes in school. They were the highlight of school for me. Of course, in first grade it consisted of a teacher playing guitar and all of us singing, but that was right up my alley! In grade 3, instruments were introduced. I chose the saxophone. Well, I was a small kid and on top of that I rode my bike to school. So here I was balancing this huge instrument on my bike for our 15 minute lessons. I didn't do well trying to play it either. The clarinet was then suggested. Well, that didn't work out so well either. I couldn't close the rings and cover the holes at the same time. (Did I mention I was a little skinny kid?) Then - wait for it - I was told I wasn't talented and to just give up. What teacher says that to a kid?!?!?! I never continued after that. Until... Grade 7 came along. We were given extracurricular options at school. They consisted of sports or band. It was like two bad choices but I hated sports more so I decided on band. We were given an instrument sheet to take home to choose an instrument. My mom went through the choices with me: saxophone, that didn't work out so well; clarinet, much the same. The rest of the instruments were described to me but that's not very helpful if you can't see or hear them. So I went back to school with a blank form. The teacher said I had to choose an instrument. "But I don't know what to choose". "You just have to choose one". Well, flute was at

the top of the list so I checked it off. I carried on, not practicing, and being the last in the class.

Early one summer we moved across the country. I didn't have any friends for the entire summer, of course. But I did have my flute and band book! I played every day and I loved it. When there were auditions for chair placement in my new school, I was placed first chair. I got a very important life lesson that year. I also sang in choir. I soon became more interested in singing than flute playing. I sang in school musicals and church choir. When it came time for University I had to make a difficult decision whether to go into voice or flute performance. I chose flute but continued to take singing lessons. I think singing is very helpful to instrumentalists! It's so helpful to learn how to use your air and throat, but that's another conversation.

How do you stay in shape on flute and piccolo? How much do you practice on each instrument?

Because my job is so much more focused on piccolo, I practice more piccolo than flute. That being said, I make sure that I stay on top of flute. You must be able to play flute well as a piccolo player. You can't sound bad on third or fourth flute (as an example) and expect the section to sound good. My position would usually have me playing the bottom line flute parts and you must be able to lay down a solid foundation for the section. If you're not a strong flute player you could wreak havoc. Then there are the times you might play second flute/piccolo in *Symphonie Fantastique* or *Mother Goose*. *Mother Goose* is a solo flute part that starts the entire piece with a second flute solo! Talk about keeping your flute chops in shape!

What instruments will you be playing on?

I play on Keefe piccolos. They are the best piccolos out there! For those not familiar with the name, Jim Keefe and Jan Kinmonth used to make

Brannen piccolos. They branched out on their own and now make the most fabulous instruments: Keefe piccolos.

Do you like playing newer music?

The LAPHil commissions tons of new music. We have commissioned 52 new works for our centennial celebration next year!!! In addition to full orchestra pieces, the Phil has a contemporary new music series call the 'Green Umbrella'. This is all chamber music, but varies quite a bit in size and instrumentation. I always like playing this series. I think one of the issues with contemporary music is that, of course, not all pieces are masterpieces. That's only natural. Composers themselves go back and revise their own music. So sometimes you get a piece that you may never play again. That doesn't bother me. I always say that you have to kiss a lot of frogs before you find the prince!

Any favorite (or recommended, or under-appreciated) repertoire for a piccolo recital?

Damare is a very important composer for piccolo players. It is often under-appreciated as the style is very trite. Damare was writing at the beginning of the 1900s. This was when people would go for walks in the park and listen to live music in local bandstands. Since there was no amplification then, the most common instruments to get solo parts were the trumpet and piccolo. This is important for the piccolo because no solo music before this time was written specifically for the piccolo. We of course have Baroque concertos, but they were written for soprano recorder, not piccolo.

Where did you grow up in Canada, and where did you do your undergrad? Was that also at McGill? Who were your teachers?

I grew up all across Canada. I was actually born in North Carolina but moved when I was 6 weeks old. Never caught the accent! In Canada, I started in Ottawa, Ontario, then moved to Edmonton, Alberta, then

Calgary, Alberta. I then moved to Vancouver, BC for undergrad studies at the University of British Columbia. There I studied with Camille Churchfield. Camille was the most supportive teacher I have ever had. I was so fortunate to have studied with her. When I started with her I had had very little formal training on flute and had never entered a competition. She encouraged me to join ensembles, play recitals, do competitions, and do summer programs. I did just that, including playing two recitals a year, not just one. This is where I truly found my desire to be a professional musician. I then went to Montreal, Quebec for grad studies at McGill University. There I studied with Tim Hutchins. He had a very different approach from Camille which was great, of course. With him I focused more on the details of my playing such as technique, sound, etc. It seems a little backwards to go back to fundamentals in grad school but it worked out great. This is why I make sure that my students take time to focus on fundamentals. This could even mean no pieces for, let's say, a month depending on the circumstances. At this point I started taking auditions and won second flute in the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. I won't bore you with all the many more auditions I took, as we've all done many! I played in the VSO for ten years then won Piccolo in the Los Angeles Philharmonic. I've been with the LAPhil now for 13 years.

What made you decide to move from Vancouver to LA?

Won a job! ;)

I'd like to follow up on your answer about breathing. How do you fix the breathing? What did you mean by breathing low? And sometimes, on the piccolo, I find that I have too much air, and much like the oboe, get a backlog of air. Does this ever happen to you?

So with breathing we are trying to harness something that keeps us alive. If we didn't breathe we'd die. That's a pretty big influence on our playing. I've written an exercise for breathing that we'll cover in the masterclass.

Basically, the exercise separates the lower part of breathing, diaphragm breathing, and the upper part of breathing, our chest. Our chest breathing is what we normally do throughout the day. It's what we're used to feeling and what tells our brain that we're breathing and ok. While that's fine for living, we need much deeper and fuller breaths using our diaphragm to play the flute or piccolo. So, if we fill up our chest first, our bodies are not inclined to take a deeper breath, whereas if we fill up low first, our brains will always influence us to take more air in until our chest is full. You fill up a glass from the bottom up, not from the side. This way of thinking about breathing takes advantage of our natural instincts.

What can people expect from your masterclass?

Don't be surprised if I focus a lot on the fundamentals of playing the piccolo. Most people have had many lessons on flute but very few on piccolo. While many exercises for flute work well on piccolo, I have not found one for tone on piccolo that works well, so I wrote one! I will definitely cover that. Also, I will have a Q&A segment, usually at the end of the class. Many flute players have lots of questions they're dying to ask about the piccolo. I also like keeping the masterclass informal and encourage questions at any time if something needs deeper explanation. I encourage trial and error in teaching, and backstabbing is never, never allowed. We're all trying to learn something and how can that be possible if we're afraid to 'fail'? (And by the way, I don't believe in failures: only in experiments that tell you what doesn't work)

Your story about continuing despite your teacher's discouraging words are a good reminder to us that we should do what we love.

Yes! We all learn at different paces and we all have our own unique life experiences. This is what makes us all individuals. Some players excel at musicality, some technique, some memorizing, etc. Just because one student is not as accomplished at something at one time in their life does not mean that is going to be true later in life. For a teacher to determine a

young student's destiny based on a snippet in their life is very inaccurate and ultimately unfair to the student. We all need to find our own path in life.

I'm fascinated by the singing connection. You must have learned a lot about singing that applies to the flute as well. Can you talk about that? How does supporting the voice compare to supporting the flute or piccolo sounds.

I think air/breathing is the great equalizer between piccolo or flute and singing. All other wind instruments play with resistance coming from their instrument. We don't have that resistance and neither do singers. You have to learn to control not only the amount of air that comes out, but also how to properly hold it in. This requires a lot of strength and finesse from your diaphragm and abdominal muscles. At the beginning of a big breath you have to hold your abdominals out so all the air doesn't escape all at once. At the end you have to push to use all the air you have left. Then somewhere in the middle of that, for an all-too-brief moment, you are nice and relaxed! Singing also requires you to open your throat. Go ahead, pretend to be a bass opera singer. Now try to do that with a closed throat. It's almost impossible! We need to keep our throats open if we want to get a deep, harmonic-rich sound.

Update Your Practice Attitude

by Carolyn Keyes

The attitudes and beliefs we take into the practice room can shape our performances – for better or worse. Each of us has good and bad days, but over the long haul, our underlying assumptions will prevail. Here are three positive attitude adjustments you can make to improve your practicing,

Growth Mindset

Of all the beliefs we carry into the practice room this one might be the most important. There has been a lot said about fixed versus growth mindset in recent years, and for good reason. Those with a fixed mindset believe that their intelligence (or talent, expression, etc.) are inherent or limited. Once someone with a fixed mindset reaches what they think is their limit, they are less likely to work hard because they do not believe it will do any good. Those with a growth mindset believe that our capacity changes in response to our effort. As it turns out, this attitude is more than positive thinking. Recent research in neuroplasticity is proving that human brains are more adaptable than we ever imagined. What does this mean for you? It means that your perceived limits might not be as fixed as you think. Take stock of your attitudes about your playing and notice if you are limiting yourself. You might catch yourself saying “I will just never be good at double tonguing.” Replace that phrase with “I have more to learn about double tonguing.” It might seem like semantics, but the difference is critical.

Play Like a Toddler

No, don't play the flute like a toddler; have fun like a toddler. Experiment freely. Turn a passage upside down. Test your boundaries. This is how toddlers learn about their world, and it is very effective. So effective, in fact, that programmers are using experimentation and play to program robots more efficiently. The next time you are facing a difficult passage, approach it with curiosity and playfulness instead of aggression or fear. If you are not sure how to get started, try this exercise. Imagine an interpretation of a passage that is wildly out of character (like a light lyrical passage played by a herd of elephants). Now go for that inappropriate character with everything you have. Be as wrong as possible! Why do something so ridiculous? For one thing, it can be a lot of fun. More importantly, you are learning more about what you DO want

by defining what you do NOT want.

Non-Judgment

This term is a bit misleading. Of course, we must constantly discern between the sounds we are aiming for and the sounds we are producing. Too often, though, we are quick to judge our playing. That note was pretty. That passage sounded terrible. The problem is that these judgments are not helpful. What did you like about that particular tone? If you did not like a passage, what do you want to do differently? If we are too wrapped up in whether something was “good” or “bad” we can easily miss the details that we want to keep or change.

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