



Case Study

(more from David's adventures in London ...)

As autumn moved into winter, it became apparent to me that I was really going to have to 'do something' about getting my flute studies moving. Busking outside a concert hall was paying bills, but it was no way to develop better skills on the flute, nor was it doing much to get me integrated into the music 'scene' in London. It was time to start coming out of my private shell a bit.

Before I left Vancouver, I had talked to one of the professional flute players in town about my plans, and he recommended one of the top London players as being 'the man' to get to know. He played a recording of this player for me, and when I heard the incredibly full and powerful tone and the wonderful breath control, I knew this was the man I needed to see. My Vancouver friend had met this player once, and had given me his address in London, but he was not able to give me an introduction.

So one day that winter, I gathered up my courage, made my way to the address, and stood there with my flute under my arm. But what was I doing, a shy little boy from 'the colonies', who honestly speaking had only basic flute skills, standing at the door of the principal flutist in the London Symphony Orchestra? I don't think I could do such a thing now, but I swallowed hard, and rang the bell.

William Bennett answered the door. And before I could get a word in edgewise, or explain what I wanted, he began ... "Oh, I see you're a flutist. Come in!" I had barely got into the room when he reached out for my flute case, "This is a beautiful case. Did you make it? Will you make some for me? Come upstairs, and let me show you the workshop ..." It turned out that not only was he a top-class flute player, but he was very interested in the design of flutes, and had a little workshop up in his attic where he was busily trying to create an improved instrument. He had many ideas about how the flute could be improved, but his metal-working skills were pretty basic, and the instruments he had altered in his quest for better tuning were a bizarre patchwork of roughly soldered parts. Of course I was very interested in this, and it wasn't until after a couple of hours discussion of design theory that he got around to asking, "Well, I guess we should hear you play something ..."

Last time this had happened, I had been rewarded by seeing the listener's face light up when he heard me play, but this time was different. Bennett had a string of pupils, and they were England's best young players ... I couldn't help noticing his face fall in disappointment the instant he heard my tone. It was clear right away that he had no interest in my flute playing at all. But he was interested in my woodwork (my flute case was one that I had made for myself, and was actually quite beautiful, with rosewood veneer, brass latches, and plush velvet interior.)

As it turned out, I ended up sleeping on their couch for a couple of days. His wife - a cellist - seemed to be used to having students hanging around like that, and when I finally left a couple of days later to return to my own room, I had his request to make a few flute cases for him. There was no discussion of me becoming a pupil of his, but at that point, just to have become an acquaintance of his was enough.

Don't hesitate ... when you get the chance, ring that doorbell!

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