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How and why I began playing...

My teenage years of flute playing!

My first memory of wanting to play an instrument was when I was about four; we had a storybook with fantastic illustrations, and I really wanted to be like the gypsy girl with the long, billowing skirt, gold hoop earrings, and long, black, curly hair playing the violin by the campfire! I suppose that my dream has come true and I am a kind of 21st century gypsy; I am away from home for about half the year albeit travelling by plane with my laptop and flute safely security-screened in my hand luggage, rather than with a violin thrown over my shoulder, by horse-drawn caravan! I was so excited when we all had to do a musical aptitude test at school to see who would get free violin lessons and was totally devastated when I was not chosen! However a few days later, I was up in the attic and found my father's old flute. I could actually get a sound out of it straight away and begged my parents for flute lessons!

I began with Wendy Berry when I was ten and I loved my weekly lessons. Wendy not only taught me the flute, but also to enjoy and have fun making music! After a couple of months of playing, I joined the Woking & District Wind Orchestra and I really got a buzz out of playing music with other people. I played solos in some local music festivals too, and realised that I loved playing for an audience!

After I'd been playing for about a year, Wendy suggested that I audition for a scholarship to go and study at the Royal College of Music Junior Department. I was really torn when I was offered a place; I knew it was a great privilege and wonderful opportunity but I really didn't want to leave Wendy. Miss Ogonovsky ("Oggie") however was an enormously encouraging and inspiring teacher. It was another full 'school' day, devoted entirely to music, with theory, aural, choir and orchestra. I loved it! At school, I was a bit of a freak for liking classical music but on a Saturday, I was surrounded by other children my age who also enjoyed music!

At around the same time as I started RCM JD I also joined the Surrey County Youth Orchestra. I can remember so vividly the sensation of playing Tchaikovsky's 4th Symphony it was the most exciting thing I had EVER experienced! I had goose pimples from head to foot! That was the moment that I knew that I wanted to play in an orchestra if at all possible! However, had someone told me then that some 20 years later I'd be playing in one of the top orchestras in the world, I would never, ever have believed them!!

I was really lucky to have had some wonderfully inspiring teachers in my teenage years. I was also lucky enough to play with some wonderful people in local orchestras and chamber groups, many of whom are still friends (some also now professional musicians) We all encouraged one another, had a lots fun and basically just loved playing music! My parents were also fantastic; not only did they make countless financial sacrifices, but my mother would cajole me in to doing that half an hour of practice when I really wanted flop in front of the telly, and my father was always ready to drive us to yet another rehearsal or concert. Had it not been for them, I probably wouldn't have become a professional musician the discipline necessary to do that bit of practice every, single day, is something which comes naturally now, but as a teenager, I fear it was a rather different story!