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. Mimi Tachouet (MM’08), Emma Niesl (MM’13), 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 of hours to the mastery of their craft, 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 positions in orchestras and universities around the globe. Marie Tachouet describes Carnegie Mellon as “a magical place” that reaches all the way back to Julius Baker, who was the Principal Flute of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra from 1941—51, and the New York Philharmonic from 1945 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. We were students of Julius Baker and Jeanne Baxtresser. Thus our reunion at the Carnegie Hall Performance reflected 75 years of this eminent tradition.

The product of this musical heritage is an extremely refined concept of sound that is instantly recognizable. Ms. Baxtresser tolds of attending a New York Philharmonic concert with Julius Baker hearing the virtuosity 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 was selected 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 all the most Pre-Ruskinian connections 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 were there, talking 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 those 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 Qiang Chen. Tracing a broad arc of musical thought, we began with Debussy’s colorful and evocative La Mer (1910), continued to Messiaen’s shimmering Iris Dévoilée (1950), and concluded with Chen’s atmospheric Iris Dévoilée (2002). The stylistic connections between these works were a beautiful allusion to the fact that the flute has 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 alumni took place in the country’s most distinguished musical venue. And 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.

Jennifer Bouton (MM’07) is Principal Piccolo of the Milwaukee Symphony, a position she began in September of 2011. Mimi Tachouet (MM’08) is Principal Piccolo for the Carnegie performances, and was recently appointed Principal Flute of the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Emma Niesl (MM’13) graduated from Carnegie Mellon this June and regularly performs with The Milwaukee Symphony as a substitute.

Ms. Bouton is the granddaughter of Earl Bouton, depicted from Carnegie Mellon’s June and July program, and Jennifer Bouton is a student of Julius Baker. The images on the cover are reproduced courtesy of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.