

New faces: Prema Kesselman



By Thomas Hancox

Prema Kesselman is a young American flautist who is most certainly making a name for herself. Having just won the position of principal flute with the Santiago Philharmonic Orchestra, she already has concerto performances with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and recital work in the Carnegie Hall under her belt. She was recently added to the roster of the Swiss Global Artistic Foundation.

Interestingly, Prema is also a highly accomplished pianist (her first piano concerto performance was no less than Ravel's dazzling *Concerto in G major*, at the age of fifteen) with not only most of the major flute repertoire's piano parts under her fingers, but works at the pinnacle of writing for the piano too.

After undergraduate training in the USA, Prema came to London to study at Trinity College of Music with Wissam Boustany, from where her career has blossomed further. She recently won Trinity's Gold Medal Prize Competition.

At what age did you start the flute and why did you choose it? I grew up in Valencia, California, which is about forty miles north of Los Angeles. My family and I sang regularly together, and, by the age of two, I had learned over two hundred songs. I started the piano at the age of six and soon knew that I wanted to be a professional musician—my parents would have to beg me to stop practising and come for my meals.

Why I chose the flute is not quite clear; I just asked for lessons a year after starting piano, having never knowingly heard it played before. I had seen pictures of the Hindu flute-playing God, Krishna, though, and this may have put the thought in my head of playing the flute. At first I was told that I was too small to start and that I would have to wait.

At the age of eight I started playing the piano with the local community college's youth orchestra, often substituting for those elusive harpists. This led quickly to opportunities to play with and accompany many other local musicians. Performing was a deeply moving experience for me and I found it a thrill to play with others.

Flute lessons started (eventually) around age eleven and I joined the same orchestra as a flautist only one month into lessons. I was determined and progressed very quickly on the flute, undoubtedly thanks to my piano background.

What was the form of your musical education? A key moment in my education came at the age of thirteen when I stopped attending the local state school (called public school in the USA) so that I could be attend an accredited home-schooling programme instead, along with my brother (who is an oboist and pianist). I was frustrated with the poor educational system and there were no full-time specialist music schools nearby, so home-schooling was the only option. Importantly, this allowed me access to many opportunities to participate in musical activities that otherwise would not have been available to me. Within the year, my brother and I got permission from College of the Canyons (where the Youth Symphony was) to enrol in their music theory courses. After two years, we had almost completed the entire music curriculum at the college and earned college credit.

For my BMus degree I studied at Temple University's Boyer College of Music in Philadelphia, studying the flute with David Cramer, who is the associate principal flute of the Philadelphia Orchestra. I had piano lessons, too. I gave my New York *début* on flute at Carnegie Hall in May 2005, under the auspices of Artists International Presentations, as a winner of their Special Presentation *Début* Award.

When and why did you decide that it was the flute that you would pursue as opposed to the piano? What has the piano offered you in terms of your flute playing? Despite more initial successes on the piano I could see that it was not the instrument I would be able to pursue completely. The piano is an incredibly satisfying instrument—the sense of accompaniment in one hand, let alone counterpoint is just brilliant, but it was just the flute that took me.


I still play the piano, often accompanying flute players (and my students) in preparation for auditions and concerts and I always learn the piano parts to my own flute pieces. Knowing and feeling the harmonic scoring of a piece is essential whether it is accompanied or not. Not understanding the harmony is like disregarding your colleagues while playing in orchestra. I could not imagine playing flute without a strong piano background.

What flute do you play on? I play on a handmade silver Powell, with a Lafin Adler gold headjoint (9K tubing with a 14K lip-plate and riser). I used to play a Lafin Adler silver headjoint with 18K lip-plate and riser, and prior to that, a Powell platinum headjoint.

How did you find the transition from the USA to the UK and

why did you make it in the first place? What are the main differences, especially in terms of musical opportunities, standards and expectations? I found the course at Trinity challenging in comparison to my undergraduate course in the USA, due to the amount of research and independent study required. A lot of work was needed, but it paid off in the end as I achieved a distinction in both my performance and dissertation.

Moving to the UK has been the best decision I have ever made, meeting many wonderfully supportive people along the way. Conductors such as Jan Latham-Koenig (who conducts the Young Janacek Philharmonic and now the Santiago Philharmonic Orchestra also) believed in me and have furthered my career.

Finally, what does music mean to you and what do you hope you can achieve with it? I feel that music has the capability to promote peace and unity, and express the depths of emotion dear to one's heart. Music can express the inexpressible and unify all people because it crosses all boundaries. What the world needs most today is a unifying force. I resolve to bring light to the world with my music. 

Wissam Boustany *flute*



Aleksander Szram *piano*



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