

The Pleasure Of Music Is To Be Able To Express My Idea To The Audience

interview by *Mina Kitamura*

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It was over a decade ago that Emily Beynon, who has established a firm position as a principal flutist at the prestigious Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, appeared in our magazine. She has visited Japan every year meanwhile for Kirishima International Music Festival or for other concerts, and is known to love Japan very much. She now talked about not only herself but also her passion for music, including her orchestra, pieces she chose, and music she self-published.

As to Programme

Q. It is our first interview with you since year 2000. Do you see any change in terms of general music scene and your musical ideas in last 10 years or so?

Well, perhaps not many, in a way! I'm still very much enjoying performing in orchestra in Amsterdam. One change is that I started Netherlands Flute Academy in 2009.

Q. Any change in your musical ideas?

Every time I play a piece, a small change happens, I think. I was talking during the rehearsal yesterday about the fact that it was over 20 years ago that I played Prokofiev's sonata for the first time, and my performance now must be completely different from then!

Q. Why did you choose Prokofiev's sonata this time?

It's an enjoyable piece to play – such wonderful, colourful music! I played it several times in Europe this year. It requires a lot of stamina because it is a big piece, challenging piece.

Q. You decided on the programme after thinking quite deeply?

Yes,

Prokofiev 5 melodies: composed as songs without words in 1920, and rewritten as a violin piece 5 years later, 1925. Singing and violin are my most important inspiration resources. So I thought the music could be performed on the flute in a natural manner too, and wrote a version for flute.

I also thought it can be a good match to programme it with sonata by the same composer for the same concert.

These two pieces were composed 20 years apart, one in 1920 and the other in 1945, so they are linked and at the same time are in quite different in styles, which I found interesting.

For the second half, I wanted to introduce a 'new' piece to the audience, Carl Frühling's "Fantaisie".

Q. This is your edition, right?

Yes, this was originally written for flute and orchestra (in 1929). Frühling was a pianist and the piano part is really romantic and wonderful. And I also thought that the exuberant Frühling makes a good contrast with Copland.

To Make Wonderful Pieces To Be Known

Q. Why did you get the idea to edit Frühling?

Most of his works were not published in his lifetime. One of my friends, Steven Isserlis, a cellist, found the music in a library in Vienna. Previously he had found a beautiful work by him for clarinet, cello and piano, and performed it and recorded it for CD. What he found was unfortunately not the original version for flute and orchestra but one for flute and piano reduction. He kindly gave it to me and said "Emily, this is a lovely piece. Why don't you play it?" So then I played it for several times in concert and I wanted to share the piece with other flutists, too. So I asked a friend who works at a publishing house to publish it. This is a beautiful piece and there are not many German romantic piece for flute. It is also very rare that a piece written 90 years ago is discovered.

Q. In the programme, by the way, no British piece is included, your home country.

Well, I've been playing British pieces. I'll be recording 4 British concerti soon. The Magic Flute Dances which Jonathan Dove composed for me, Concerto by William Alwyn, Concerto by Lennox Berkeley, and Poulenc's Sonata arranged by Lennox Berkeley for flute and orchestra. So though no British pieces in today's programme, I do often perform them.

Communication in Section

Q. about Royal concertgebouw Orchestra, Mr.Jansons became a chief conductor from 2004. What do you think about his music?

He is a wonderful conductor, and very nice person, very charming. I'm so very happy to work with him.

Q. You have been principal flutist since 1995. What kind of things do you pay attention to lead the flute section?

It is like a happy family, so we have dinner together when we are on a tour. It is necessary to create a warm working environment in our daily life. In a practical sense, it is my job to let the others know how much vibrato we might use (or not!) for a particular passage, length of notes or what the dynamics should be, etc.

Q. Could you name some pieces that best represent the characteristics of Concertgebouw?

Well-known ones are of course Mahler and Bruckner - perhaps especially Mahler. We just completed a cycle of all of his symphonies which were performed within two years. We play the Bach's Matthäus (or Johannes) Passion every year and we often play Brahms and Beethoven, but we also perform several world premieres. So it is difficult to answer to that question in a word. Next season will be my 17th season - I love the variety of music we perform.

Q. Does Concertgebouw have some educational concert programmes for children?

Yes, we do. It is one of the developing areas. We give a special family concert once a year and there is also an Orchestra Academy - coaching young people to play in an orchestra, helping them prepare for orchestral auditions etc.

Q. What kind of pieces are children happy to listen?

In my experience, children often seem to enjoy more when they hear contemporary music with various exciting new sounds techniques - perhaps they listen to that with more interest than when they hear Mozart or Beethoven.

Q. Do you, by the way, play the piccolo?

Seldom - very occasionally in the orchestra and sometimes in chamber music. Also I play the alto flute for works such as Takemitsu's Towards the Sea.

Practice Not Only Flute Pieces But Works For Other Instruments, Too.

Q. What is the most important quality as the principal flutist in an orchestra?

What is required for ALL orchestra players is to always keep antennas alert which allow them to sense things such as timing, phrasing, intonation, etc. And principals need to have an ability to switch to be soloistic when playing a solo, and to be good 'accompanists' at other times.

Q. What about the second flute player?

It is a very difficult job (laughter). I have hardly done it so if I have to do it, I find it very strange (laughter).

Q. What kind of practice do you think young flutists need to get in an orchestra?

The most important thing is to know the orchestral excerpts very well. It is only a small section of a piece you have to play in an audition. You need to study by listening to the whole piece. It is necessary to know well not only what the flute part is doing but also what all the other parts are doing and how the solo fits into the whole symphony. When you are playing alone in an audition, you should be hearing the other parts in your head.

I often teach in a class for auditions. In this class, as I said earlier, I tell the students how important to learn the piece well as a whole. In terms of performance, rhythm and intonation are most important. It is also essential to play every detail such as dynamics, accent, tenuto, staccato properly.

Q. In orchestra auditions in Japan, it is always a requirement to play a Mozart's concerto in the first round. What about in Europe?

Mozart's concerto is one of the regular pieces, but they don't ask to play it in every audition. What I recommend to my students is to practice not only flute concertos, but also pieces Mozart composed for other instruments (like the violin or clarinet concertos) and don't forget the quartets either! Then they can practice articulations in Mozart's style more. There are some people who say "I'm OK because I've been practicing Mozart's concertos for 5 years." They have lost a fresh feeling in playing the piece, and it easily becomes boring.

Q. What kind of exercise do you do every day?

You mean in gym? No, on the flute, right?! (laughter) I first put down my instrument and start with breathing. I also stretch to awaken my body. Then I play long tones, with crescendo and diminuendo, then harmonics, whistle tones, etc.

Q. Which etudes do you use?

I've extracted several things from various books to make my own exercise collection. But I found Trevor Wye's flute studies 1 - 3 very good. Taffanel and Garbert is very good, too.

Q. How long does it take you to go through your-made exercise study?

I cannot go through whole a lot because nowadays I have often to regard myself lucky if I can take 1 hour a day for (technical) practice. I choose different things at different times. However, if my time is so limited that I can do just one, I make it a rule to do harmonics.

Sleep Well and Have a Good Rest. It's the Key to Good Performance

Q. How long have you been using Altus flute?

Since about 1990. I was using Louis Lot before.

Q. What it is about the instrument that you love? also What is the most comfortable thing about Altus?

Sound and the range of sound colour.

Q. Why did you change from Louis Lot to Altus?

I played Louis Lot for about 11 years but it is, as you know, an old instrument. So in case anything (mechanical) happened to the Louis Lot, I had been looking for a new instrument similar to Louis Lot. Then I came across Altus. I thought it was perfect. I was using the Altus as a spare for 'just in case', but over time I began using the Altus more as a main and the Louis Lot as a spare! I think everything of the sound of Louis Lot and technical mechanism of modern instrument are put together in Altus.

Q. You are traveling all over the world. How many flutes do you usually take with you?

I have just one this time. When I come to Kirishima, there would be many flute players so if anything happened I hoped that I could ask someone to let me use hers/his. Also as my wonderful Altus technician takes very good care of my flute every time I come to Japan, so I feel safe here. But on an orchestra tour, I usually take two flutes with me in case anything happens to mine or a section member's instrument so that we don't have to panic a half hour before the concert.

Q. Do you do anything particular not to let the tiredness from your journey affect your performance?

I try to sleep as well as possible, though not very successfully (laughter). I still try to have a good rest. I've changed as I got older. When I first came to Osaka 20 years ago, I acted energetically. I woke up in the morning thinking "I'll see this today, and I'll visit that shrine" etc. Then in the evening I was very tired, not only physically. Recently, however, I can spend time in a relaxed manner, thinking "I have already seen many things and I can come again". I'm no longer obsessed with the idea that I have to do sightseeing. I relax and spend a leisurely time reading a book or eating something nice.

Everyone Should Perform With Their Own Personality

Q. You are known to love Japan. Do you love Japanese food, too?

Yes! I used to love sushi but recently I quit eating fish.

Q. Why?

When I stopped eating meat more than 30 years ago I also stopped eating fish, but I started eating fish again 15 years ago. I loved fish and had been eating every day.

However I bought a book called "Eating Animals" last December as a present for my sister. I began reading it to see what it was about and got totally absorbed! It talks about fish a lot. For instance, apparently, to catch 1 kg of prawns, as much as 26 kg of other kinds of fish are caught in the process which are not needed (allowed by quotas) and are thrown away in the sea. After learning this, I thought something must be changed, and I decided to quit eating fish. I now very much enjoy vegetables in Japan. There is a variety of nice vegetables in Japan. I love natto, too.

Q. I think it's difficult to stick to being vegetarian in Japan when you eat out...

I had thought so too, but it is not! I found many nice vegetable dishes to my joyful surprise. I had lovely yam in Kagoshima.

Q. Have you found any change with your physical condition since you turned vegetarian?

I feel very good. I don't particularly miss fish. I used to love it but now my body doesn't seem to be wanting it.

Q. Could you tell us your future schedule?

I'll be recording four concertos at the end of October. And also I'll be playing another concerto by Fred Jonny Berg with Ashkenazy and Philharmonia Orchestra in May next year. The earlier recording of the first concerto was nominated for a Grammy award last year. And this time, we are recording the second concerto. Amongst other trips/tours, I am also going to Italy to give a chamber concert.

Q. May I have your message for flute lovers (in closing)?

It was a great experience for me to teach in Kirishima for two weeks. What I felt there was that everybody was so good but many of them were playing to the music stand. I felt it is important to play for the audience beyond the music stand to share his/her music. Everybody must have a different idea. Everybody is required to express what kind of idea about the music he/she has. Prokofiev's sonata was composed 70 years ago and has been played so many times, and people still play it. Why? It is not something like that someone has recorded it and there is no more need for the piece to be played again, is it? Everybody plays with different idea; everybody plays differently. And that's why it becomes fun.

Thank you very much.