



The New York Flute Club

NEWSLETTER

January 2023

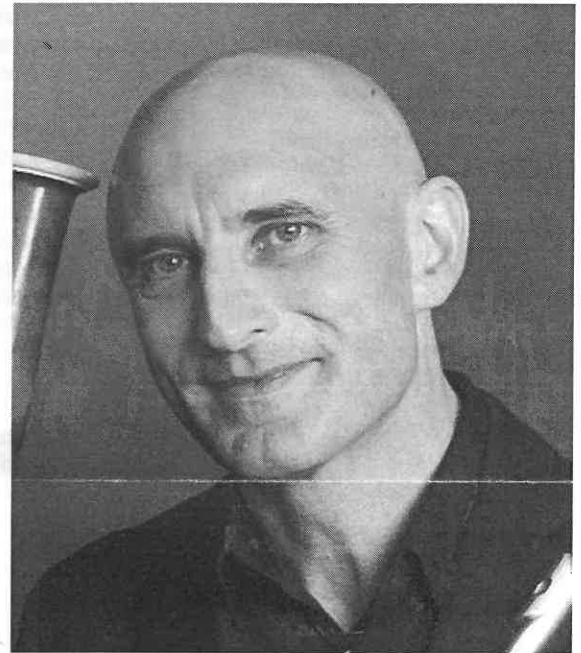
Borealis Flutist Keith Bonner Reflects on Mentors, Colleagues, and Lessons Learned

Interview by John Romeri

Borealis Wind Quintet flutist Keith Bonner has an active career as a freelancer (including performances in more than a dozen Broadway shows and with the NYC Ballet Orchestra and the Orchestra of St. Luke's) and is currently principal flutist of both the Greater Bridgeport and Riverside Symphonies. He also teaches flute and chamber music at the 92Y School of Music, Special Music School, and the NY Youth Symphony.

I first met Keith about 20 years ago while playing second flute with him on Beethoven's Sixth with the Westchester Chamber Orchestra. I was fresh out of school, and I can remember being struck by the simple beauty and the ease with which he could spin a phrase. However, as a complete newbie on the scene, it was his kindness and support that resonates with me still to this day. He was engaged, social, supportive, and hilarious. Without knowing me, he treated me as a valued colleague, which helped make me more relaxed and better able to support him the best I could. That experience is echoed each time we are together—whether we've been on stage, in a recording session, or even together on a roller-coaster at Six Flags.

This interview was conducted over Zoom, as we hoped that that medium would keep us on task. Although three hours later it was clear that it had not, readers will, at the least, come away with an understanding of how Keith acquired the qualities that impressed me so much at our first meeting.



(Cont'd on page 4)

In Concert

Borealis Wind Quintet

Keith Bonner, flute • Tamar Beach Wells, oboe

Jo-Ann Sternberg, clarinet • Eric C. Davis, horn • Wayne Hileman, bassoon

Sunday, January 22, 2023, 5:30 pm

Sunday, 5:30 pm • Engelman Recital Hall, 55 Lexington Avenue (at 25th Street), NYC

(See p. 2 for COVID protocols)

Program

Concerto No. 2, BWV 593 after Vivaldi (1974) J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

arr. M. Rechtman

Haitian Folk Tale Lina Mathon Blanchet (1903-1994)

ed. G. Dejean

Indialantic Impromptu (2008) Paul Moravec (b. 1957)

Juego De Ladrones (Game of Thieves) Suite (2016) Oscar Navarro (b. 1981)

Program subject to change



I Just Wanna Play!
January 19, 2023
Thursday • 7:00 pm

Joidy Blanco, flutist
See p. 6 for details.

IN THIS ISSUE

Borealis Flutist Keith Bonner Reflects on Mentors, Colleagues, and Lessons Learned	
<i>Interview by John Romeri</i>	1
From the President: Expanding Comfort Zones	
<i>by Jenny Cline</i>	2
Member Profile: Stephanie Pizza	3
Joidy Blanco: January's I Just Wanna Play!	6
Ebonee Thomas at the NYFC in December	7

Announcements

COVID protocols for January	2
Flute Happenings	3
Call for 2023 Flute Fair proposals	3
2023 Competition Deadlines	7
Ensemble Program Update	7

(Keith Bonner, cont'd from p. 1)

JOHN ROMERI: Hi Keith, thanks for taking the time for some questions—let's see if you can get them all correct, ha-ha! What led up to your getting a flute into your hands for the first time? And why the flute?

KEITH BONNER: I was born in Brooklyn, NY, and grew up on Long Island in Freeport, NY. From a very early age I was drawn to music. My mother had a very eclectic collection of LPs, so there was always music in the house, ranging from classical to pop to opera to jazz. I always wanted to listen to them. One of my mother's favorite musical artists was Barbra Streisand. I think it was her vocal quality that drew me to the flute, believe it or not! I couldn't wait to play it.

Neither of my parents played musical instruments. So the instrumental program in my elementary school let me explore my natural musical curiosity and provided a path to the flute. In fourth grade we were brought down to the auditorium, sat in a circle, and asked what instrument we wanted to play. I very eagerly answered "FLUTE!" when the teacher asked me. He responded, "Okay, but are you sure you want to play the flute? You know the girls play the flute?" I was sure; in my mind there was no other option and I was determined to play it.

JR: Your mother was a nurse and your father a firefighter—I'm sure a career in music wasn't necessarily on their radar for you, so what helped you decide to make a life in music?

KB: I always wanted to be the best flutist and musician I could. Playing music was what I wanted to do. I was fortunate that by the time I got to high school I had a very good group of friends who were involved in either music or theater. My friend Missy [Melissa Fogarty] was actually in the Met's children's chorus. She was performing solo roles, and my friends and I would come into the city to see her perform. This helped inspire me to figure out a way to become a performing musician.

In 10th grade I started studying flute with Florence Nelson. She played piccolo in the NYC Opera Orchestra. Florence helped me gain the confidence I needed to decide to pursue music in college. But she encouraged me to go somewhere where I could study something else as well. John Wion was principal flutist in the NYC Opera Orchestra and was teaching at Hartt School of Music in Hartford, where they offered

a music business degree. I started as a double major in music performance and music business. I went off to Hartford knowing somewhere inside me that I really didn't want to pursue music business. It was just sort of a "Well I guess this is what my mentors suggested, so I'll give it a whirl." I never took any business classes, ha-ha.

After my freshman year at Hartt, I went to Chautauqua Music Festival, where I studied with Sandra Church. She really inspired me to see more clearly what I needed to do to really be a professional musician. She strongly suggested I come study in New York. It was there I was going to have the opportunity to meet and hear a huge array of musicians. I had always wanted to live there, so I decided to leave Hartt. At Chautauqua, I also met flutist Reva Youngstein, who was at the Manhattan School of Music studying with Michael Parloff. I remember being so inspired by her then (and still am today!). So, I took a semester off and practiced a lot and took lessons with potential teachers.

It's about more than
just sounding good
and being prepared.
It's about being a
good colleague.

I loved my lessons with Michael Parloff. I really liked his practical style of teaching. I took the audition to study with him at MSM and was accepted. Early on, he gave me ways to practice tone, technique, scales, arpeggios, and a keen sense of what I needed to focus on to become a better flutist and musician. We did a lot of work on the Marcel Moyse and the Trevor Wye studies—the first semester, that's all we did. I was immediately eager to learn and felt so grateful having someone teach me the basics, the fundamentals of flute playing. After the first semester, we worked through a lot of repertoire, etudes, and orchestral excerpts. We



L to R: Interviewer John Romeri (on duduk), Keith Bonner (on bass flute), and Liz Mann (on alto) with Orchestra Moderne in NYC c. 2019.

didn't really spend lots of time on one piece—he wanted to hear a new piece and new excerpts every week.

JR: Why do you think that was?

KB: I think it's because he wanted us in the practice room. It was a good way to accomplish that goal. He also understood that as a professional you must learn a lot of music very quickly. He was training us for this inevitability.

We also had a studio class every month. We performed a piece with piano in front of the entire studio. This was both terrifying and inspiring. Thinking back on it, I got the sense that he trusted us to figure out things musically on our own. He wasn't telling us exactly how to play everything. He was giving us guidelines to work within, but he allowed us to find our own voices. I value the strong foundation he gave me. He often stressed the importance of working on tone and technique. I remember arriving at lessons and I'd hear him through the door practicing his scales and long tones. I appreciated that he was someone who was "walking the walk," as well as his very quiet way of helping me find confidence in my musical voice.

JR: So, you finished your undergrad at MSM?

KB: Yes, and Sandra Church was right—I loved being in New York. I would go with friends to the NY Philharmonic pretty much every week. We would sneak in at intermission! I was hearing Jeanne Baxtresser play at the NY Phil and Michael Parloff play at the Met. I also loved making friends with other flutists at the school who were studying with different teachers. It was great to hear what they were working on with Jeanne Baxtresser, Linda Chesis, or Ransom Wilson.

(Cont'd next page)

JR: That was the same for me while studying in NY. Every time I attended the Met, for example, it felt like a masterclass. I always I left the opera house knowing I was already a better flute player.

KB: One of the really incredible experiences I had while studying with Parloff was attending the Waterloo Music Festival, where he played and taught in the summers. It consisted of an orchestra where he was the principal player and we, the students, made up the section. I was playing second flute to Michael Parloff! It was a dream. Elaine Douvas and John Ferrillo were the principal oboes, and I think Charlie Russo and David Singer were the clarinets. Having the opportunity to play with them was amazing. I also played in a quintet both summers.

JR: Wow, that must have been so inspiring to have such a great experience as an undergraduate!

KB: Yeah, it helped me become more confident as a player. Parloff wasn't micromanaging or overly nitpicky with us. He was very, very knowledgeable, patient, and serious about what needed to be done. He gave me room to figure out so many aspects of flute playing and music making. He is also a very funny guy!

JR: So, why did you leave NYC for the Cleveland Institute of Music?

KB: I had decided I wanted to attend graduate school and was accepted at CIM to study with both Jeffrey Khaner and Joshua Smith. To have the opportunity to study with the principal flutes of both the Philadelphia and Cleveland orchestras was an opportunity I did not want to let pass. Joshua Smith is only a month older than I am. I did not know how that would work, but, in the end, I learned a lot in my lessons with him. He was one of the first teachers I worked with who would spend an entire lesson working on one phrase. I loved it.

JR: Ah, so in your undergrad, you had a kind of macro studies—get the fundamentals down, find your confidence, find your voice—and now, suddenly, you got the micro studies—all the details within the excerpts, etc.

KB: Exactly. In Cleveland there's the Cleveland Orchestra. Very different from NYC, where there were many orchestras, chamber groups, and styles of playing. There's a very particular style to how Cleveland plays. That's what they taught us students. I took a deep detailed dive in how they phrase, use tone color etc., and it took a bit

of adjustment. Hearing the Cleveland Orchestra perform at Severance Hall every week was incredible. Cleveland focused my mind to develop a clearer musical viewpoint.

JR: How long did it take you to start working after returning to NY two years later [in 1994]?

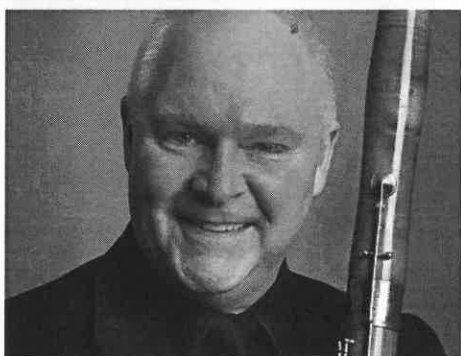
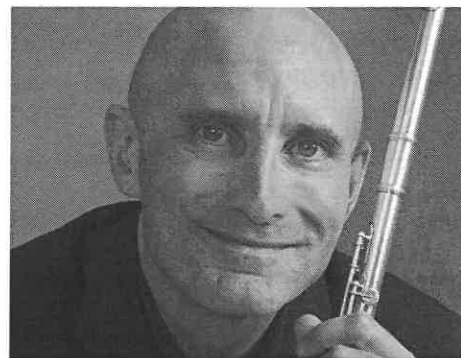
KB: I came back to NY because I knew I had a support system of family and friends. I called Michael Parloff soon after coming back and asked him for advice. He was generous enough to facilitate a few introductions to flutists. I then continued meeting people and taking their advice: be a good colleague when you're at rehearsals, be someone who can work with people, and always show up prepared. I learned a lot of our business is word of mouth, and slowly but surely through connections and recommendations I started to get more work.

I remember Jeanne Baxtresser gave a class at MSM on how to be a good colleague. She talked a lot about not only playing well but being a good person. Be respectful of others. That made a real impression on me. It wasn't always going to be about just sounding good. You also had to get along well with others. You had to consider other people. How was my playing affecting them? How is my personality affecting them? She also took a moment in the class and talked about how grateful she was making a living as a musician. I was experiencing this all now in real time.

As performing musicians, we are able to shift audience members' moods and/or their mindsets and feelings. We can change the trajectory of their lives in ways both subtle and profound. This happened to me as a young audience member going to concerts. It's what I love about music and why I wanted to become a musician.

JR: That wonderful sentiment of respect and acknowledgment towards your colleagues segues beautifully into your work in chamber music. How did you first start playing with the Borealis Wind Quintet?

KB: Borealis formed in 1977 at the Juilliard School. Soon after, they won the Artist International Competition, had their NY debut, and began working with Joanne Rile Management. She was very supportive of them, and they began to get bookings around the country. Their reputation grew because they commissioned and recorded many works, some of which—Ewazen's *Roaring Fork* and Steinmetz's *Wind*



Current members of the Borealis Wind Quintet, top to bottom: Keith Bonner, flute; Tamar Beach Wells, oboe; Jo-Ann Sternberg, clarinet; Eric C. Davis, horn; Wayne Hileman, bassoon.

(Cont'd p. 6)

(Keith Bonner, cont'd from p. 5)

Quintet, for example—have become standard repertoire.

JR: Is that what helped set Borealis apart from other quintets?

KB: Yes, I think so. Borealis has done a lot of touring and has always had great camaraderie. Audiences respond well to that connection amongst musicians. I started playing with Borealis in 2009, originally as substitute for Kathy Fink, and then as a member in 2012. I love playing with them! I love that there's always a great flow of ideas within the group and a lot of respect for everyone's playing. Also, we have a lot of fun together! The concerts are always exciting, vibrant experiences where I feel like we're all doing the best we can to bring life to the music.

JR: Can you tell us a bit about the January program?

KB: We wanted to highlight a range of composers and genres, with each composition creating different textures and moods. We open with the Bach/Rechtman Concerto No. 2 after Vivaldi. It is a double transcription of a Vivaldi Concerto for two violins. Transcribed first by Bach for organ, then by Recht-

man for wind quintet. Rechtman was the principal bassoonist in the Israel Philharmonic for many years. Then we'll be performing Lina Mathon-Blanchet's *Haitian Folk Tale*, which was arranged for wind quintet by the bassoonist Gil Dejean. It's a fun piece, and we're excited to add it to our repertoire.

Indialantic Impromptu was commissioned by Borealis back in 2008 from Pulitzer Prize winner Paul Moravec. If you know his music, you will be surprised by this work. It's a short piece, but it says a lot in six minutes! *Juego De Ladrones Suite* is a programmatic piece by composer Oscar Navarro. Navarro was inspired by the Cervantes short story, "Game of Thieves." It's about two boys that leave their small town in Spain and make lives for themselves in Seville. They get caught up with a gang of thieves and learn how to become successful scoundrels. It's filled with character, lots of different moods, and colorful instrumental textures. I love this piece!



Interviewer John Romeri (on piccolo) and Keith Bonner (on flute) at a 2019 Stamford Symphony pops concert.

JR: Awesome, sounds like a fantastic program—I can't wait to hear it.

KB: Yeah, it's going to be a fun concert.

JR: Well, Keith, this Zoom has been a blast. It's been great learning more about you, and I have to say you aced all the questions! Bravo!

Freelance flutist **John Romeri** has played in 15 Broadway musicals and with orchestras including the ABT, Orchestra of St. Luke's, and the Stamford and Harrisburg Symphonies. He is also the co-founder of Broadway Chamber Players.

NYFC's November "I Just Wanna Play!" series:

Joidy Blanco

Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 7:00 pm

Event & connection details at nyfluteclub.org/calendar.

The virtual component of the NYFC's 2022-23 I Just Wanna Play! series (7:00 pm on third Thursdays of alternate months) features amazing Black and Brown, Asian, and Indigenous flutists in interactive events not to be missed. Curated by Chip Shelton with team members Gene Coleman, Jinni Rock Bailey, and Dotti Anita Taylor, January's event features Joidy Blanco, who will join us on Zoom from Madrid, Spain for a live interview, followed by a performance of Max Meyer-Olbersleben's *Fantasie-Sonate* Op. 17.

About Joidy Blanco:

Joidy Blanco grew up in Venezuela, where she attended the Simon Bolivar Conservatory of Music and the National Academy of Flute in Venezuela. From there she went to Lyon, France, where she attended the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Danse, obtaining her bachelor's degree. Ms. Blanco went on to study with Jacques Zoon at the Haute Ecole de Musique de Genève, Switzerland, earning a master's degree. She began competing in international competitions at the age of 15, most recently taking the silver medal at the 16th International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 2019, and earlier this year winning sixth prize in the Kobe International Flute Competition. Ms. Blanco is currently living in Madrid, Spain, where she performs in several ensembles.

About Max Meyer-Olbersleben and his *Fantasie-Sonate*

Max Meyer-Olbersleben (1850–1927) is primarily known for his songs and choral works. His three-movement *Fantasie-Sonate* for flute and piano is a powerful, moving work that has long been popular with flutists in Europe and Japan, but is relatively unknown in the U.S. The composer studied with Carl Müllerhantung and Franz Liszt at the Weimar Orchestra School, and with Josef Rheinberger, Franz Wüllner, and Peter Cornelius at the Munich Conservatory.

Flutist attendees: Come with your questions about her experiences competing at the international level.

Admission: Free; for event & connection details, visit nyfluteclub.org/calendar a few days before the event.

