

Interview with flutist and composer JOHN HEISS:

A discussion of his works for flute in chronological order.

By Ronda Benson Ford, D.M.A.

RBF: Can you tell me a little about each of your works for flute?

JH: I'm going to go in chronological order of my flute works and what I think I'll do is say a sentence or two about each of my works that has a prominent flute part. *Four Lyric Pieces* (1962) for solo flute, published by Southern Music Company, is what I call free atonal. It's not twelve-tone, but it is atonal and it is still distinguished today by the fact that it is melodically lyrical and singing and probably you could use the word beautiful, in a style which isn't associated with those characteristics particularly.

RBF: Whom were you studying with when you wrote *Four Lyric Pieces*?

JH: Darius Milhaud. He was, of course, the great composition teacher at Aspen and he was very nourishing and very helpful. The value of him, of course, was to get your intellect out of the way and just "do it." I showed him a new flute piece and he said, "That is fine, but where is the rest of it?" And I said, "This is it." He said, "No no, three more movements by Friday." That became my *Four Lyric Pieces*.¹ That was one of the first things I ever had published. The Southern Music Company picked it up in 1971 with Arthur Ephross. I wrote a lot of music at Aspen and it really opened me up in a way to not be trying to pre plan everything, get an idea, get it down, get it in front of the performer, and have it on a concert the next week. It was very, very fluid, and nourishing in one's creative naturalness.

RBF: So you originally intended the *Four Lyric Pieces* to be only one piece?

JH: Yes, the third movement was the movement I had written as a tribute to a dancer friend, the girlfriend of my best guy friend. I thought she was terrific, and I wrote her a solo flute piece to dance to and she did. She had a beautiful slinky way with her long red hair and her

¹Heiss wrote and premiered the *Four Lyric Pieces* when he was a student at Aspen in the summer of 1962. John Heiss, *Four Lyric Pieces* (San Antonio, Texas: Southern Music Company, 1971), 3.

slender body and her height. She could always be flowing through some kind of movement and then suddenly come to a little point and put a point on the flow, which seemed to me to be very relevant for contemporary music generally, so I wrote a long note which suddenly repeats as a short note. That was the main idea, which one finds a lot in Stravinsky's music. Of course that is a balletic gesture. I don't know the name of it, but I call it "The long note cut off by the short note." There is another name for it, but I have since forgotten what that is. It is a French word. So Milhaud liked the piece very much but was very surprised to find out that there were no other movements. I said, "Okay; I'll write some more movements." But I didn't get three movements done by Friday. I got one movement done by Friday, and then the next week another movement, and the following week the last movement. I played the premiere of the *Four Lyric Pieces* at Aspen.

RBF: What did you learn most about composing from Milhaud?

JH: Opening up.

RBF: He did not want you to be thinking so intellectually about the music?

JH: When you come from a university background, you may be studying with people who are highly conceptual in the way they generate their music. Milhaud said he respects that of course, but there is another way to do it. Just . . . think about it, feel it, get it down, and get it played. Don't let your cognitive brain get in the way of your intuitive brain. Meanwhile, while that was going on, I was also studying flute with Albert Tipton.

RBF: What did you learn most from Albert Tipton?

JH: He was very supportive with new music and my music. Albert even made some suggestions in my *Four Lyric Pieces*. He added one note in particular, which is a stunner; he said, "You can't end that phrase on that D; have it fall away to maybe a low B." I have a phrase in the piece that is very haunting and very "calling," like minor thirds are, and Albert wrote the low B; it wasn't my note. He was right. Here is my flute teacher making a compositional improvement in my piece. That was just wonderful. He had me often turn pages for him in concerts. I heard him and his wife Mary Norris play the [Walter] Piston *Sonata* better than I ever

thought it could be played. It was happening right there and I was sitting there turning pages for his wife. He liked that I was a composer, and he taught me in a way that took into account that interest rather than trying to subvert it. I worked with him on the Wallingford Riegger *Suite for Flute Alone*. I remember that he said, “There is something funny happening here, you are playing these dynamics with great passion and you are right to do so, but do you know that your intonation is terrible?” I said, “What? I think I have a good ear for intonation,” and he said, “You are not listening to yourself.” And then he got out a tape recorder and I played a phrase and he played it back to me and I thought, “Oh my God, he is right.” He was very practical, very thoughtful, and he played flute magnificently of course. He was a fantastic teacher, he had some great students by the way. David Shostac was in his studio; he is now in the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra. David became a close friend [of mine]. I wrote a set of pieces for him and his then-girlfriend for flute and cello as my very next piece, and they played the heck out of it at Aspen. It was wonderful. Then next would be the *Sonatina* (1962) for flute and piano published by Elkus & Son. The *Sonatina* is rather bouncy and more traditional in style. It is a response to the Hindemith, Poulenc, and Prokofiev sonatas. It’s tonal, very tonal in fact, intentionally so, but it’s a twentieth century kind of tonality. They liked it at Aspen, but they didn’t like it very much around Columbia.

RBF: Did you write this when you were at Aspen?

JH: Yes, I did. That was the same summer that I wrote the *Four Lyric Pieces*, and I started the *Five Pieces for Flute and Cello* (1963) there, and then I finished that in the winter. *Five Pieces for Flute and Cello* (1963) published by E.C. Schimer are very cheerful, jovial, graceful, and charming. I think I initially began those with the idea of thinking about what it was that Milhaud enjoyed most in music and wanting to do something a little more French and very tuneful, and full of joyfulness, that is what came to mind first of all. Milhaud, by the way, was not too taken with my atonal music, but when I wrote the flute and cello pieces, which are more tonal, he liked that very much. He said, “Now that’s much more like John Heiss.” Milhaud was a little bit resistant to the atonal side of things, although he was respectful always, but if you

were using a twelve-tone row, he would come up to the composer, tap you on the shoulder and say, “How do you like being in jail?” He offered to pay bail to get you out. With both Milhaud and Tipton, there was personal warmth and support, there was humor always, and there was a sense of taking something seriously, but not overly seriously. They were both great. It was funny to be going back and forth between Columbia and Aspen. Actually you saw that Aspen was “Juilliard West” and had nothing to do with Columbia. That was all very helpful.

RBF: Were you considered an Aspen Fellow?

JH: I think that vocabulary came in later. I don’t remember it anyway, but I was a student. I was a more advanced student, mature and older than a lot of the people there, but not some. The next piece for flute is the *Four Movements for Three Flutes* (1969) published by Boosey & Hawkes.

RBF: Was this the one in which you used key clicks?

JH: Oh yes. There are a lot of alternate fingerings and a lot of compound minor seconds in the harmonic background of it. It’s a very chromatic, atonal work a rapid sense of humor in it, again something that you don’t always associate with the language that comes with that style. It’s in four movements, and in fact the first movement is my only twelve-tone piece. The other movements are in a similar language without being serial. You see from my list that there is a recording of this piece.

RBF: Are these still available?

JH: The CRI recording is still available. All of these records are permanently in print. Probably the new compact disc on [Centaur Records] with *Whimsies* and *Apparitions* would be the most important one for you. I don’t know whether you want to list the *Quartet* (1971) for flute, clarinet, cello, and piano published by Bowdoin College Press.

RBF: Yes, I would like to have your thoughts about this piece.

JH: This is also atonal. The *Quartet* is bold, striking, and for 1971, a very avant- garde piece with a lot of character to it. *Songs of Nature* (1975) for mezzo soprano, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, published by Boosey & Hawkes was a rediscovery for me, in 1975, of a

new kind of tonality, one that was not bound by chord progressions. You find triads and pitch centers with a sort of fresh air about them. My father had died and these songs were in his memory and were much more personal and gentle. The *Capriccio* (1976) for flute, clarinet, and percussion solo published by E.C. Schirmer is another overtly humorous piece in which the percussion was kind of the primary player and the flute and clarinet are his “blocking backs.” The percussion is the one running with the football and the others are blocking for him. That is not a very common way to write a piece of music where the percussionist is the solo and the other two are running interference. It’s got one of my first overt quotes of an old fashioned piece. I have a hymn in there, *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*, which kept playing at the church across the street from my house while I was writing it, so I thought I would put it in the piece.

RBF: Like Ives, right?

JH: Yes, that’s true by the way.

RBF: Is that piece atonal?

JH: The *Capriccio* is primarily atonal, with a secret tonality lurking underneath all the time. It pokes its head our from time to time. The *Flute Concerto* (1977) published by E.C. Schirmer, later rearranged as the *Chamber Concerto* (1977) also published by E.C. Schirmer, is primarily atonal, with striking harmonies.

RBF: Why did you decide to do a reinstrumentation and recomposition of the *Flute Concerto*?

JH: To make it more practical. I think I had eleven players in the first version, it’s more of a chamber orchestra. It seemed to me that it might have another performance life if I made a quartet out of it.

RBF: Sometimes I think composers don’t think in those terms.

JH: Composers tend to think in terms of absolutes. They think “this is my piece and that is it.” Some pieces transcribe very well though, and for others it is not such a good idea to do that.

RBF: Stravinsky wrote *The Soldier's Tale*, and then he wrote another version for violin, clarinet, and piano.

JH: Stravinsky did that very often and very well. My *Eloquy* (1978) published by E.C. Schirmer, uses a made-up word, but means “eloquent soliloquy;” it is a woodwind quartet. It is probably more in the chromatic, non-tonal side of things. It has a long unison line running through it where people are doubling up, as in the Ingolf Dahl quintet, which I probably had in mind when I wrote this. *Etudes* (1979) for solo flute published by Elkus & Son are about extended techniques; like so much of my music, they are more atonal than tonal, but that is a distinction that is losing its meaning. The first one is a chorale, and then there's a quote of *Happy Birthday* in the fifth one.

RBF: How many etudes are included in the work?

JH: Six are published, but I have some more in manuscript that I have never brought to print. The next piece, *Epigrams* (1985) published by E.C. Schirmer, is for flute and percussion. This was written for my children when they were teenagers and it is both tonal and atonal, very comfortably in both languages. This was written for the players to have fun. I even have one that is an argument between the two, like sibling rivalry. At one point the percussionist is drowning out the flutist, so at the end of the movement she [the flutist] picks up a triangle and plays it very quietly; he [the percussionist] looks disgusted. She's getting back at him. *Songs from James Joyce* (1986) are listed again later when I added some [additional songs] in 1996. I added two movements and changed the order [in 1996]. This work and the *Songs of Nature* (1975) are written for the famous “Pierrot ensemble” as we call it, namely flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano (with doublings). That is almost a standard twentieth century chamber ensemble. [It refers to Schoenberg's instrumentation in his work *Pierrot lunaire*]. *Songs from James Joyce* are on the cusp. They feel tonal when you are listening to them and then there is actually an arch between the tonal and non-tonal. *Mosaics #1* (1986) published by Southern Music Company is for a very large array of flutists.

RBF: I noticed that there is no score.

JH: That's correct; everyone plays the same part. You are arranged in a circle and, as the conductor starts to move his hand in an arc past you, you begin playing the first excerpt. You keep repeating yourself until the conductor's hand comes past you again and then you move on to the next excerpt. What this causes is a gigantic imitative echoing type of canon where it is not coordinated in terms of any beat. It is a texture piece where gradually new notes are introduced, it gets higher, it gets lower, it gets louder. You feel that something is unfolding, the image that I had in mind is beautiful sounds beeping away independent of each other, even though they are doing the same material. That accumulates to something uniquely special, according to my ears any way. When I listened to a radio-telescope, the sounds coming in from outer space were randomly received, but [my] mind was trying to organize them. There is a pattern and then you hear something else and then, low and behold, there is a message that you interpret even though maybe there wasn't one given. In my case there is a very specific message, which is that everyone has something to play with real profile, but it is never going to line up with anyone else's sense of where that profile is. You get this texture, which becomes very haunting to listen to, and the idea worked so well that I did it again for cellos, then again for trombones, and then again for clarinets.

RBF: I didn't realize that this was a series of works.

JH: Anyway that is the idea, what I like to call a controlled aleatory. It is something that is random or aleatory, but the composer is in charge of what it adds up to harmonically, what its overall form is, which is shaped somewhat by the conductor in this case. So we're not just sitting there listening to total randomness, but a well-defined randomness with a kind of intention. Of course, perhaps astronomers would say that it's the human mind making up the intention. The sounds from space, all the different pulses that the pulsars make, the frequencies that we pick up from heaven-knows-where, including the background radiation of the initial "big bang," which we do hear all of those things are interpreted by the human mind and given a rationale, whereas they may not have had one originally, and I thought "We're gonna turn that around." I'm going to give something to people that is definite. I even have in my *Mosaics*,

some Morse code where you have dots and dashes and they can spell out the name of the performing organization. I have “NFA” in one of them for the National Flute Association, “NEC” for the New England Conservatory, I have my own name, you could use the conductor’s name, or you could code up any of these things with secret messages. It’s kind of an in joke, but it makes the performers laugh and the audience enjoys it. It’s mainly for fun and one thing to note is that you can use any number of players. I would say don’t get much below ten because you begin to hear the individual parts too much. The biggest I ever had was fifty eight at the St. Louis NFA Convention. Also at the Boston Flute Convention in 1989, Fenwick Smith had me add a *Fanfare*, where everyone plays in a conducted tempo. So there’s a B version called *Mosaics with Fanfare*. The original version has an ending that just kind of fades away, whereas the B version has an ending that jerks you back into an ensemble-coordinated music for about two minutes.

RBF: And Fenwick asked you do to that?

JH: Yes.

RBF: When was the last time you saw Albert Tipton?

JH: It was in 1987 at The National Flute Convention in St. Louis, MO. Leone Buyse was the Program Chairperson for the convention and she programmed my piece *Mosaics* [*#1 for a Very Large Array of Flutists*], which can be played by any number of flutists. I usually go with as little as ten or as many as twenty five, but she got it with fifty eight flutists. There were two rows of twenty nine. I want to tell you who showed up for that dress rehearsal; I couldn't believe it. It was Albert Tipton who walked in and said, "I want to play this!" In that performance, I'm sitting there looking at the following people, all of whom were playing it: Jacob Berg, Albert Tipton, David Shostac, Fenwick Smith, Leone Buyse, Doriot Dwyer, and my former student Andrea Loewy, who made such a wonderful compact disc of my two most recent flute pieces that came out about six months ago; she teaches at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette. It was many of my friends and several of my current students, my former students, and one of my teachers. They were all there playing this thing and, of course with fifty eight [flutists], the wash of sound was overwhelming and gorgeous, although the details were not particularly clear and how could they be, but the piece went fine with 58, and that was Leone's idea, and Albert was in it. I just couldn't have been more touched. It is a piece in which the players stand in an arc. The person on the left edge and the person on the right edge have to be very alert because they often start the first figure or end the last figure. I had Leone on one end and Fenwick on the other end. It is best to alternate more experienced and less experienced players. Albert said, "Where do you want me?" I said, "How about in the middle?" And there he was, front and center. As my musical gestures go across the arc, every time that it came to Albert I heard something very interesting and well projected, and this was in 1987, some twenty five years after we worked together. He was still confidently musical. He didn't have the sound or the technique that he had had earlier, but the musicianship was still there in the biggest way that you could possibly imagine.

RBF: How much time were you given to write the piece for the NFA High School Soloist Competition, *Fantasia Appassionata, Episode IV for unaccompanied flute (1994)*, and were there any guidelines given to you about what the piece should or should not include?

JH: [I was given] several months, half a year or a year; I can't remember, it was enough. The guidelines were to just remember that I was writing a piece for high school students to play, a piece that they would all play, multiple performances of it in the competition. That [information] was very practical, very useful, very pragmatic. I thought right away the first thing I wanted to do was to avoid writing down to the level of sixteen or seventeen year olds, but rather to make it a good, strong piece with what would be for them some innovative qualities, that was still however very expressive and full of character and emotion, maybe even rather dramatic. And it occurred to me early on that it might be in an arch form, beginning soft and coming to a climax in the middle, maybe to the right of the center, and then ending quietly, but I didn't know for sure that it would turn out to be that way. You have a form that you begin to try, and the piece tells you, "Yes; that's a good form," or "No, that's a bad form, I want this form." And once the piece tells you that, you better listen to what it's telling you. You can't put all of these things into a box if they are not going to fit, but I began with that A from the beginning of my *Chamber Concerto for Flute and Ten Instruments* and it is a 440 A, and one hears that in one's head a lot. And I thought, "Let's see what can unfold out of this." I worked my way up, worked my way down, worked my way through what is principally a kind of chromatic language, maybe with all twelve notes, although I have never stopped to look and see if that's what I've done, the whole language of the twelve note group being what you draw on rather than something that is more limited in terms of scales. There's a kind of searching in the opening of things developing, and then I put down "...with developing passion," "...calling," "...considering," "...purposeful."

JH: My *Lines from Neruda* (1997) was written for my daughter's wedding. That's tonal and very original in terms of harmony, quite ecstatic. The *Lines from Neruda* are read initially in English, although he [Pablo Neruda] wrote them in Spanish, and they are also soon read in Spanish. There's kind of a Spanish/English bilinguality going through the piece. You need to have a speaker that sounds wonderful in both languages. The Spanish comes from another culture, at least the way I thought I heard it. My daughter married a Chilean. The piece is for soprano, flute, piano or organ, and the two narrators. If one of them is English and the other Spanish speaking, that is another way to do it. You can have two narrators, but the soprano also sings and the flute echoes the soprano, so it's like a visit to another culture.

RBF: Where did the text come from?

JH: It's from Neruda and it is a wedding text. It begins with the words, "Today is today," and it speaks about long days before and long days in the future, and as this marriage builds up, it will connect the past and the future. The *Vocalise* (1998) for soprano and piano is derived from the *Lines from Neruda*. I just wanted to give the soprano the whole [text], instead of having it fragmented, so the *Vocalise* has no narration and no flute. Then come *Apparitions* (2001) and *Whimsies* (2001), both published by Elkus & Son, which is right in the middle of what you are asking me about. *Apparitions* was composed first and was commissioned by the Robert Willoughby Birthday Project and the Longy School of Music in Boston. That work is primarily atonal with some electronic music that my son did for it.

RBF: Did Robert Willoughby play the piece?

JH: No. It was presented to him as a gift for his eightieth birthday.

RBF: Did you play it?

JH: No, I deferred because they wanted to have one of his students play the piece. It turned out to be Patricia Spencer. She brought with her a good pianist from New York and it was performed at Longy. Robert was very touched and he jumped up and down and said, “Oh, how interesting. There’s nothing there that I quite expected; it forces me to do what I love doing, which is to try to get acquainted with something brand new, and he said I think I hear your music in it.” He was right; the *Apparitions* (there are twelve of them in all) is a one movement work. The *Apparitions* are visits to each of my former pieces for flute in some context or other. It is rather retrospective on my flute repertoire, if you will. It has tonal and atonal music in it.

RBF: Are there program notes with the compact disc?

JH: Yes, Andrew Loewy wrote notes based on something I told her. That’s all you really need. The idea behind it is using the past to probe the future and again to make a fundamentally atonal language very accessible, and to have no hesitancy in bringing in something tonal, if it is relevant to the discussion that is underway in the music. It’s a probing, thoughtful, rather bold, and dramatic piece. It is one extended long movement with ten apparitions of things, and my son wrote some electronic music to go with it! In that piece, I had to work hard to try to get everything to go together. It was a very serious probing piece.

RBF: Tell me about *Whimsies*.

JH: Fenwick Smith called me and said, “I want you to write me a flute and piano piece.” And I said, “I just wrote one!” And he said, “Make it different.” That was just what I wanted to hear, so I thought I better write a series of short little movements that are funny, and, “Poof!” It just started happening, and I especially got on a nice roll where the last movement just kind of wrote itself. I made an effort to sort of bring things home together. I called that movement “Homeward Bound.” The last movement of *Pierrot Lunaire*, which is about going home, was in my ear and I suddenly got the idea to use Sprechstimme notation where Schoenberg says, “Hear these pitches, but don’t hit these pitches.” So I decided to put it in the flute and get to hear the pitches. What came over me that day were some astonishing moments harmonically and expressively that just flashed into my ear, and I put it down without ever having to apply any cognitive thinking. The *Whimsies* is a lighthearted reaction to having written a sober piece (*Apparitions*). The *Whimsies* are like little Benjamin Franklin sayings or Japanese haiku, each of them pretty short, and each of them reflective of an idea. The titles of the individual *Whimsies* are important for you to see; they are on the compact disc. This is where you get a long form that arises out of a whole series of short pieces.

RBF: How many movements are there?

JH: There are eight of them. They are in all manner of styles. Some are overtly tonal and some are atonal, and some are more cutting edge modern.

RBF: What is your next important work for flute?

JH: The next piece would be the *Fanfare for Auros* (2002) for the Pierrot Ensemble. [Auros] is a group up here in Boston that I wanted to give an anniversary piece to. I have two very short pieces that were written just this past spring. The first is for flute, clarinet, and two violas and the name of it is *Major Seconds* (2005) and that was for the anniversary of a group called Dinosaur Annex. *Major Seconds* is atonal. The second piece is for oboe and string trio which is based on a Bach chorale, and is more tonal.

RBF: What is the name of the second piece?

JH: *Wanderings*. I think a point that you can stress is that these two so called styles were regarded in my student days as irreconcilable differences. In the beginning I oscillated between doing one or the other and kept them quite distinct, but as I have matured they have converged, not only in my life but in contemporary music in general. The distinction now seems rather artificial and not only irrelevant, but undesirable and unnecessary. So, contemporary music, in the last 30 years I would say, has started to find something quite natural in the utilization of these two so-called separate styles in conjunction with each other. The idea for that was already there in Ives one hundred years ago in a work called *The Unanswered Question*, so it's not like I'm a revolutionary. The main point is that, while this used to be an argument, it is now quite silly to think that way.

RBF: When something is new, people either embrace it or don't, but as time goes by, people become more accepting.

JH: That's right. This is what happened in the past; we had the idea that [Johannes] Brahms and [Richard] Wagner were opposites and couldn't possibly get together, but in the early twentieth century Schoenberg, among others, brought their two languages into a very nice conjunction. I think [Claudio] Monteverdi would be another case, where he switched his style from Renaissance to Baroque. He got trashed by the critics. He said, "I'm writing in a new language and you are judging me by the old language." In his later life, the counterpoint from the past and more harmonic language of the present came into balance with each other. That happens a lot in music, you get an oscillation in one direction and a counter-oscillation in another direction, and then a fusion.

Biography of John Heiss

John Heiss is currently teaching at the New England Conservatory of Music. He teaches flute, chamber music, composition, music history, and music theory. He is also the Director of the Contemporary Ensemble at NEC. His works have been performed worldwide, receiving premieres by Speculum Musicae, Boston Musica Viva, Collage New Music, the Da Capo Chamber Players, Aeolian Chamber Players, Tanglewood Festival Orchestra, and Alea III. He has received awards and commissions from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, Fromm Foundation, NEA, Rockefeller Foundation, Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, ASCAP, and the Guggenheim Foundation. His principal publishers are Boosey & Hawkes, E.C. Schirmer, and Elkus & Son. Heiss has been principal flute of Boston Musica Viva and has performed with many local ensembles, including the BSO. His articles on contemporary music have appeared in Winds Quarterly, Perspectives of New Music, and The Instrumentalist. Heiss has directed fifteen of NEC's annual festivals, plus visits by many composers including Ligeti, Lutoslawski, Berio, Carter, Messiaen, Schuller, and Tippett. Along with Juilliard faculty Joel Sachs, Heiss has designed and written a book/CD-Rom classical music primer for Blue Marble Music entitled Classical Explorer.

He has a B.A. in mathematics from Lehigh University and a M.F.A. in music from Princeton University. He studied composition with Milton Babbitt, Edward T. Cone, Earl Kim, Otto Luening, and Darius Milhaud. His flute teachers include Arthur Lora, James Hosmer, and Albert Tipton. Recordings of his works are available on TelArc, Nonesuch, CRI, Golden Crest, Arista, Turnabout, Video Artists International, Boston Records, and AFKA. He has served on the faculties of Columbia University, Barnard College, MIT, and the NEC Institute at Tanglewood.

Biography of Ronda Benson Ford

Ronda Benson Ford is second flutist with the Topeka Symphony and has played with orchestras in Missouri, Kansas, Illinois, Texas, and Arkansas. She has taught on the faculties of Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, National American University, Truman State University, Park University, Missouri Western State University, Kansas City Kansas Community College, and Parkland College. Ford has performed with the International Flute Orchestra at two National Flute Association conventions and also toured with the IFO to Eastern Europe in 2004. She is a four-time winner of the National Flute Association Professional Flute Choir Competition. Her doctorate is in Flute Performance and Pedagogy from The University of Southern Mississippi, her Master of Music degree is in Flute Performance from Illinois State University, and her Bachelor of Music Education degree is from the University of Central Arkansas. Her teachers have included John Bailey, Danilo Mezzadri, Kyril Magg, Alexander Murray, Max Schoenfeld, Bootsie Mayfield, and Carolyn Brown.