



The New York Flute Club

NEWSLETTER

October 2020

The Music of Gabriela Lena Frank



Clockwise from upper left: Moderator Jayn Rosenfeld, flutist Carol Wincenc, composer Gabriela Lena Frank, and flutist Demarre McGill.

Demarre McGill: Opening Doors to the Past, and to the Future

Interview by Jayn Rosenfeld

Demarre McGill is currently principal flutist of the Seattle Symphony and associate professor of flute at Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. On September 21, we chatted by Zoom, with him in Seattle and me in NY. It felt like we were together in the same friendly room. His warm interest in the broad spectrum of history, education, performance, and new art looking forward comprised a real, personally-felt social program. I first requested permission to record; then we got started, but with a small hiccup, a short postponement....

DEMARRE MCGILL: I'm about six days from closing on a home and just got some documents I needed to look at about ten minutes before we were supposed to meet...

JAYN ROSENFELD: Well, hello and congratulations! Where is this new home, in Cincinnati or Seattle?

DM: In Seattle.

JR: Wonderful, hope it goes well! How do you juggle playing in Seattle and teaching in Cincinnati? It sounds hard and tiring...

DM: Right now I'm Zooming, but pre-COVID, I was on

the plane every weekend. It's not the easiest thing and it's probably not for everyone. But I'll take it.

JR: Our real subject is Gabriela Lena Frank. Why did you choose her for your commission?

DM: Well I have been a fan of her work(s) for years. There's a wonderful chamber music festival that I

(Cont'd on page 4)



October Solo Series: Flutist Patricia Spencer performs Noel Da Costa's *Blues* and Claude Debussy's *Syrinx*. Connection details, p. 3; article, p. 7.

The Music of Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972)

Sunday, October 25, 2020, 5:30 pm

Visit www.nyfluteclub.org prior to the event for Zoom connection details.

Program

Moderator **Jayn Rosenfeld** introduces flutists **Carol Wincenc** and **Demarre McGill** and composer **Gabriela Lena Frank**

JR queries GLF on the origin of her Quechan and Andean melodies

CW and pianist Brian Wagorn perform **Five Andean Improvisations** for flute and piano, commissioned by the NYFC for its centennial

The video was recorded at the work's world premiere at the NYFC's Gala Centennial Concert at Merkin Hall on November 17, 2019.

CW and GLF in live conversation

DM and pianist Jessica Choe perform **Kanto Kechua No. 3** for flute and piano, commissioned by DM in 2019 with funds from the Dallas Symphony.

The video will be recorded in October 2020 in Seattle.

DM and GLF in live conversation

Program subject to change

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 Jessica Yang, NYFC Social Media Chair

Beginning Our Second Century

by Nancy Toff



From the President

Welcome to our second century, season 101 of the New York Flute Club—and prepare for something new. Charles Dickens begins *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

In all truth, it is not the best of times, but we will do our best to produce a season of Light. We will draw on our rich musical and technical resources, on the talents and creativity of our members and colleagues, to continue our tradition of service to the flute community.

My thanks to the large and enthusiastic program committee, which produced long and interesting wishlists of artists and music they wanted to hear and topics they want to learn about. After a centennial season celebrating the deep bench of New York flutists, this year we will take advantage of our online existence to eliminate borders. The logistical issues that often challenge us—including travel schedules, budgets, and visa requirements for foreign artists—are happily irrelevant, and we look forward to hearing from a host of flutists based outside New York.

I also want to thank Jennifer Spicher Szabo, who will be doing the video editing for our presentations, and Jeff Mitchell, who is acting as our technical advisor. We’re all going to learn a great deal from them about how to function in this new environment. My hope is that our electronic presence will allow us to connect with an ever-wider audience, not just New Yorkers. Moreover, as our education and outreach committee considers new ways to reach underserved and minority students, we can bring our programs into their homes at no cost to them.

We have not yet announced the spring season, because until very recently we held out hope that we might be able to hold “real” concerts. That prospect seems dimmer by the moment, but the winter/spring season will happen—albeit online. The big event will be the flute fair; program chair Deirdre McArdle (deirdremcardle49@gmail.com) is hard at work designing a virtual program and welcomes your suggestions. Fred Marcusa is working with our corporate sponsors to continue those very productive relationships. There will be a spring of hope.

For many of us, playing and listening to music has sustained us over these many months of solitude. We have been touched by the Songs of Comfort offered by Yo-Yo Ma, most recently his performance of the Rachmaninoff vocalise in memory of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, loyal daughter of Brooklyn and opera fan extraordinaire. Together, they represent the power of music to console and inspire both performer and listener.

As flutists, we’ll take that enjoyment up a register (or two) with our Solo Series, focusing on the abundant literature for unaccompanied flute. Please join us for the opening of the Solo Series on Thursday, October 22, when Pat Spencer introduces us to the *Blues* of the African American composer Noel Da Costa. And on Sunday, October 25, listen in to a program of works by Gabriela Lena Frank, reflecting her Peruvian roots.

2021 FLUTE FAIR: Update and request for proposals

from Flute Fair Program Chair Deirdre McArdle



As we pivot from our traditional one-day flute fair in Manhattan to an online two-day event some weekend this spring (date TBA), we are seeking proposals for live interactive Zoom workshops, prerecorded concerts, and flute choir Zoom performances.

Two weeks before the going-live day of the fair, presenters and corporate sponsors will have the option of sharing materials and/or instructions related to their session through the NYFC website and Facebook page.

Additional details and a link to the online proposal form may be found on our website’s Flute Fair page at www.nyfluteclub.org/concerts-events-and-more/flute-fair. Questions, comments, and/or suggestions? Please contact Flute Fair program chair Deirdre McArdle at deirdremcardle49@gmail.com.

Member Profile

Baihan Lin

NYFC member since
2020



Employment: Ph.D. student in computational neuroscience at Columbia University.

A recent recital/performance: In July 2012, performing with his high school symphonic band at his hometown music hall in Shenzhen, China, and at the Czech Pisek International Music Festival in the Czech Republic.

Career highlight(s): As a student flutist: performing in various charity concerts, international competitions and music festivals with his school band in junior high school (Shenzhen Foreign Languages School, 2007-9) and high school (Shenzhen Middle School, 2010-12). As a scientist: finding a way to combine his two research interests—neuroscience (where he studies how human brains develop perceptual illusions in virtual reality from real-time observations of the physical world, as well as how different minds in a society engage in mathematically meaningful information flows) and computer science (where, in collaboration with IBM Research, he works to develop neuroscience-inspired artificial intelligence algorithms to help clinical psychiatrists diagnose early-stage mental disorders and monitor disease progression).

Current flute: A silver Yamaha 211, purchased new in 2006, when he started learning flute in sixth grade.

Influential flute teachers: Gongwei Zhu, his first flute instructor, from sixth grade through high school (“He introduced me to the joys of producing music and gave me the idea that learning the flute would be a lifetime endeavor.”); and, later, Dan Rao, associate principal flutist of Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra (“She taught me about flute performance from a more academic and professional perspective.”). Baihan also collected many valuable experiences through orchestral training and practice in the SMS Symphonic and SFLS Wind Bands (“My time in these groups not only shaped my skills in harmonizing with other musicians, but also enlightened me to the beauty of

music that can only be created by a collective group.”).

High school: Shenzhen Middle School in Shenzhen, China.

Degrees: BS in applied and computational mathematics and BA in psychology (University of Washington, 2017), MA in cellular and molecular biophysics (Columbia University, 2019), MS in applied mathematics (University of Washington, 2020), MPhil in computational and systems biology (Columbia University, 2020) and Ph.D. in computational neuroscience (Columbia University, expected 2022).

Most notable and/or personally satisfying accomplishment(s): His volunteer work during high school Saturdays at Shenzhen Children’s Hospital for the rehabilitation training of children with cerebral palsy. He says, “It was troubling to see that the therapies were unaffordable, while the facilities and special schools were insufficient to serve all the children who needed them. I did some research and proposed an initiative to the city government to launch school-based “rehab + education” programs that would allow student organizations to coordinate and conduct safe rehab trainings and basic education under the supervision of a group of volunteering doctors. My idea was accepted and it was very rewarding for me to see the positive impact it had on the affected families.”

Favorite practice routines: Normally Baihan would start the day with 20 minutes of long tones and scales, followed by work on an etude or piece of interest (most recently, Bach’s BWV 1033 and Handel’s HWV 360). But now that the quarantine has given him back his commuting time, he enjoys improving his skills with Peter-Lukas Graf’s *Check-up: 20 Basic Studies for Flautists*.

Other interests: Travel (three continents so far), skateboarding and longboarding (both harder in NYC than Seattle), Aikido, DIY electronics, and wood-working (“A recent project was a modern sofa, where my two little cats enjoy cozy naps.”). Most of all, he likes creating memorable experiences with other people (“I am really looking forward to joining the NYFC ensemble and meeting everyone in upcoming concerts—hopefully this difficult time of COVID-19 will pass soon.”).

Advice for NYFC members: As the Chinese proverb goes, “The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now.”

FLUTE HAPPENINGS

OCTOBER '20

Oct.

16-18 Friday - Sunday, All day

23-25 The Consummate Flutist College Audition Workshop, taught by **SOO-KYUNG PARK** and colleagues, for a head start on the preparation, organization and inspiration needed to have a successful college audition.

- Livestream via Zoom.
- Admission (auditor): \$20 per day, discounts for multiple days and full weekends.
- Info, visit theconsummateflutist.com.

Oct.
18

Sunday 9:00 am - 8:00 pm

The New Jersey Flute Society’s Flute Fair with guest artist **JIM WALKER**. Includes recitals of newly commissioned works and works of women composers. Performers include **KATHLEEN NESTER** and **WENDY STERN**.

- A virtual, livestreamed event.
- Admission: Free for NJFS members; non-members \$10 general, \$5 students/seniors
- Info, visit newjerseyflutefair.org.

Oct.
22

Thursday 7:30 pm

PATRICIA SPENCER will compare Noel Da Costa’s *Blues* and Debussy’s *Syrinx* and perform both in the opening installment of the NYFC’s 2020-21 Solo Series.

- Zoom webinar.
- Access is free.
- Info and connection details, visit nyfluteclub.org.

Remember to renew your NYFC membership for the 2020-21 season!

Visit nyfluteclub.org to join/renew online or via a downloadable membership form for mailing to the NYFC Membership Secretary:

Katherine Saenger
115 Underhill Road
Ossining, NY 10562-4408.



Flute Happenings Deadlines

Issue	Deadline	Mail Date
November 2020	09/21/2020	10/23/2020
December 2020	10/29/2020	11/30/2020
January 2021	12/10/2020	01/11/2021
February 2021	TBA	TBA
March 2021	TBA	TBA
April 2021	TBA	TBA
May 2021	TBA	TBA

Interview (cont'd from page 1)

cofounded around 2005, 2006 that had programmed her pieces before. So I was familiar with her chamber music works. Peripherally, I wanted to commission a female composer. But I was really drawn to her simply because I liked her work.

JR: That is, of course, the best reason! But that brings us to something interesting. Gabriela's music is "classical music," but it has a kind of Latin, well, folk really, not present-day Latin, but it has a strong folkloric side to it. And your piece has got a Central American Indian title.

DM: Yes. *Kanto Kechua*. You know, it's [a big] subject, at this point, what classical music is. But it makes sense that her pieces are inspired by her roots. [Gabriela Frank's mother is Peruvian; her father Eastern European—JR.] You write what you know. It just so happened that for some years, the music, at least that we have been performing, was written by white Europeans.

JR: Yes, white, European, and male.

DM: Yes, but I was saying: the pieces we were "performing." Because there are also white female European composers who weren't and haven't been played. Everyone is writing from their roots, essentially, although maybe theoretically they can be fitted under the umbrella of Western classical music, language-wise, but even then, it depends on where you're from. I think that this is an exciting time to be part of the larger cultural world. It would be beneficial to everyone if such diversity [were accepted].

There's a beautiful thing, I think, about music, about traveling, about eating! It [permits us] to learn about someone else's voice. And that has a lot to do with why I am drawn to Gabriela's music. It's because she is able to write in a way that is, at once, universal and personal. This particular piece, it's for flute and piano, I don't think there's any question that it falls into the category of classical music. AND it falls under the umbrella of her voice as well, which is connected to her people. But there's also no question, if you've heard her other works, that her voice is unique to her and that she claims it as her own.

JR: You don't want to listen to a composer who doesn't have a voice, who doesn't have something to say that's different than from what 19th-century folks have said. It has to be unique, and it needs "roots."

DM: I definitely hear it in this piece. It's there. There are some other composers that I really enjoy as well, who are able to, in the best sense, take the listener in, if they understand the history of the work as it relates maybe to their cultural roots. And their educational background. You find both in a work. Otherwise you can just sit back and enjoy it. (Laugh).

JR: God forbid, that you just sit back and listen! ...

DM: If you focus on that continent across the ocean and across our continent, at any given moment, there are a variety of things happening. A composer who tends to bring out Peruvian elements in the music? It's no different from a Germanic, French, Czech, or Danish composer doing the same thing.

JR: But we don't have very many Black African classical composers.... There are American Black composers but they don't compose from their roots much.

DM: I believe that they do. One composer who is very popular now outside of the flute world, and definitely inside the flute world, is Valerie Coleman. It's in her music definitely. I hear it in everything that I've heard of hers. When I was mentioning white, male, European composers, I specified that that's what's being played. It's important to specify that, because there also are, for instance, European female composers, who are not being played. On the same note, there are Black African composers out there who are not being played, and we have to realize that just because these pieces aren't being played or heard, it doesn't mean they don't exist.

JR: Our job, our responsibility, is to find them, introduce them, and then mix them in.

DM: Yes, I believe that, and the reason I believe that is that I personally don't like being a part of anything that filters out excellence. So you, You, collectively, without prejudice, invite [everyone] in, and then you can let the quality controllers, like Time, filter out the lesser works and promote the good ones that will become standards.

JR: What do you think students, younger players, want to play?

DM: They're playing what their teachers suggest. And if there's something everyone else is playing, students tend to figure out a way to like it.

Take the Liebermann Sonata, for example. I was definitely playing it back in



Demarre McGill (R) with his brother, the clarinetist Anthony McGill, after NYFC concert at Engelman Recital Hall on Dec. 18, 2011. Photo: Zara Lawler

2003, and before that. And it's been popular ever since. There's a variety of works that find their way into the flute repertoire. And, right now, speaking of Valerie Coleman, her works are "popular"! I have more than a handful of students who bring her music in to lessons without my asking. So in some of the circles that I have an eye on, that I'm actively involved in, the students seem to be a little bit more curious.

JR: Is it because of political awareness? Political protest? Political nervousness?

DM: All of the above. But hopefully the result of this is not something which is simply fashionable, but rather good and lasting. One of the things that has come out of this is Valerie Coleman's works. And that is wonderful.

JR: Well, it's a thrill to see the world expanding, not only in one direction, over our musical continents. Incidentally, have you read the Richard Powers novel, The Time of our Singing?

DM: No.

JR: The first scene has Marian Anderson singing at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, and the response of the crowd and the response of two people who meet there, then marry and have a family. It's about all the kinds of music they sing in their house; you might even identify with some of the characters; it sounded like an experience you might have lived in your own family. It's a masterpiece, it's not a casual book.

DM: I'll look. The idea of music and roots together, what happens in a family over time as kids are growing up, it's very connected to Roots. I listen now to mostly non-classical music. At least 90%, if not 95%, of the music that I listen to is non-classical.

JR: But you don't want necessarily to play it.

DM: No, my voice is the voice I have when I'm performing. That's how I know how to speak in public, sing in public. It comes out in that genre.

JR: The other thing that interests me is music education, reaching young people, outreach in general.... How do you get diversity in your students, and find the hidden talent that needs to be found?

DM: That's a very good question, and it's something I've been thinking a lot about. It's something that relates to my own teaching studio. I believe there is so much talent in these communities that either hasn't been invited to enter, or has been denied entry. I realized that when I started teaching at CC, where I've been for three years, but officially appointed a year ago. When a person, or a community, feels not invited, even when they are playing the same sport or the same music, you can't expect them to come in as soon as you open the door. It doesn't mean they don't want to come in. This is one thing I've become more aware of in my own studio. So I'm being more active about it. Technically the door is open, but instead of saying "I am a Black flutist, I am a Black professor," I need to go that door and say, "Come in."

JR: You go to schools? It's demanding!

DM: Hard is part of progress! Hard is not a factor. There are a few young Black flutists that I would like to mentor, to teach. Once a couple of Black students are a part of my studio, then the community knows, "I'm okay here." When I was young, I grew up in Chicago knowing I couldn't go to a certain area of Chicago.

JR: Because you weren't welcome there?

DM: Yes, but once there's a certain percentage of Black families with homes, that warning no longer has any kind of effect on my decision. You understand? So, it's the same with organizations, with academic institutions; you go to the door, and say, "Come on in, come on in," because then the community knows the door is open for them as well.

JR: We are all fervently in favor of that!

DM: It's the best way to having access to excellence across the board. Then you add the filters that are in place.

JR: Like talent. And in some cases, financial filters? Are there a lot of scholarships at CC?

DM: Some. I wish there were more, but there's always a way.

On preparing an *Andean Improvisation* for the 2020 NYFC Competition

by *Jonah Murphy*



The 2020 NYFC Competition was held on February 29, 2020. In addition to performing a piece of our choice, the participants were tasked with memorizing the first of Gabriela Frank's newly composed *Five Andean Improvisations*, "Quena" (quena refers to the wooden flute from the Andean region, which has six regular holes and a thumbhole).

To me, the hardest and most rewarding step in learning Quena was the memorization. The piece has, as its name suggests, a somewhat improvisatory structure—one phrase builds from the previous phrase, and a snippet of that becomes the core idea being developed in the next phrase. In Quena, new ideas emerge as simply a new formulation of the scale and melt into the piece as a whole. This style helped make studying and memorizing the piece a very engaging experience: buried below an apparently simple surface was a surprisingly intricate structure where motifs and ideas constantly circulated, with enough variation to deepen and enrich the texture, and yet with sufficient similarity to make an audible thread from the beginning of the movement through every point thereafter.

Jonah Murphy, first prize winner in the 2020 NYFC Competition, is in his third year at Manhattan School of Music, studying with Michael Parloff.

JR: What a great attitude!

DM: Really. When I was accepted [for a master's] at Juilliard, after Curtis, which was tuition-free, Juilliard didn't give me any scholarship at all. They said, we base this on need and talent.

So much talent hasn't been invited in...the door is open, but I need to go to that door and say "Come in."

JR: And you had both of those!

DM: I won a concerto competition that year! In any case, I thought [Juilliard] was part of my musical trajectory, although I am not a fan of student loans. But I had to do what I had to do to get the education that I thought I needed to have. But we're getting side-tracked...

JR: No, it's not a side track. Did you connect with Julius Baker before you went to Juilliard?

DM: Yes, at Curtis.

JR: And did you go to Juilliard to continue with him?

DM: Yes, I studied with him for seven years. I studied with Julius Baker and Jeffrey Khaner at Curtis, and then Baker at Juilliard.

JR: To return to Gabriela Frank, who supported your commission?

DM: At the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, players in the endowed chairs could apply to use some of the interest

from the endowments for specific projects. That particular year I used it for a commission.

JR: Did you want the piece for a certain concert?

DM: No. I knew that I would have concerts for it. But I just wanted to to expand the flute repertoire [with a work] by someone who was writing amazing music.

JR: What an enlightened thing for the Dallas Symphony to do.

DM: Yes. I'm not a member of that orchestra any more, but the amazing thing about art is that it belongs to the world. Whether you pay for it, or whether you create it...

JR: I see you crossing your fingers.

DM: Crossing my fingers from the composer's point of view, too. The world can still benefit from this music.

JR: You've been very generous, but I want to ask you one more question.

Tell me about that beautiful painting behind you. (The painting is largely bright yellow and blue, a kind of turquoise; the whole frame was not visible, but the work is semi-abstract, intriguing and appealing.)

DM: This beautiful painting! It's called *Portrait of Faces* and the artist is Kareem Ralph Amin. When I was playing with the San Diego Symphony and about to purchase my first home there—a big, big deal for me—I wanted an original work of art, and I wanted it from a local artist. So I went online and found Kareem Ralph Amin,

(Cont'd on page 6)

From the NYFC Newsletter Archives: More about Gabriela Lena Frank, Demarre McGill, and Carol Wincenc



The participants in the October 2020 concert have been featured in several past NYFC newsletters, both as subjects and interviewers. If you have to pick just one issue from our online archives to look at, I recommend November 2019: Jayn Rosenfeld introduces us to composer Gabriela Lena Frank and gives some background on the history of NYFC's centennial commission; and Carol Wincenc shares her impressions about Frank's *Five Andean Improvisations*, the commissioned piece that she premiered at the Club's Gala Centennial Concert on November 17, 2019.

Gabriela Lena Frank and the Commission

- *Meet Gabriela Lena Frank, the NYFC's Centennial Commission Composer* (Interview by Jayn Rosenfeld, November 2019)
- *About the Commissioning Process* (Sidebar by Jayn Rosenfeld, November 2019)

Carol Wincenc

- *Inspiring Collaborations: A Conversation with Carol Wincenc* (Interview by Tanya Dusevic Witek, March 2007)
- *Carol Wincenc: Music of the Spheres* (Interview by Zara Lawler, October 2011)
- *Bursts of Flavor: Carol Wincenc on Gabriela Frank's Five Andean Improvisations* (November 2019)

Demarre McGill

- *Demarre McGill: Seattle's Newest Flute Star* (Interview by Nathalie Joachim and Allison Loggins-Hull, December 2011)

About the Quena

- *What kind of flute do you play?* (Article by Rachel Susser on her summer in Peru studying native flutes, May 2014)

Interview (cont'd from page 5)

a Black artist, around my age, but those are [just] facts. He said, come to the studio, and I went, and I saw that painting, and I loved it. I thought that, okay, we have some similarities, but I just loved the work and I bought it. This painting has traveled with me as I've moved. And I'm about to move into another place here. Of course. I've already picked out where the painting will go.

I love visual art; I have at least seven original works. My brother (Anthony,

first clarinet in the NY Philharmonic) and I grew up with art in the home. Our parents paint. I want people, when they walk into my place, to just look.

JR: I want to come to your place! Do you see where I'm sitting? It's not where I really live—I got flooded out of my home and this is the temporary housing provided by the insurance company.

DM: This is really interesting, and I'm not even joking—I need to get insurance for my new house; there was a reason you told me this! Literally!

When I get up from this Zoom meeting I'm calling your insurance people!

JR: So you wrote down two details, the book I recommended and the name of my insurance company. And the Flute Club and I got a wide-ranging and moving interview. Thank you so much! I'll see you on October 25.

Jayn Rosenfeld is a former president of the NYFC. During a long career as a flutist and advocate for new music, she has been dedicated to commissioning and performing contemporary chamber works.

NYFC ENSEMBLES PROGRAM

UPDATE

The NYFC Ensemble program will be continuing this season, though in a modified, virtual-only mode for now. The season will open with a Zoom meet-up on Saturday, October 17th, from 2:00 to 3:00 pm. No group playing, but a chance to tell your fellow participants about what fluting you have enjoyed in the past six months or so. Also on the agenda: plans for a NYFC Ensemble virtual flute choir performance (individual videos edited into a tapestry) for the 2021 NY Flute Fair.

Co-directors Denise Koncelik and Mark Vickers will send out an email with the Zoom link to people on their ensembles mailing list (previous ensembles participants and potential newcomers who have contacted them). All members of the NY Flute Club are welcome to participate, though your membership must be current for 2020-21. Questions? Contact Denise or Mark directly at ensembles@nyfluteclub.org.



Denise Koncelik



Mark Vickers



From the Zoom meeting of April 25, 2020

NOEL DA COSTA'S *BLUE-TUNE VERSES**

by Patricia Spencer

An unknown gem with some hidden relations to *Syrinx* (Background for a Solo Series presentation, see October 22, 2020 Flute Happenings listing on p. 3 for details—Ed.)

In every era, we find musical gems that have been unjustly neglected. Such a work is Noel Da Costa's solo flute piece, *Blue-Tune Verses* (1997). Da Costa, a composer, violinist, and choral conductor, was born on December 24, 1929, in Lagos, Nigeria, of Jamaican parents who were missionaries for the Salvation Army. He graduated from Queens College and Columbia University and studied with Luigi Dallapiccola in Italy on a Fulbright. He taught at Rutgers University for more than 30 years. He has composed for a wide variety of vocal and instrumental combinations, and many reflect his knowledge of African, West Indian, and African American folk traditions, among them *Ceremony of Spirituals*, *Primal Rites*, and *Five Verses with Vamps*.

Da Costa's *Blue-Tune Verses* ranks with the best of the wonderful short solo flute works of the 20th century—Honegger, Ibert, Takemitsu's *Mei*, Carter's *Scrivo in vento*, and Jolivet's short single-movement *Incantation*. It even seems related to Debussy's *Syrinx*. The charm and strength of the Da Costa are subtle, lurking under the surface. But when the piece is finished, one senses that the world is different; something has happened.

Details! How can I support this claim? In rehearsal with the composer, prior to the premiere (in 2002), I mentioned in passing my intuitive sense of a relationship between his piece and the Debussy. He replied that he “would like to compare it with *Syrinx*,” but we then focused on finding the right tempos and other practical issues. I have since performed it a number of times, always with good response. Sadly, Da Costa, already ill at the time of the premiere, died later in the same year; so that first rehearsal was the only one I had with him.

Recently I decided to memorize the piece—and suddenly the relationship between it and *Syrinx* crystallized. In phrase after phrase, as I got to know the piece more closely, I found hidden instances and hints of the distinctive opening “cell” of *Syrinx* (the first four notes), most often with just three of the four notes, but clearly identifiable. The musical example is the first “verse” of the Da Costa, an 8-bar phrase, plus one bar of the introduction, with quotes marked with straight brackets, a retrograde in a diamond-line bracket, and re-ordered “cells” in hatched brackets (|||||).

The opening “cell” of *Syrinx* occurs seven times in this verse. The verse is repeated later in a kind of “recap” with different rhythms, a different mood—but with all the same little quotes of the cell. Another distinctive feature of *Syrinx* is the descending whole-tone scale at the end. In *Blue-Tune Verses*, Da Costa has one eight-bar verse in which a descending whole-tone scale occurs five times. And in two of these instances, including the first one, the final note of the scale is also the first note of a quote of the three-note “cell”



L to R: Noel Da Costa, Patricia Spencer, and Claude Debussy

Legend:
 — Quotes
 ◊◊◊◊◊ Retrograde
 ▨▨▨▨▨ Re-ordered cells

from the opening. So Da Costa is taking the distinctive ending of Debussy's work and combining it with a brief quote of the distinctive opening—meanwhile maintaining a laid-back, jazz feeling that is the predominant mood of the piece, sparked with exciting climaxes. I don't remember any flutists from the audiences who heard this telling me they heard references to *Syrinx*. There are more connections than one could cover in this brief article. Here is one more quick one.

One aspect of the “tonality” of *Syrinx* is a kind of B-flat “centricity.” B flat opens and closes the first phrase and rises to C flat in the second, only to fall back to B flat after the long upward reach of C flat—D flat—E flat. The next section, *Un peu mouvementé*, also centers on B flat, as does the return of the opening after the Rubato section. But at the very end, a shocking B natural initiates the descending whole-tone scale and never gets displaced by a B flat, so it leaves us hanging there with a new note.

In *Blue-Tune Verses*, the E is given a “centricity” role. All of the five verses, plus the coda, begin on E, and all the wholetone scales in the fourth verse begin on E. But the final note of the piece is E flat, leaving us with a feeling that something has changed, and we are in a different place. We can rejoice in Noel Da Costa's *Blue-Tune Verses*. Realizing only recently how masterfully Da Costa has handled his tribute to *Syrinx*, I feel remiss in not having studied it carefully before now, programmed it more often—and not having told you all about it long ago!

Patricia Spencer, a former president of the NYFC and founding member of the Da Capo Chamber Players, has played the premiere of Elliott Carter's flute concerto (NY), Karlheinz Stockhausen's Kathinkas Gesang als Luzifers Requiem (U.S.), and Shulamit Ran's Voices (world). She teaches flute and chamber music at Bard College/Conservatory and Hofstra University.



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Park West Finance Station
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Sunday, October 25, 2020

A virtual concert (connection details at www.nyfluteclub.org)

The Music of Gabriela Lena Frank

101st Season

2020-2021 Events

October 22, 2020 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Patricia Spencer plays Noel Da Costa

October 25, 2020 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
McGill & Wincenc play Gabriela Lena Frank;
Discussion hosted by Jayn Rosenfeld

November 5, 2020 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Density 21.5 with Molly Barth

November 15, 2020 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
Claire Chase and the *Density 2036* Project

December 3, 2020 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
John Heiss interviewed by Meg Griffith

December 13, 2020 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
Winners of the 2020 NYFC Competition

January 14, 2021 (SS) • Thursday, 7:30 pm
Emily Beynon on Marius Flothuis

January 24, 2021 (C) • Sunday, 5:30 pm
Performers to be announced

February - May 2021 • TBA

All events will be virtual; SS = Solo Series, C = concert.
Visit the NYFC website at www.nyfluteclub.org for
additional information and connection details.



From the Editor

Greetings! October brings us the first two events of what might end up being a virtual-only NYFC season, thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. This month's "concert" will be devoted to the flute music of Gabriela Lena Frank played by flutists Carol Wincenc and Demarre McGill in precord video. Jayn Rosenfeld will moderate a live discussion with the composer and the performers; she touches on a few of the discussion topics in her interview of Demarre, starting on p. 1. To round things out, we have some pointers to previous newsletters featuring the participants (p. 6) as well as a commentary from a 2020 NYFC Competition winner who had to learn a portion of the NYFC-commissioned Frank piece for the competition (p. 5).

In this month's "Solo Series" event (scheduled for Thursday, October 22), Pat Spencer will introduce us to the music of Noel Da Costa. She will perform a piece of his that she commissioned and discuss its similarities to Debussy's *Syrinx* (for a preview, see the reprint of her *Flutist Quarterly* article on p. 7).

In her "From the President," Nancy Toff welcomes us to the opening season of NYFC's second century—a season with challenges and opportunities unlike any in the Club's history to date. She confirms that planning is underway for a spring Flute Fair, and reminds us that we are fortunate to have music as a stress reliever.

Baihan Lin, a Columbia University Ph.D. student in computational neurobiology who joined the Club this summer, is this month's member profile subject. I share his disappointment about the unlikelihood of an in-person ensemble program this fall (though some virtual events are planned—see the Ensembles Update on p. 6), and loved his advice (an old Chinese proverb about tree planting).

Anyway, all for now. Hope to see you on a screen sometime....

Katherine Saenger (klsaenger@yahoo.com)