

A Legacy in

by JENNIFER BOUTON (MM'07)



A performance at Carnegie Hall has long been the proof of a musician's arrival on the world stage. That old saying – "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?... Practice, practice, practice!" – is certainly still true. The performers who appear onstage at Carnegie Hall have devoted tens of thousands of hours to the mastery of their craft. Professional orchestras regularly travel there from

around the country as a way to energize the communities in their home states, to present themselves to New York concertgoers, and to participate in the numerous festivals designed to bring new audiences to Carnegie Hall.

On May 11, 2012, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra performed at Carnegie Hall as part of the Spring for Music Festival – a concert series created to feature orchestras with a commitment to adventurous programming in Classical Music. Among the 95 musicians sharing the stage that night, each viewing the performance through the lens of his or her own journey to the hall, the flute section had a particularly unique path to trace. Marie Tachouet (MM'08), Emma Niesl (MM'12), and I (MM'07), all studied with Jeanne Baxtresser and Alberto Almarza at Carnegie Mellon University. For us, the performance at Carnegie Hall represented not only the pinnacle of our professional careers to that point, but also a celebration of the shared education and musical heritage that had allowed us to reach it.

Carnegie Mellon Professors Baxtresser and Almarza have created a uniquely rich environment that provides one of the best training programs for orchestral flutists. CMU alumni hold prominent positions in orchestras and universities around the globe. Marie (Mimi) Tachouet describes Carnegie Mellon as "a magical place" and Jeanne Baxtresser and Alberto Almarza as "two figures as revered in the flute world as Carnegie Hall is in the performing arts world." But besides the professional successes of their graduates, Baxtresser and Almarza are renowned for encouraging the kind of relationships among students that make reunions like ours possible. A significant part of the training for CMU flutists

takes place during the weekly studio class, with the entire flute studio in attendance. Professors Baxtresser and Almarza coach individual students on specific ideas for the given repertoire; this allows everyone a chance to learn from the performing experience of their colleagues and fosters an environment of support and cooperation.

When Mimi and I were attending Carnegie Mellon, most of the flute studio would compete in the same auditions for professional orchestral positions. Professors Baxtresser and Almarza encouraged us to work together, rather than sequestering ourselves in our practice rooms for weeks beforehand. As a result, much of our audition preparation was collaborative, both in studio class and mock auditions. Audition preparation is always an intense and undeniably competitive process, but in the supportive atmosphere of the CMU flute studio, it took on an atmosphere of joyful excitement. We often traveled together to auditions, and it was reassuring to know that when my portion of the audition was done, my CMU colleagues would be there, ready to celebrate or commiserate over beers. What we shared was greater than the difference between those who advanced in auditions and who didn't; there was a sense of camaraderie that transcended competition. As a result, I formed many enduring friendships with my colleagues in the flute studio at CMU. Mimi adds, "I will never forget the cohesion of the studio and the wonderful times I shared with my fellow flutists. For me, performing at Carnegie Hall with my dearest friends from CMU is the fulfillment of a great personal and professional dream."

The sense of fellowship among CMU flutists is due in part to the excellent overall training we received at Carnegie Mellon. However, it is also the product of a distinguished pedagogical lineage that reaches all the way back to Julius Baker, who was the Principal Flutist of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1941-'43, and the New York Philharmonic from 1965 until 1983. In addition to his celebrated orchestral career, Julius Baker was highly sought after as a teacher. Baker trained a generation of outstanding flutists during his tenure at The Juilliard School. Jeanne Baxtresser and Alberto Almarza both studied with Baker; in addition, Mimi Tachouet, Emma Niesl, and I worked with teachers during our undergraduate years who were students of Julius Baker and Jeanne Baxtresser. Thus our reunion at the Carnegie Hall Performance reflected 75 years of this eminent tradition.

Sound

The product of this musical heritage is an extremely refined concept of sound that is instantly recognizable. Ms. Baxtresser tells of attending a New York Philharmonic concert with Julius Baker honoring the retirees of the orchestra, in which Sandra Church (Associate Principal Flute, and another Baker student) was playing a solo: "Sandy played and Julie [Julius Baker] grabbed my hand. 'That's us,' he said."

I had the same reaction when I first heard Emma Niesl playing with the Milwaukee Symphony. I was the only permanent member of the Milwaukee Symphony in the flute section that performed at Carnegie Hall, and when Emma played as a substitute with us last November, her sound triggered a whole series of musical memories for me. There was something both indefinable and yet immediately familiar in her tone; hearing it for the first time evoked an almost Proustian connection between past and present. Similarly, when Mimi Tachouet began rehearsing with the Milwaukee Symphony three weeks before the tour, it felt as though Ms. Baxtresser was right there, talking to me through Mimi's flute. On more than one occasion I found myself turning my head to look – the sensation was so strong and the communication so direct, it felt like speech.

The program presented by the Milwaukee Symphony at Carnegie Hall provided the perfect vehicle to highlight these connections between students and teachers. The concert followed a thread linking French composer Claude Debussy to his student Olivier Messiaen, and further, to Messiaen's student, the Chinese composer Qigang Chen. Tracing a broad arc of musical thought, we began with Debussy's colorful and evocative *La Mer* (1905), continued to Messiaen's shimmering *Les Offrandes Oubliées* (1930), and concluded with Chen's atmospheric *Iris Dévoilée* (2001). The stylistic connections between these works were a beautiful parallel to our own artistic evolution: just as Debussy shaped the musical language of the 20th and 21st centuries, so Julius Baker, Jeanne Baxtresser, and Alberto Almarza have shaped the sound of a new generation of flutists.

It seems both natural and extraordinary that the musical reunion of three CMU alumnae took place in the country's most distinguished musical venue. (Andrew Carnegie built Carnegie Hall in 1891 – nine years before founding a school he called the Carnegie Institute of Technology, which would later become Carnegie Mellon University). Nearly every major musician or

ensemble for the past 120 years has sought to present themselves at Carnegie Hall; when you step inside it is hard not to imagine Igor Stravinsky, Bob Dylan, Albert Einstein, Duke Ellington, Martin Luther King Jr., Glenn Gould, Groucho Marx, Leonard Bernstein, and the countless other luminaries who have performed or spoken there. In Ms. Baxtresser's words, "It is a room, a room that holds history beyond what you can keep in your mind."

This performance marked my first occasion in Carnegie Hall as a performer or audience member. Though it was just the beginning of my relationship with the space and the legacy of musicians whose memories haunt its halls, this concert also represented the culmination of a course set in motion during my time at Carnegie Mellon. Furthermore, it served as tribute to the personal and professional relationships I began there. Incredibly, Ms. Baxtresser was able to attend The Milwaukee Symphony's Carnegie Hall concert, adding her physical presence to the spirit of her many performances still reverberating through the hall. Now our performance is one of the thousands energizing future musicians onstage at Carnegie Hall. As we celebrate our shared heritage, we are also all the next links in the chain. The idea persists, in that indefinable quality of our sound. Which part of it is Baxtresser and which is Almarza? Which is Messiaen and which is Debussy? Which part goes back even farther? What will continue in our own students, tracing this same line?

Musicians play for the love of their art, but it is seldom so simple and idealistic – we're accustomed to making the best of a performance with too few rehearsals, in an uncomfortable space, with people we may have just met or may not care to know better. Great music is made every day in imperfect situations. To be able to play with an orchestra of such caliber, in the greatest hall in the country, is truly a rare gift. To have shared that experience with friends, with a beloved teacher in attendance, assures that it will be among the most memorable performances of our lives.

Jennifer Bouton (MM'07) is Principal Piccolo of the Milwaukee Symphony, a position she began in September of 2011.

Marie Tachouet (MM'08) played principal flute for the Carnegie performances, and was recently appointed Principal Flute of the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Emma Niesl (MM'12) graduated from Carnegie Mellon this June and regularly performs with the Milwaukee Symphony on 2nd flute.