

## A Conversation with Mary Karen Clardy By Heather Small

Mary Karen Clardy, Regents Professor at the University of North Texas, enjoys a varied career as an avid chamber musician, soloist, teacher, and author. Her collection of etudes from *Schott Music* is a standard sourcebook for music curriculums throughout the world, and her students have won national and international prizes as well as prestigious teaching and orchestral posts. I attended the premiere of *Bricolage for Flute and Computer Music on CD*, a commission by Clardy from renowned American composer Cindy McTee, at the 2008 National Flute Convention in Kansas City. After the performance we discussed the commissioning process, upcoming projects, and her thoughts on teaching.

Raised in a musical family, her parents were professional musicians and educators, and music was a constant part of life in the household. “My parents were my earliest and strongest influences because I heard them teaching, practicing, performing on a daily basis.” She began piano study at age 5 and voice at 12, and her mother largely influenced her decision to become a flutist. “Before I was born, my mom’s intuition told her that I was a girl and that I would be a flutist, so I suppose the idea originated with my mom’s feminine intuition.”

Clardy studied the flute, piano, and voice through the second year of college, but at that point she reached a defining moment in her career path. “I chose flute for both artistic and practical reasons. I loved flute repertoire, and developing embouchure, breath control and endurance needed for artistic maturity, it’s necessary to focus daily practice on one instrument. Voice, piano, and flute complement each other in many ways, but there are subtle physical differences in body usage. I became a flutist in my mind around the age of 17 or 18, but I’m still active as a pianist and singer when teaching in my studio.”

As a Finalist in the NFA’s 1978 Young Artist Competition, Clardy performed in Washington, DC, and won Second Prize. The occasion was a memorable moment in her career, and she recalls the experience, “An NFA convention draws the luminaries of our profession, and as a young artist, it’s exciting to connect names with faces.....but after the performance, you think of who might have been in the audience, and you realize you should have been even more nervous than you were.”

### Commissioned Works

Renowned composer Cindy McTee recently retired from the University of North Texas to focus exclusively on composing, and notable recent commissions include the Detroit, Houston, and National Symphony Orchestras. While studying at Yale, McTee wrote *Chord* (1977) for her classmate Robert Dick; *Stepping Out for Flute and Hand Claps (Claves)*<sup>1</sup> (1993) for her colleague Mary Karen Clardy at the University of North Texas;

---

<sup>1</sup> At Clardy’s suggestion, McTee created a CD with a Hand Claps/Claves accompaniment for flexibility in performance.

and *Bricolage for Flute and Computer Music on CD* (2008) as a commission from Clardy. From the French word *bricoler* (to fiddle or tinker), the term is widely used in the visual arts and in literature, and in the words of the composer, “*Bricolage* reflects my lifelong interest in musical surrealism where the musical unconscious asserts itself through improvisation during the compositional process, and disparate (sometimes borrowed) elements are freely transformed and juxtaposed.”

One of the most important elements in *Bricolage* is listening. As Clardy remarks, “if you’re not listening actively to the computer sounds in the score, the performer’s reaction time and the resulting collaboration is off in performance. So what happens is that the actual computer sounds are a score in the same sense as a Beethoven Symphony, with meter, rhythm, and organization of pitches. The track is laid down, and then as a flutist you respond or react within the texture of the score. It’s not possible for the computer track to adjust to your timing, and although it doesn’t need to be synched exactly, the flutist’s listening abilities, response, and reaction time are critical for successful performance. It’s the same skill I encourage in flutists preparing for an orchestral career because it’s critical to listen to what’s around you in the orchestra. Performing *Bricolage* feels like being in the middle of an orchestra, but without a conductor.”

When asked if she has any advice about the commissioning process, Clardy suggests collaboration. “Many colleagues have a background in composition... perhaps even a degree in composition...but you know them as performers, teachers, or colleagues in the academic world. Most colleges and university music departments have fully-staffed composition departments, with a wealth of new repertoire regularly written by faculty and students, and the process of working with composers adds to the creative energy of performance.” Previous commissions include faculty colleague David Dzubay’s<sup>2</sup> *Duo for Alto Flute and Harp*, premiered in Boston at the 1993 NFA convention, and George Eason’s *Sonatina for Alto Flute and Piano*, written for Clardy by her college piano professor.

## Creative Projects

Since Clardy enjoys practicing etudes, the *Flute Etude Books (Volumes I and II, Schott Music)* were a natural extension of a lifetime of practice. “Selection was based on my teaching experience and personal practice, and I chose my favorites. I like the variety inherent in a collection, because when using an etude book from a single composer, my students were often bored halfway through the semester and lost interest in etude practice. The first collection of etudes was a practical solution to the issue, and daily etude practice always results in artistic, musical, and technical growth in students.” Her next book, *Classic Etudes*, from Universal Edition Vienna, is scheduled for release in 2010 and the book’s format involves student/teacher collaboration within the context of traditional etudes. “Hearing and playing together in a lesson builds a musical reservoir for students, and a sound is worth a million words when teaching music.”

---

<sup>2</sup> David Dzubay is head of composition at Indiana University and director of IU’s New Music Ensemble.

As a recording artist, Clardy records for *Encore Performance Recordings*, and her current releases include *Sonatas and Sonatinas (EPR 2520)*, with composer/pianist Steven Harlos in the world premiere recording of *Sonata Rubata; after Syrinx....( EPR 2521)* , with October Trio members Susan Pejovich, harp, and Barbara Sudweeks, viola; and *The Solo Flute Past to Present (EPR 2522)*. Her other publications include solo repertoire books *Classic Solos (Volumes I and II, UE Vienna)* and daily fundamental exercises *Flute Fundamentals (Volumes I and II, Schott Music)*. “My first book was written in 1994, *Flute Fundamentals*, as a compilation of exercises integral to my teaching— long tones, vibrato, double tonguing, and practice/sightreading skills. Having basic concepts in one place is a great time saver, and *FF I* continues its popularity with flutists of all ages. Second in the series, *FF II*, combines musical artistry with technical development, with expanded exercises from *FF I* and standard musical excerpts used as illustrations. To develop as a musician, first you must develop the phrase, and writing a book that addresses concepts of phrasing and artistry has been an exciting project.”

Scheduled for 2011 release, *The Art of the Piccolo (EPR 2523)* is Clardy’s latest CD for the EPR label. “Playing the piccolo has been a lifelong interest, even though many flutists don’t enjoy piccolo. When teaching orchestral excerpts I insist on piccolo experience for every student, so that after graduation they’re prepared for professional life when confidence on piccolo is an asset. With experience on piccolo, then a young professional will say, ‘Sure I’ll play piccolo on Ravel Bolero...would you like me to play the part in today’s rehearsal? As a matter of fact, I have my piccolo with me.’ My love for the piccolo led to the project, and the CD includes several new works, Robert Beaser’s *Souvenirs*, Daniel Kelly’s *Suite for Piccolo and Piano*, and Daniel Dorff’s *Sonatine de Giverny*.” As the instrument comes into its own ... “there’s more solo repertoire and more interest in commissioning new works for piccolo. There are performers devoting themselves completely to piccolo, and several degrees in piccolo performance on the master’s level.”

## Teaching

Clardy regularly presents master classes in the US and abroad, with annual events in California, Colorado, and Hawaii. From a guest artist appearance at the Hong Kong Flute Centre’s Annual Summer Institute to a Guest Residency in Venice at the Benedetto Marcello Conservatorio, you’d assume that a language barrier exists when teaching around the world, but she says that’s no longer the case. “English is a common language in the world, and after all, music is the first universal language. The best illustration of the universality of music was in rehearsals for Ravel’s *Introduction et Allegro at Campos do Jordão*, a Brazilian Festival modeled after Tanglewood Institute. The rehearsal hall was filled with German, Portuguese, and French being spoken, and I was the only English speaker in the room. As musicians, we worked within the language of music, and it was probably one of the most memorable experiences of my career..... and that was only the rehearsal.”

A colleague at the University of North Texas invited Clardy and some other faculty members to teach in Taiwan’s Summer Music Institute in the mid-1980s, and this was her

first trip to Asia. “Asian cultures praise and develop the work ethic, and because practice and discipline are strengths of Asian students, it’s important to address phrasing and tone development to complement technical skills. In flutists from all cultures, development of mechanical skill often precedes musical development, so introducing artistic goals together with technical challenges is essential in the teaching process.”

On the subject of teaching, Clardy acknowledges that she learns as much from her students as she teaches them. “Teaching is an exciting process because it’s like working in a chemistry lab where simple ingredients combine to create something new – very fascinating.”

### **The Art of Listening**

With every opportunity, Clardy teaches her students to listen. “Developing the art of listening is a priority, and I encourage this skill through imitation...the most basic, natural way to learn music. In music theory and ear training classes, students learn dictation and other exercises, but for career success, listening goes beyond music. It’s important to develop the habit of listening and following instructions exactly. Developing listening skills in the studio is the best preparation for an orchestral career because in professional situations, instructions are given once. “

During our discussion, Clardy gave the following advice to Flute Talk readers. “My top five suggestions for a young flutist are to listen, listen, listen, listen, and listen! Listen to your teacher’s instructions; listen to the best available recordings; listen to great singers, pianists and other instrumentalists; listen to yourself through recordings; and finally, listen to live performances as often as possible to learn the art of performance.” Develop independence from the notes on the page by memorizing as soon as possible and commit to a regular practice routine that includes daily scales, arpeggios, and other exercises. “Detach from the page and use your ear to respond, react, and create music without the visual security blanket of the score. Encourage young musicians to sing or whistle pitches to develop the internal ear, phrasing, and musical line. And last but not least...perform as much as possible and remember the inherent joy in music.”

Her last advice is particularly valuable for players auditioning for orchestras, competitions, or college teaching positions. “Preparation for auditions and/or job interviews involves a great deal of personal flexibility, and learning to respond and react flexibly under the stress of an audition is a developed skill. A perfect audition day or ideal job interview is not a fact of modern life, and professional flutists share stories of the three-hour flight delay before an audition or a late-season April snowstorm that snarls traffic on the way to a performance of Debussy’s *Afternoon of a Faun*. Life gets in the way of perfection so prepare for the unexpected!”

### **The Next Chapter**

Clardy recently appeared at the *XXVth Annual Peruvian Flute Festival* in Lima, Peru, in concerts and masterclasses, and she's an invited guest for the *2010 Honduras Flute Festival* in Tegucigalpa.

The *Dallas Contemporary* has established a new concert series, and Clardy will perform Cindy McTee's *Bricolage* and *Stepping Out* in October on the 2010 inaugural season.

The 2010 NFA Convention in Anaheim includes performances and judging the High School Soloists Competition.

Clardy is an invited judge for the *1<sup>st</sup> Annual Hong Kong Flute Competition* in 2011 alongside Robert Aitken, Shigenori Kudo, and Brooks de Wetter Smith.

Proceeds from *The Woodwind Player's Cookbook: Creative Recipes for a Successful Performance* sales are donated to the American Music Conference (AMC), a non-profit affiliate of NAMM, the International Music Products Association. Through their proactive approach, the AMC leads the way in support of music education in America and around the world.

A regular contributor to *Halftime Magazine: Sights, Sounds & Spirit of the Marching Arts* Wind Sectional column. The publication is geared to HS musicians and provides tips for musical and technical practice during the intense fall marching band season.

#### **Selected list of Flute Talk Articles:**

"Those First Four Measures," Volume 22, No. 1, September, 2002.

"Preparing for College Auditions, an Interview by Victoria Jicha," Volume 21, No. 4, December, 2001.

"A Performance Guide to Ned Rorem's *Trio* for Flute, Cello, and Piano, Volume 19, No. 4, November, 1999.

"Auditions, College, and Beyond," Volume 18, No. 3, November 1998.

"A Performance Guide to Eldin Burton's *Sonatina*, Volume 16, No. 8, December, 1997.

"An Interview with Philippe Bernold," Volume 15, No. 1, January 1996.

"*Flute Fundamentals, A Guide*", Volume 13, No. 7, September, 1994.

"Performing Gustav Holst's *The Planets*," Volume 13, No. 1, January 1994.

"An Interview with Jonathan Snowden," Volume 12, No. 1, January 1993.

"Guide to Performing Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*," Volume 11, No. 9, May/June, 1992.

"Guide to Performing Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*," Volume 11, No. 5, January 1992.

"Linking the Past and Present: An Interview with George Morey, Volume 11, No. 5, January 1991.

"The Career Musician," Volume 10, No. 4, December, 1990.

"Soichi Minegishi, Teacher and Orchestral Player," Volume 10, No. 1, September, 1990.

"The Importance of Competition," Volume 8, No. 7, March, 1989.

"Nice Flute Symposium," Volume 8, No. 2, October, 1988.

"Developing Breath Control," Volume 5, No. 1, September, 1985.

### **Miscellaneous Articles:**

"The Art of Practice," in *The Woodwind Player's Cookbook: Creative recipes for a Successful Performance*, Meredith Publications, Volume 3, 2007.

"Technique Tips for Flutists," "Flute Basics," "Solving Flute Problems," "Becoming a GREAT Piccolo Player," *Halftime Magazine*, [www.halftimemag.com](http://www.halftimemag.com), Volumes 1, 2 and 3, 2007 - 2009.

"An Interview with Jacob Berg," *The Flutist Quarterly*, Volume XXVIII, No. 1, Fall, 2003.

"Mary Karen Clardy: Grace & Balance," *Backstage Pass*, [www.yamaha.com/band](http://www.yamaha.com/band). Yamaha Corporation of America, Fall, 2001.

"Flute Embouchure," *The Emerson Flute Forum*, Winter, 1992.

"Guest Master Class with Mary Karen Clardy," *The Emerson Flute Forum*, Winter, 1988.

"The Fiberoptic Laryngoscope in Woodwind Playing," Mary Karen Clardy and Charles Veazey, *The Flutist Quarterly*, Volume XIII, Winter, 1987.

"The Master Class by Mary Karen Clardy," *The Flute World of Selmer*, Opus No. 3, 1983.