

A Flute Family Tree

BART FELLER ('85) LINKS PAST AND PRESENT CURTIS WOODWINDS

BY HEIDI WALESON

When flutist Bart Feller entered Curtis in 1981, he became part of a distinguished lineage of woodwind instruction. Mr. Feller's teachers were Julius Baker and John Krell, both of whom had been students of William Kincaid, the legendary Curtis pedagogue and principal flute of the Philadelphia Orchestra. However, his teachers had very different approaches. "They were a great combination," Mr. Feller says. "Krell would focus on the elements that came from Kincaid—the balance of the phrase, playing through the intervals, the vibrato carrying between the notes. Baker went off and developed his own brand of flute playing—the beautiful, bell-like sound, his phrasing priorities. If I had to play for both teachers in one week, it was the most amazing flexibility exercise to please them both."

Another key Curtis experience was the weekly wind class, then taught by oboist John de Lancie, director of Curtis. Every class began with the same "nail-biting" exercise: "Each student had to play, by himself, a long A with de Lancie conducting," Mr. Feller recalls. "It was a one-note solo, with a crescendo and decrescendo, and absolutely unbearable for a freshman. It was a huge priority for him, and after a while, we all knew why: I've played in orchestras for twenty-five years, and knowing your attacks will be there for you is a huge source of confidence and stability."

Mr. Feller, like his teachers, now combines performing and teaching. He has been principal flute of the New Jersey Symphony for twenty years, and he also holds the principal chair with the New York City Opera and the Santa Fe Opera. Teaching—precollege students at Juilliard and graduate students at Rutgers—"feels essential" to him. "Playing in the orchestra and opera are wonderful, but being able to articulate what I'm doing, and to figure out what students need developmentally is a whole other skill set. If I didn't have that teaching opportunity, I'd feel some important part of the loop was missing."

Four years ago, Sonora Slocum, then a high school junior, joined Mr. Feller's Juilliard studio. "He brought me back to basics, and really helped me reach a new level with my sound," Ms. Slocum says. "He instills confidence in you without giving you too much confidence. He's the perfect balance of strictness and freedom." Ms. Slocum auditioned for nine college programs, and got into all of them. She chose Curtis, the first of Mr. Feller's students to attend. "I was so proud that she got in, and so pleased that she would be exposed to the same experience as I was," Mr. Feller says.

At Curtis, where she has now completed her second year, Ms. Slocum studies with Jeffrey Khaner, principal flute of the Philadelphia Orchestra and also a student of Julius Baker (via Juilliard). She loves playing in the orchestra, and her dream is to be an orchestra flutist.

The Curtis teaching legacy is passed down via Mr. Khaner, who, she says, follows some of Mr. Baker's methods, including "intense talk about phrasing, and a lot of playing for us," and Donald Montanaro, the clarinet teacher. "He is the biggest connection to the history of woodwind playing at the Philadelphia Orchestra and Curtis," Ms. Slocum says. "He gives us lots of stories. Times and styles are changing, and what makes Curtis special is being able to hold on a little to the traditional ways of playing and teaching."

And Mr. Feller is continuing that legacy with five more precollege students, one of whom is only twelve years old. "After their parents, the teacher is one of the most influential people in their lives," he says. For Mr. Feller, it's an influence that goes beyond teaching flute technique. "I really hope that my students come away knowing how grateful I am to have such an interesting and varied life in music." ♦

Heidi Waleson is the opera critic for the Wall Street Journal and a regular contributor to Symphony, Opera News, and other national publications.



PHOTO: TAYLOR HOOPER

STUDENTS OF ALUMNI

Alumni of many eras and majors pass along Curtis lessons, blended with their own experiences, to young musicians. The following alumni (not including Curtis faculty) have taught current Curtis students:

MATHIEU HAREL (Cello '98)
Gabriel Cabezas

SAM CAVIEZEL (Clarinet '96)
Ruokai Chen

SOOVIN KIM (Violin '99)
Hsuan-Hao Hsu

MICHAEL DEAN (Opera '93)
Evan Hughes

SOOVIN KIM (Violin '99) and
C. J. CHANG (Violin '92, Viola '94)
Bryan Lee

EFE BALTACIGIL (Cello '02)
Sarah Rommel

MARK LAWRENCE (Trombone '72)
Samuel Schlosser

RONALD LEONARD (Cello '55)
Xin Shi

DAVID CERONE (Violin '62)
Ji-Won Song

RANAAN MEYER (Double Bass '03)
Nathaniel West

RICHARD LUBY (Violin '67)
Maia Cabeza

JORDAN ANDERSON (Double Bass '00)
Derek Zadinsky