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**Interview with Jean-Guy Brault - Flute**

National Arts Centre Orchestra

*FOURTH STAGE*

March 14, 2002

**Please introduce yourself and tell us your position with the NACO.**

My name is Jean-Guy Brault. I'm a flautist and I play the flute and the piccolo with the NAC Orchestra.

**Do you come from a musical family?**

My mother was a teacher and my father a fisherman off the Atlantic coast. There was a piano and a violin at home and my father played both of them. But more than that, there was a great love of music in general and always music to listen to at home.

**When and why did you start playing the flute?**

The flute wasn't my first instrument, I was a saxophonist first. At the time that I started, years ago, if you were a saxophonist who really wanted to play, you had to play the flute or the clarinet as a second instrument. That's how it began for me. Right away things started to happen. These days, it's probably not like that, but at that time, you could do it that way.

**What are your habits before a concert? What sort of things do you do?**

I try not to think too much about the concert that we're about to give. First I do a warm up, as relaxed as possible, and then I just give it my best.

**Do you play any music other than classical?**

When you're a member of an orchestra, you play what's in front of you. In some series – such as the Orchestra's regular series – we play the occasional popular piece, but in general we mainly play classical.

**Do you hear yourself when the orchestra is playing?**

It is absolutely crucial to hear yourself. A musician who doesn't hear him or herself within the orchestra is likely to have problems. If it happens, the orchestra may be playing too loudly or the musician not loudly enough, but it's essential to hear yourself at every moment. And you also have to be listening to what the musicians around you are doing. That's what makes a successful orchestra.

**Do you find it hard to make yourself practise? Was it the same when you were a student?**

I've never had trouble making myself practise. For me, playing wind instruments may be my work, but it's also my hobby. It's a way of life. Practising is part of my morning routine. It may have been different when I was student – there are so many things to do! But in general, I always find it easy to practise.

**Can you give us some examples of useful techniques and tips you were taught that you never forgot?**

One piece of advice that I got from my flute teacher when I was very young was to stay as relaxed as possible. If you aren't relaxed, you don't play well. That's part of the job. Other than that, practise regularly and love what you do.

**What advice would you give a young musician who would like to become a flautist?**

A young person who wants to become a flautist – or play any other instrument – has to enjoy it. You learn an instrument for the joy of it, because it pleases you. Then, if you enjoy playing, it will give you pleasure throughout your life. It's the same even for a virtuoso: practising has to be a delight, otherwise you should ask yourself whether you're doing the right thing.

**What advice do you have for advanced students?**

To really love your instrument. After that, be realistic. It depends on what you want to do and where you want to go. There are not many openings in orchestras, as everyone knows, and there are lots of flautists, lots of musicians, and everyone is trying to find work. So if you want to play in an orchestra, you have to be realistic. There are a number of other ways to make a living in music, such as giving private classes or teaching in a school. Just love what you do, be realistic in life, and enjoy it.

**What is the difference between playing with vibrato and without?**

Without vibrato:

[On video, Jean-Guy plays first without vibrato and then with vibrato.]

You can play with or without vibrato. Vibrato may be part of the interpretation, but not necessarily. You have to draw on your knowledge of music and musical tastes to decide the sound.

**Can you give us a demonstration of what “interpretation” means in playing a piece?**

Here’s the passage that I just played...

[On video, Jean Guy demonstrates a passage]

You can hear that I’m playing two notes at a time... Now, I can play the same thing a different way...

[On video, Jean-Guy demonstrates this.]

So it’s a question of interpretation: you can decide to group the notes or draw out the phrase.

**Can you show us some difficult fingerings and ways to make them easier?**

There can be several problems with the flute – with the hands, the arms, the fingers. You have to watch your right hand on the flute, you have to hold the instrument with the right arm, with the fingers straight, the thumb, the little fingers. Now you have to try to move your fingers. But there are some passages that are fairly simple, for example...

[On video, Jean-Guy plays the flute.]

You have to hold the instrument and at the same time try to move your fingers to play certain notes. How? First of all, you have to play as slowly and as naturally as possible. Then, for this instrument, it’s essential to have good posture. That may be the single most important thing, otherwise, you aren’t going to be able to do it. So, you take it slowly...

[On video, Jean-Guy plays the flute.]

Very slowly at the beginning, and then you build up, more and more quickly. But you never attack it and always pay total attention to what you’re doing, otherwise you’ll soon have muscular problems, pain in the back, neck and arms – they all stem from the things I’ve just shown you. That’s why you have to take it slowly and play in as relaxed a manner as possible.

And that’s only the right hand. Then there are often problems with the left. The main thing is to have a good teacher, who lets you know from the beginning how to do everything correctly. So I advise those who teach the flute in schools to go slowly and make sure their students have good posture and are holding their

instrument correctly. Don't expect them to hold it in place all day because playing the flute is extremely tiring. You have to build your arm and shoulder muscles and develop good posture, otherwise you won't be able to do it.

**Can you play us something from the NAC Orchestra Four Strong Winds Young Peoples Concert?**

In that concert, I play a bit of piccolo.

[Jean-Guy plays a piece called *Piccolo*, taken from "Doodles, An Introduction to the Orchestra" by Frank Proto.]

We were speaking earlier about interpretation. When you interpret music, the first thing is to play the music in front of you. Then you can put your own shading on it if you wish, but not too much, because you can't interpret what hasn't been written. Our work as musicians is above all to interpret what has been written. The rest depends on the musician, his musical expression and experience. Ultimately, it depends on life!