



# The New York Flute Club

## NEWSLETTER

May 2006

## 2006 ENSEMBLE CONCERT

The May 2003 Ensemble Program concert. Photo: Ed Wolf.



### About the flutists:

#### Mid-Atlantic Flutes

**Dirk Wels**, a native of Germany, has lived in NY since 2005 and is also a bassoonist. **Sally Shorrock** is an arts administrator on the music faculty of St. Joseph's College. **Jonathan Engle**, a native of New Zealand, was a 2006 winner of the NYFC's Young Artist Competition.

#### Performing the Delibes...

This Brooklyn trio includes **Ann Bordley**, an attorney with the Brooklyn District Attorney's office, and **Ed Wolf**, a physics professor at (Brooklyn) Polytechnic University.

#### Our City Flute Choir

Consisting of professional, amateur, and student flutists from around the tristate area, this group includes two teachers, a professional bassoonist, and a business owner.

#### Performing the Katherine Hoover Suite...

Flute teachers **Clarissa Nolde**, BM Northwestern, MM Juilliard, and **Kati Gulde**, BA Brown University, MM Peabody, have played together for several years.

#### Performing the Madeleine Dring Trio...

**Carol Weinstein** and **Jennifer Carroll** are, respectively, a physician practicing psychiatry at St. Vincent's Westchester and an elementary instrumental music teacher in the Port Jervis school district.

#### Performing the Florent Schmitt Quartet...

The group met through the NYFC and share a love for 20th century music. Over the five years they have been together, they have performed quartets by Bozza, Bennett, Dahl, Elizabeth Brown, and Genzmer.

#### In Concert

### NYFC Flute Ensemble Program Sunday, May 21, 2006 • 5:30 pm

Yamaha Piano Salon, 689 Fifth Avenue

(entrance on 54th Street between Fifth and Madison Avenues)

- Grand Quartet in E Minor, Op. 103 (4th mvt) .....Friedrich Kuhlau (1786–1832)
- Arcadie-Quatuor .....Marc Berthomieu (1936–1991)  
*Mid-Atlantic Flutes: Dirk Wels, Naomi Sinclair,  
Sally Schorrock, and Jonathan Engle*
- Flute Trio No. 1 .....James Hook (1746–1827)  
*Helen Bartolick, Olympia Fiedler Lord, and Jinni Rock-Bailey*
- Flower Duet, Lakmé (arr. Baxtresser) .....Léo Delibes (1836–1891)  
*Edward Wolf and Anne Bordley, flutes, Louis Cigliano, piano*
- In the Bleak Midwinter (arr. Pearce) .....Traditional
- Masques .....Anne McGinty (b. 1945)  
*Our City Flute Choir: Annette Baron, Selena Daniels,  
Julia Porter, Herb Walden, Naomi Sinclair, and Dirk Wels*
- Bryn-y-Celyn .....Catherine McMichael (b. 1954)  
*Malcolm Spector, James Blair, Mary Brust, and Mary Lynn Hanley, flutes*
- Suite for 2 flutes.....Katherine Hoover (b. 1937)  
*Clarissa Nolde and Kati Haynes Gulde*
- Trio for flute, oboe, and piano .....Madeleine Dring (1923–1977)  
*Carol Weinstein and Jennifer Ackerson Carroll, flutes, Allen Weiss, piano*
- Quatuor de Flutes, Op. 106 .....Florent Schmitt (1870–1958)  
*Shoji Mizumoto, Rana Boland, Dorothy Papo, and Craig Devereaux*
- Hues of the Golden Ascending.....Malcolm Goldstein (b. 1936)  
*NYFC Ensemble Program participants, conducted by Jane Rigler*

Program subject to change

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**2005–2006**

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# How does this resonate?

by David Wechsler



We have been fortunate enough this season to hear two performances of Baroque flute—Sandra Miller and Andrew Bolotowsky in December, and Stephen Preston and Amara Guity of Ecosonic in January. Why is the sound of a wooden flute so compelling? Native American, Indian, Chinese or Japanese, the appeal transcends cultural boundaries. Equal temperament tuning or not, it doesn't matter. The sound draws you in. I think it must come from an ancient and timeless connection to the organic

quality of the wood. You feel as though you are listening to or playing a living thing. You blow air, cover holes with your fingers, and that's it. No reeds, no mouthpieces, no smelting, no melting. In Western music, the evolution of our harmonic system has changed our concept of scale and intonation. The addition of more tone holes and keys for a chromatic scale was a big development. The addition of Boehm's versatile mechanism enabled us to cover more holes than we have fingers. Can you imagine if we had six fingers on each hand that were as thick as sausages? We wouldn't need any key system! We could play a chromatic scale and once more feel our fingers covering holes. No more mechanism to clean and oil and adjust. No more pads. No more overhauls!

With European exploration and colonization, science became a more dominant part of life and art. Along with the scientific explanations of the natural world came refinements of many things. New substances and products were discovered worldwide, and their components broken down and purified for a more potent, or refined version of the original. Some examples include brown rice and brown sugar vs. polished white rice and white sugar. Cocoa leaves vs. cocaine. Ceremonial use of tobacco vs. outright addiction to nicotine. Wrought iron vs. steel. Music has also undergone a refinement that has brought it further away from its indigenous, folk form.

As European music and instruments became more refined, both moved further from their roots in folk traditions. This has been beneficial to music but it has taken the artist and performer a few steps away from the primal feel. Perhaps the audience rioted at the 1913 premiere of *The Rite Of Spring* because the music and choreography were so audacious and antithetical to the refined mores of the time.

With flutes, this modernization and refinement has led us from wood flutes to metal ones. I would compare a wood flute, even a Boehm-system wood flute, to a raw substance—earthy, organic, and natural. The silver flute is its refined counterpart—precious metal brought forth through industrial processes. Our esthetic of tone for classical music has been one of purity of sound, with airiness perceived as a negative. But can you imagine a shakuhachi, Native American or Chinese flute without the gritty airiness? It is an essential part of the tone. With the addition of keys, tempered intonation and metals, we have lost the fetching and compelling nature of wooden sound. It is easy to retrieve in spirit, however. Wood or metal, the ideal we should strive for when we play our instruments is that the breath is life for the music, the mechanism secondary. One must move the air, and hear and feel the resonance of the individual flute, as you create the sound. That is no different on metal than it is on wood... just perhaps a little more elusive. □

## Help Wanted: Openings at the NYFC

*Three jobs in the NYFC will soon be vacant and need to be filled. They are: Treasurer (a board position), Membership Secretary (a board position) and Ensembles Coordinator. If you are interested in applying for any of these, please send a short note to NYFC President David Wechsler at [davewechs@earthlink.net](mailto:davewechs@earthlink.net).*

## Member Profile

### Mary Duncan

#### ("Meridee") Brust

NYFC Member  
since 2002



**Employment:** A nurse for most of her working life, Meridee is now director of Occupational Health Services at Rockefeller University, responsible for the health and safety of the University employees (providing first aid, travel health counseling, health surveillance for special populations engaged in potentially hazardous scientific research, etc.).

**A recent recital/performance:** An end-of-term recital at the Greenwich House Music School in December 2004 with one of Jayn Rosenfeld's workshop groups, playing Catherine McMichael's *La Lune et Les Etoiles*.

**Career highlight(s):** Certification as an occupational health nurse specialist (2001) and case manager (2005), giving her a string of new initials to have on her business cards (COHN-S/CM).

**Current flute:** A c. 1961 silver French-model Haynes with a C foot, purchased new when she was in college and a beginning flute student.

**Influential flute teachers:** In the early '60s: Sam Baron (her first teacher, but only for three months until his travel and concert obligations made it difficult to teach a beginning student) and William Watson. More recently: private lessons with Judith Bachleitner and now lessons and chamber music coaching with Jayn Rosenfeld.

**High school:** The Putney School in Putney, VT (where she and Jayn Rosenfeld, already an accomplished flute player, met as teenagers).

**Degrees:** BA in languages and literature (Sarah Lawrence, 1962), BSN (Columbia University School of Nursing, 1981).

**Most notable and/or personally satisfying accomplishment(s):** Professionally: obtaining her nursing degree while raising three young children and, more recently, obtaining additional professional certifications. On the flute: finally being able to play the notes of the third octave well enough to seek out pieces that include those notes.

**Favorite practice routines:** Meridee usually starts with long tones (weeping at how wretched it always sounds as she begins), then some chromatic sequences, scales and arpeggios. She then alternates work on a piece or two (to get her musical heart pumping) and more exercises. She says, "My issues, which I'm sure others share, is making or finding enough time to practice to make progress, or at least not lose ground as I can't always practice every day."

**Other interests:** Family, including her husband, three adult kids, daughter-in-law and a beguiling infant grandchild; travel (most recently to South Africa and India, where two of her kids now live), and playing with her recently-formed woodwind quintet. And cooking, her lighthouse (The Barber's Point Light) on Lake Champlain, walking in Central Park, and the NY cultural scene.

**Advice for NYFC members:** (i) Learn those scales and technical things younger rather than older (when fingers just don't connect to the brain as reliably or swiftly). (ii) Keep playing! Even ten minutes here and there can help minimize loss during "dry spells" with too many obligations and no time for the real work of practicing. (iii) Play chamber music! It is an energizing experience, particularly if you can arrange for coaching...And consider joining the Amateur Chamber Music Players ([www.acmp.net](http://www.acmp.net)) to identify players of other instruments. □

## FLUTE HAPPENINGS

FREE to current NYFC members, this section lists upcoming performances by members; flute-related contests, auditions, and masterclasses organized/sponsored by members; and (periodically) brief descriptions of members' new recordings, sheet music, and books. Send submissions to the editor.

### MAY '06

MAY  
18

Thursday 8:00 pm

The Sylvan Winds with flutist **SVJETLANA KABALIN** will perform a program of works by Mozart, Ravel, Husa, and others.

• Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, 154 West 57th Street, NYC • Admission: \$30 general, \$15 students/seniors • Info, call 212-222-3569 or email [sylvanwinds@att.net](mailto:sylvanwinds@att.net).

MAY  
23

Tuesday 8:00 pm

**JONATHAN BRAHMS**, flute, and Nelson Padgett, piano, in a program of works by Mozart, Dvorak, Ravel, and Prokofiev.

• St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 619 Lexington Avenue (at 54th Street), NYC • Admission is free.

MAY  
23

Tuesday 8:00 pm

ModernWorks features **PATRICIA SPENCER**, flute, and Madeleine Shapiro, cello, in duos by Reza Vali and Kaija Saariaho. Reception following concert.

• Second Presbyterian Church, 6 West 96th Street (at CPW), NYC • Admission: \$10 suggested donation (for organ fund) • Info, visit [www.ModernWorks.com](http://www.ModernWorks.com) or call 212-362-0962.

### JUNE '06

JUNE  
06

Tuesday 8:00 pm

Da Capo Chamber Players, with **PATRICIA SPENCER**, flute, offers a program entitled "Ears to the East," featuring works by Chinary Ung, Huang Ruo, Evan Ziporyn, Akemi Naito, and Da Capo's 100th commissioned work, Shirish Korde's *Bandit Queen: Song Cycle on the Life of Phoolan Devi*.

• Merkin Concert Hall, 129 West 67th Street, NYC • Admission: \$20 general, \$10 students/seniors • Info, visit [www.dacapo-chamberplayers.org](http://www.dacapo-chamberplayers.org) or call box office at 212-501-3330.

## MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS

**JEANNE BAXTRESSER** flute masterclass at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh with guest and resident artists Mathieu Dufour, Christina Jennings, Jennifer Conner, Alberto Almarza and Stephen Schultz, June 18–25, 2006. Advanced participants and auditors of all levels are welcome. A daily option is also available. There will be opportunities for all to attend classes and lectures, and participate in ensembles and mini-lessons. Visit [www.jeannebaxtresser.com](http://www.jeannebaxtresser.com), or phone 908-608-1325, fax 908-608-1326; [jbmclass@aol.com](mailto:jbmclass@aol.com).

# MORE ADVENTURES ON THE BARRÈRE TRAIL: Nancy Drew Investigates eBay

by Nancy Toff

Sell it on eBay: that's the eternal hope of anyone eager to clean out their attic, basement, or closets. For collectors, it has become the preferred source for treasures of all kinds. But a spur to serious research? Why not? Over the last few years, I have used eBay as an entertaining and useful tool for expanding my archive relating to Georges Barrère. And some of these finds have also forced me to flex my research muscles to document them.

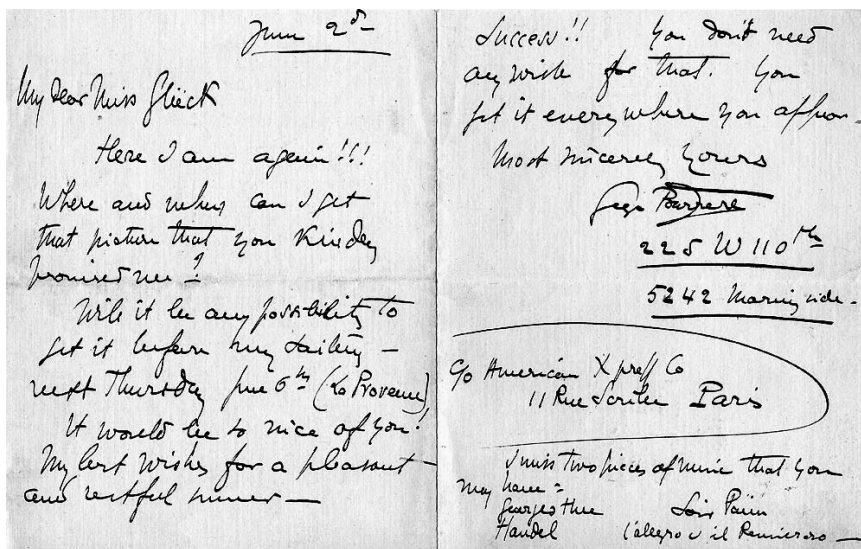
📷 The very first Barrère item I found on eBay, in September 2001, was a mint copy of the 1931–32 Barrère Little Symphony flyer. I had seen several copies in libraries, but this would be a choice addition to the Barrère archive. Better yet, the starting bid was \$1.00. I had no competition, and the flyer was mine for \$1.57, postpaid. The seller was a book dealer upstate who had found the flyer used as a bookmark. One man's trash...



In October 2002 I picked up three programs from the Fortnightly Musical Club in Des Moines, one for the Barrère Little Symphony's April 25, 1925 concert at the Women's Club Auditorium. (One of the others was even more of a rarity, a recital by pianist-composer Leo Ornstein in December 1924.) Total price: \$4.00.

## Needs research

📷 The morning after the 2005 New York Flute Fair, I dutifully checked my email. One item immediately caught my



eye: a “saved search” notice from eBay for an autograph letter from Barrère to the soprano Alma Gluck. (I’ve set up a “saved search” for Barrère, among other keywords, which means that eBay automatically sends me an email when that word turns up in the description of an item for sale.) The seller was an autograph dealer in Colorado Springs, and he included an excellent scan of the letter. There was absolutely no doubt that it was authentic. But he clearly was no musician, because he opened the auction at a mere \$0.99. His final notation was “Needs research.” He had come to the right place.

Flute fair guest artist Leone Buyse was my house guest, and she became as excited as I was. “Bid high,” she counseled. I took a more conservative tack: I’d start at the opening price, \$0.99, and see what happened. Suffice it to say that nothing happened. Five days later I won the auction: at \$0.99, plus \$4.95 shipping and handling. Five days after that, my prize arrived in the mail. Then the real fun began: researching its contents.

The letter was sent from 225 West 110th Street, and dated only June 2nd, no year. I consulted my Barrère address log and found that he moved to 225 West 110th Street sometime after

February 21, 1910, the date on his son Gabriel’s birth certificate. There are two letters from Barrère written from that address in February and April 1912, but by November he had moved to 135 West 104th Street. (Fortunately, he moved often, a fact that is extremely useful in dating his correspondence.) So that narrowed the date to 1910–1912. Barrère also mentions that he’s sailing for France on Thursday, June 6, which according to the perpetual calendar could only be in 1912. As the mathematicians say, Q.E.D.

But I wanted to know more about his collaboration with Alma Gluck, a fine musician. I consulted my Barrère concert database and determined that Barrère and Gluck had performed together at a private musicale on November 3, 1911 at Alnwick Hall, the New Jersey home of Mr. and Mrs. Edward P. Meany. (A web search\* revealed that the 42-room neo-Gothic mansion is on Madison Avenue in Convent Station, just east of Morristown. It is now a Lutheran church.) The host, Edward Meany, was a lawyer who helped found the American Telephone & Telegraph Company; the audience included such notables as the banker-philanthropist Otto Kahn.

Barrère’s fellow performers were tenor Edmond Clément, violinist Efrem

Zimbalist (Gluck's future husband), and an orchestra directed by A. Rothmeyer. (I had numerous sources: announcements in *Musical America* and the *New York Times* and a review in the *Times*—documentation we certainly wouldn't have today.) The repertoire included the Chaminade Concertino and that old chestnut, Bishop's "Lo, Hear the Gentle Lark." A check of Barrère's scrapbook revealed the full program—but it included neither the Hübner "Soir païen" nor the Handel aria from *L'Allegro e il Penseroso* mentioned in the letter—so perhaps they performed together more than once. Or perhaps those works were encores, or they were simply considering them for the program.

The next time I'm in Washington, I'm going to check Alma Gluck's scrapbooks at the Library of Congress for evidence of other collaborations with Barrère.

### Clap for Clappé

☞ A few months later, I didn't have to do much research, just eat a little crow, when my standing Barrère search reported this item: *The Principles of Wind-Band Transcription* by Arthur A. Clappé (New York: Carl Fischer, 1921), ex-library, with an opening bid of \$2.00. The selling point was the dedication:

To  
GEORGE BARRÈRE  
THE EMINENT FLUTE SOLOIST  
FOUNDER OF THE BARRÈRE ENSEMBLE  
IN RECOGNITION OF AND AS TRIBUTE TO  
HIS INSISTENT LABORS TO WIN FOR WIND INSTRUMENTS  
THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN PUBLIC APPRECIATION AND  
AS ESSENTIAL FACTORS IN THE REALM OF MUSIC  
THIS BOOK IS INSCRIBED  
BY THE AUTHOR

The treatise itself is a classic of its kind—but I had not had reason to consult it in perhaps 30 years—and I'd completed my Barrère biography oblivious to this heartfelt dedication. A Google search and *Baker's Dictionary* explained the Barrère link: The British-born Clappé was a longtime U.S. Army bandmaster. In 1911, with Frank Damrosch, he had founded the school for army bandmasters at Fort Jay, on Governor's Island, that was affiliated with the Institute of Musical Art. Barrère taught some of the school's flute players. No one else bid on the book. It was mine for \$3.84, with postage.

### A hunch pays off

My next purchase resulted from a combination of intuition and luck. In addition to searching eBay by keyword, a potential buyer can browse various categories. I typically comb through music and dance memorabilia and various paper collectibles. The very first time I did that, I noticed a listing for "1922 Town Hall Theatre Program, New York Concert Ballet." That rang a loud bell: Barrère had conducted the premiere of John Alden Carpenter's *Krazy Kat* ballet, with Adolph Bolm dancing the title role, in Town Hall that year. Could this be that program?

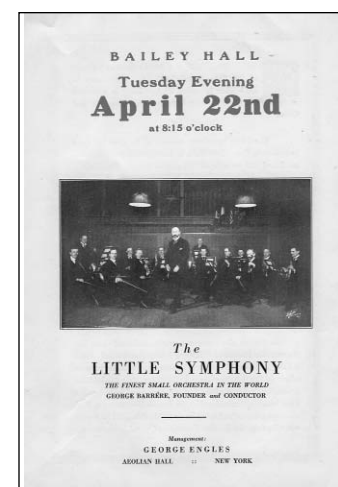
The description gave no clue; very often eBay sellers are not experts on the items they have for sale, and they don't realize what kind of information will be useful to a potential buyer. I asked the seller if the program was dated January 20 or 21, 1922, and if it was for *Krazy Kat*. Indeed, responded the owner of Bob's Country Store Antiques in rural Tennessee, it was. I bid, and with no competition won it for \$5.50 plus postage.

I had seen pieces of this program in various scrapbooks and clipping files, but never had I seen the whole thing. And I found something curious: nowhere does it mention Barrère, even though he is listed prominently in the advertising flyer and mentioned in every review.

### Cornell

☞ Most recently, I received a notice for "antique ad—The Little Symphony—George Barrère—Cornell," supposedly dated 1922. The flyer itself reads "Bailey Hall, Tuesday, April 22," no year. I was very pleased: this concert was not one in my database, so this would up the total count from 1,749 to 1,750. (I've since logged more.) I checked with the seller to verify the date. She wrote, "The flyer was in a large lot of fliers from Cornell and Ithaca Conservatory of Music. . . . I estimated the year after comparing them to the other fliers which were all in an envelope marked 1922. . . ."

I was skeptical, because my calendar showed that members of the Little Symphony were playing in Griffes's *Salut au Monde* at the Neighborhood



Playhouse on Grand Street that night. And I had recorded that date as a Saturday, a fact I confirmed with my trusty perpetual calendar. From that I determined that possible years for a Tuesday, April 22 were only 1919, 1924, 1930, and 1941.

The text inside the flyer states, "The French Government recently conferred upon Mr. Barrère the Rosette of Officer of Public Information." That wasn't quite right—the correct title was Officer of Public Instruction, an honorific that would lead to the Legion of Honor—but according to my chronology database the award was announced in May 1923\*\*. I crossed 1919 off my list. My best guess is 1924, but I am awaiting confirmation from the Cornell archives.

### One that got away... sort of

☞ Over the summer, I was pleased and not a little surprised to find two items advertised from the estate of Lorna Wren, a Barrère student at Juilliard in the 1940s. She lived in Los Angeles and we'd corresponded, but she had never agreed to be interviewed. Now a dealer was offering an autograph letter of recommendation by Barrère and a photo of the all-women's woodwind quintet that he coached in the mid-1930s.

I had known about that quintet for years; Bob Lehman, longtime treasurer of the flute club, had seen the photo in the home of the group's bassoonist, Maxine Shimer, in Pittsburgh. But it had been damaged in a fire, and Ms. Shimer was so attached to it that she refused to

(Cont'd on next page)

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allow Bob to take it to a professional photo studio to be copied. I was likewise unsuccessful in securing a copy from her.

Ms. Shimer had identified the other players as Lorna Wren (flute), Lois Wann (oboe), Josephine La Prade (clarinet; later married to New York Philharmonic trumpeter William Vacchiano), and Helen Enser Hall (horn). I wrote to Ms. Wann, who was retired but still lived in Westchester. Unfortunately, she was too ill to see me. Mr. Vacchiano (who, incidentally, played briefly in the Barrère Little Symphony), had no recollection of the photo, and Ms. Hall was deceased.

I had long since given up hope of finding the photo, so I was thrilled to



see it on eBay. But I thought the opening price was a bit steep, probably elevated by the letter, which had no particular historical interest but potential value as an autograph. A bit unenthusiastically, I placed a bid, but the price went too high for my taste.

It turned out, however, that I recognized the winner as Alan Weiss, marketing director at Haynes Flutes, who is also a collector of flute ephemera. (He's also been most helpful in providing me access to the Haynes archives.) I wrote to Alan and asked if he'd provide me with a scan of the photo, which he willingly did. So we both won—he has the original, and I have a scan suitable for printing.

### Gotcha!

Success of another sort—along with a small dose of vindication—came in February 2005, when I saw an estate sale of some Community Concerts programs from Glens Falls, NY. What grabbed my attention was the description of Barrère, which I realized was

my own text, on the flute club website. I crankily fired off an email to the seller: "I note that you have plagiarized your description of Barrère from the NY Flute Club website, which is copyrighted. In the future, I would ask that you be more respectful of other people's literary property."

Chastened, the seller wrote back overnight, "While I freely admit to cribbing the info from the web, since I had no idea who Mr. Barrère was, I have never visited your site. . . . As best as I can remember, I found the info on a site selling sheet music. . . . I'm afraid you were plagiarized before I got there."

But then he made an offer: if the NYFC were a non-profit and he could get a tax deduction, he would donate the Barrère program to our archives. I sent him an acknowledgment and the program is ours, gratis. But caveat emptor: Barrère (as well as BLS flutist Paul Siebeneichen) signed the program in

pencil, as he often did. The seller's father had traced over the signatures with a fountain pen, diminishing their value. Nevertheless, it's good to have the documentation.

### Please, sir, may I have some more?

I continue to look for Barrère items, and also for New York Flute Club memorabilia for our archives. I trust NY Flute Club members to refrain from bidding against me! □

*Nancy Toff is the archivist of the New York Flute Club. Her most recent book is Monarch of the Flute: The Life of Georges Barrère (Oxford University Press).*

\*<http://www.nynjctbotany.org/njhltocf/morristwnhist.html>

\*\* *The New York Times*, May 13, 1923.

## Upcoming Wood Flute Conference

Readers intrigued by the sound of the wooden flutes we've been hearing this year and wanting to learn more might like to attend a special Wood Flute Conference being held at the University of Washington (Seattle), June 16–18, 2006. Organized by the prominent wood flutes pioneer and UW Professor of Flute Felix Skowronek, who died on April 17 at age 70, the conference will examine the extent to which "modern" wooden Boehm-system flutes and metal flutes with wooden headjoints are being played in the United States and Canada, and will allow participants to discuss their common experiences and problems as members of a distinct but growing minority in the flute world. Details on the program, accommodations, and fees may be found at [www.woodflutefest.com](http://www.woodflutefest.com) or by contacting Jeffrey Cohan at [woodflutefest@aol.com](mailto:woodflutefest@aol.com) or 866-808-6708.

I learned some interesting things from Prof. Skowronek via email correspondence and a selection of reprinted articles he sent me in March. A former president of the NFA, he had been playing a wooden flute since the early 1960s, and experimenting with making his own wood headjoints since the 1980s. He had investigated several exotic hardwoods from Western Australia as possible substitutes for the more traditional grenadilla and cocus. He believed that the resistance and lack of responsivity typically associated with wood headjoints have more to do with the maker's design choices than any intrinsic properties of wood as a material. That said, he thought that the resistance in a clunky wood headjoint could actually have a remedial value in certain cases, since learning how to sound good on wood makes metal seem all the easier (for details, see his article in the December 1985 *Seattle Flute Society Newsletter*).

Anyone planning on attending the conference and willing to consider reporting on the highlights in a future *NYFC Newsletter* issue should contact the editor.

Katherine Saenger ([klsaenger@yahoo.com](mailto:klsaenger@yahoo.com))

# MEMBER PERSPECTIVES: IMPROVISATION

David Wechsler's November 2005 "From the President" column ("Improvisation—Not a Lost Art") and the more-noticeable-than-usual role of improvisation in the NYFC's programming this season prompted me to make a request last fall for readers to send me their reflections on when, how, and why they learned to improvise, and if they thought it could be taught. —K.S.

## **NYFC member Gene Coleman had this response:**

I think I must have been around 12 when I first started to improvise, even before I played an instrument. It was the late 1950s, and my family had an extensive collection of jazz and popular music recordings. I was accustomed to listening to Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Frank Sinatra, etc. I enjoyed listening to those records and I would sing along with them, the melody and improvised sections. On impulse I bought a recorder. Thinking back, why a recorder? I think that was the least expensive substitute for a saxophone, as at that time I was entertaining thoughts about playing saxophone when I became older. Now without regard to tonality and rhythm I would play along with records trying to play the melody and then would improvise playing variations during the solos. I continued doing this until I started playing flute in a high school band at about age 15. During band breaks, I and a few other students would play jazz tunes and improvise. I was a weak sight reader, but I was ahead of the others when it came to improvising.

In music appreciation class I discovered that as a result of my attempts to improvise and listening to records at home I had inadvertently taught myself the AABA song form. This enabled me to know at what point I was in the tune. At this time I was not aware of the harmonic structure of tunes or what jazz musicians refer to as the "chord

changes" or "changes." I was playing what I considered melodic variations.

How have my improvisation skills been useful to me? Jazz is the music that I primarily play, and improvisation is a vital component of this style of music. The ability to improvise has also come in handy in playing Latin and other styles of music where improvising is an important element.

Can improvisation be taught? That might be a tough call. My first impulse would be to say no. One might just have to have some sort of predisposition to it. I say this because I have encountered people who just couldn't get it. But, thinking further on another level, improvisation can be approached the same as other skills are developed, such as learning how to swim, drive, dance, or speak and write in a foreign language.

What is it that prevents most people from attempting improvising? Is it fear, or a nervous anxiety that one might not do well when trying? Is it a lack of understanding of just what is required, a lack of exposure to music styles where improvising is an integral part of that particular music? Comparing learning to improvise to learning a foreign language, there is a vocabulary and a grammatical structure. And, in the end, after studying these elements, the final result may be that there are some that will be able to do it well and there will be those who can do it better. I might add at this point that imagination is an important element. You have to make wide use of it. You are telling stories of which you are the author. Most important for those attempting to improvise is to feel secure and confident in playing. And who knows? Something wonderful may come out of the process!

An afterthought: it is a funny thing... as I took a more formal approach to improvising by studying popular and jazz harmony, I became somewhat inhibited when I attempted to improvise. The more I learn the more I find what I don't know. Looking back at my first attempts at trying to improvise, with no knowledge of that vocabulary

and grammatical structure I mentioned previously, I guess you could say ignorance was bliss. Now I am trying to establish a good balance between depending upon my imagination and the application of a good knowledge of popular and jazz harmony in approaching improvisation. □

*When not working his day job as an adjunct professor teaching film and television studies at the New York Institute of Technology, Gene Coleman performs as a freelance flutist and soprano saxophonist with ensembles in which improvising is an important element of the music.*

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

**Sunday, May 21, 2006 at 5:30 pm**

*Yamaha Piano Salon*

*689 Fifth Avenue*

*(entrance on 54th Street between  
Fifth and Madison Avenues)*

*New York City*

The annual meeting of the New York Flute Club, Inc. will be held on Sunday, May 21, 2006 at 5:30 pm. At that time we will elect officers and members of the board of directors. All current members are eligible and encouraged to attend and vote.

The spring ensemble concert, featuring flutists who have participated in the NYFC ensemble program, will immediately follow the 5:30 pm meeting. There will be a reception following the concert.

Post-concert refreshments will be needed. Please phone David Wechsler (718-859-8649) if you can bring something. Requested items include wine, soda, cheese, crackers, cookies, grapes, and other nibbles. Please help us make a nice end-of-year celebration.

## CLASSIFIED

**Members may advertise in this section for \$10 for up to 320 characters/spaces. Your ad should be submitted by hard copy or email. Name and phone number are required. Deadline is the same as for Flute Happenings submissions. Ads must be paid for in advance. Make checks payable to the New York Flute Club and mail to the Newsletter Editor.**



The New York Flute Club  
Park West Finance Station  
P.O. Box 20613  
New York, NY 10025-1515



## May 21, 2006 concert

Sunday 5:30 pm • Yamaha Piano Salon, 689 Fifth Avenue (at 54th Street)

## 2006 ENSEMBLE PROGRAM CONCERT

### 86<sup>th</sup> Season

#### 2005–2006 Concerts

**October 23, 2005** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
DAVE VALENTIN, ANDREA BRACHFELD,  
CONNIE GROSSMAN and KAREN JOSEPH

**November 13, 2005** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
CAMILLA HOITENGA, flute

**December 18, 2005** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
SANDRA MILLER and ANDREW BOLOTOWSKY  
*Baroque holiday concert*

**January 22, 2006** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
STEPHEN PRESTON and AMARA GUITRY  
*Contemporary music for two baroque flutes*

**February 19, 2006** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
PATRICIA and GREGORY ZUBER, flute and  
percussion duo  
*With Thomas Kovachevich visuals*

**March 19, 2006** • Sunday, all day  
FLUTE FAIR 2006—Rhonda Larson, guest artist  
*LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Per-  
forming Arts, 100 Amsterdam Avenue (@ 65th)*

**April 23, 2006** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
2006 NYFC COMPETITION WINNERS

**May 21, 2006** • Sunday, 5:30 pm  
ANNUAL MEETING & ENSEMBLE CONCERT

*All concerts and events (except as noted) at Yamaha Piano Salon, 689 Fifth Avenue (entrance between Fifth and Madison on 54th Street). All dates and programs subject to change. Tickets \$10, only at the door; free to members. For more information, visit the NYFC website at [www.nyfluteclub.org](http://www.nyfluteclub.org) or call 732-257-9082.*



#### From the Editor

**Greetings!** The May 21st concert, organized by Jane Rigler, will feature participants in the NYFC's ensemble program; the annual meeting of the club and a reception will bracket the concert. Please note the 5:30 pm start time (a change from the original schedule) and the Yamaha Piano Salon venue.

This issue features some reflections on improvisation by NYFC member Gene Coleman, in response to the November 2005 Member Perspectives column, and an article by Nancy Toff on the challenge and fun of using eBay as a tool for scholarly research. We also have a "help wanted" announcement for three positions in the Club (p. 3); please take a look and consider volunteering yourself or recommending a colleague.

Mary Duncan ("Meridee") Brust, a Rockefeller University nurse and amateur flute player, is this month's member profile subject. I was intrigued to learn that she has memories of Jayn Rosenfeld as a high school flutist in Vermont, and had fun checking out photos of her lighthouse (a Lake Champlain landmark) on the web.

As this is the last of the newsletters for the 2005-6 NYFC season, I would like to thank the year's interviewers, writers, and proofers for their many contributions. This select group includes Jamie Baum, Gene Coleman, Annette Dorsky, Kathy Fink, Don Hulbert, Jim Phelan, Jane Rigler, Pat Spencer, Stefani Starin, Nancy Toff, David Wechsler, and Barbara Williams.

Hope to see you on May 21st, and best wishes for a good summer.

Best regards,

**Katherine Saenger** ([klsaenger@yahoo.com](mailto:klsaenger@yahoo.com))