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I first became acquainted with the artistry and innovation of Swiss flutist, Matthias Ziegler when I listened to his submitted tape recording of Marsyas' Song. I was program chair for the 1992 Los Angeles convention. I listened to this tape and could not believe my ears. It was like nothing I had ever heard before. I knew at once that I must invite Matthias Ziegler to give his first NFA performance at the convention in Los Angeles. He is now a well-known artist in this country, having performed on numerous tours and at many conventions since that date.

I was therefore thrilled to have the opportunity to bring Matthias to the Ohio State University to play a concert and a master class for my students. His music making, his instruments, his compositions, his personality and his teaching style blew my students away. So was !!!

Later, Victoria Jicha asked me to interview Mr. Ziegler while he was in Columbus. We talked for hours. Here are excerpts from that interview.

Matthias Ziegler Interview

Family

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Zurich, Switzerland where I still live close-by in a village by the lake with my family, my wife and two kids. Samuel my son is eight, he plays the cello. My daughter, Anahita she is six and she plays the violin. Samuel is a name that has been in my family quite frequently. My wife's family is from Tehran so we have some relation to this culture. Anahita is actually an old, Iranian name, the goddess of water. The sound reminds you of the name Anna that is quite a common name in my family.

How many years have you been married?

(Laughter, you should ask my wife!) I think ten.

Where did you meet her?

On a train to Italy. I was just coming back from the States. I had to go to Italy to teach and was too tired from jet lag to drive. So I decided to take the train. Here I was on the train, first of April, April fool's Day, and there was a strike. We spent an entire day on the train because of the strike. It was a really funny. We were in the same compartment It was an overnight train. In the morning I woke up and thought I should be in Florence, but we were only in Milan. It was seven in the morning and between 6pm we just went bit by bit, so we had a lot of time to talk.

I guess it was meant to be!

Probably. Yes! It is a great story.

What is her profession?

My wife is originally a physical therapist who specializes in working with children. She does special therapies with children who have problems integrating all the information from the outside world. They call it sensory integration. Stuff like what is coming in how it is filtered in the brain and how you get reaction to it. There are lots of kids that are throwing down things or slamming doors indoors, they don't know how much to touch stuff. Also, small children who walk on the tips of their toes because they don't know how to feel their legs. They need additional muscular tension to feel their legs and feet. It's very delicate bodywork therapy. It is all about finding out where is the transmission block. Many of these children just need a little push at some point. This is her main activity at this time. She also works with children after brain surgery or accidents or cerebral palsy. This is the tough part. This is really important work. She is also teaching, courses about this work.

Early education

When did you start playing the flute?

My kindergarten teacher taught me recorder. I still remember the lessons. It was a special atmosphere. Little steps, she would draw a little character; we are here, we are here; that is the range of the flute. Playing songs. And then I picked up the flute at age nine. We didn't have the bent flutes. I learned to read music and I came to know music.

Did you learn any solfege?

No. Not singing. It was always with the instrument. Not the French school where you have solfege separate from the instrument. It is all connected with us. We don't have this.

So from the very beginning it was always reading. Did you do any improvisation?

No, that came later, maybe at age thirteen or fourteen. Of course I was listening to pop music. Jethro Tull and for the first time, jazz flute, I was listening to Herbie Mann, Memphis Underground. "Oh, you can play jazz on the flute. You can improvise on the flute!" So I got together with friends who played the guitar. We started playing the blues and we started improvising. I picked up the guitar myself. That was an age when I was pretty spread out. I started playing drums and at age sixteen the saxophone. Because I really wanted to explore this world. I didn't know exactly where I was going. I was listening to jazz and to pop music and blues. When I finished gymnasium, what you call high school, I had to make a decision whether to go to conservatory, which was not part of the

university at that time, or study at the university. I went to the university and started to study architecture, I thought I would become an architect. And then, when I was almost finished with my studies, and only had the final exam left, I decided to take a break to find out about the flute because I always so intensely studying the flute. It was getting to be too much. So I took a break, I was going to go back after one year and the break lasted until now!!! (Laughter) I don't think I'm going back next year!!

Teachers

So for your break did you go to the conservatory?

Yes. I really wanted a degree in flute. It would have taken about the same time as it would have to finish the architecture degree. By then, the virus had already infected me; I wanted to go on to study for masters, like a postgraduate degree, an artist diploma in Germany with William Bennett. While I was in Switzerland I studied with Conrad Klemm and André Jaunet who was my neighbor in Zurich, one tram stop, a five to ten minute walk from where I lived in Zurich. We really got along well, he would give me lessons for hours and hours we would work on the repertoire. That is where I learned the flute repertoire. And Conrad Klemm he was very special, of course he was an Alexander teacher at the same time. He had a very special career. A very gifted flute player and at some point, at age 45, he got cancer on his tongue. They had to take part of his tongue. He had a lot of x-rays so his skin was totally burned on the side. In spite of this he went on and was I still able to hear him play. He studied Alexander Technique that led to a very nice way of looking at music. When I would play for him, the things I studied with Andre Jounet, he would always tell me if it fit my personality, whether it was convincing or not. If not, he helped me to was adapt it. He would always interfere on this. Most of the time he asked me to do the opposite of what I was doing. He would make me check out different solutions. By doing this I found my own way of playing. It was fantastic. Each of his students sounded different. He developed the individual character of each student.

That is the mark of a great teacher!

I think so. And now, teaching myself I see how difficult this is. By doing it the other way – play like this, play like that – you get a quicker result at the first look, but you don't actually help the students in the long run and they can't develop their own personality.

That doesn't allow them to find their own voice They just become carbon copies.

Yes, we need people who have their own voice. The market, the professional life of a flute player is so tough and competition is so bad, and the selection is so hard out there. You want to develop their individual

skills. That is their only chance they have to be out there. If they are copies, they won't make it!

So this was, when I was studying with Conrad Klem, after this exam I went to see/study with William Bennett at Ramsgate and Geoffrey Gilbert, two summers at Ramsgate, and I was fascinated with both. At that time William Bennett came over to Freiburg im Breisgau for awhile and took the job that Aurèle Nicolet had before. I got along really well with William Bennett. I had a half-year which I wanted to fill before I could go to conservatory so I went to see Geoffrey Gilbert in Florida. That was fantastic, especially for technique. He really got after me for the scales, intonation and special excerpts. Scales classes were amazing and he played himself. There were twelve students in the scale class playing in unison. Of course when you made a mistake you would just move your fingers and try to sneak in again. You could be sure that at the next lesson he would come up to you and say "please, play me f# minor." So you knew that when you made a mistake you were going home and practice. (Laughter)

So he would call me at nine in the morning and say "What are you doing?" and I would say "well you know I'm getting some sleep, actually I'm still in bed" "What are you doing in bed? Someone cancelled their lesson. You can have it a half an hour from now. I'll see you in half an hour." I'd get up you know. And then, I'd be there and he would say "play me Midsummer Night's Dream, "Oh I haven't got the music here." " Oh maybe play me Till Eulenspiegel." " Sorry, if I had the music I would play it for you." "I think you don't know half of what you should know" very friendly, with his little mustache, he never got angry, never was offending; he just made a statement boom!

And at the same time he was carefully working on my sound. He really helped me to define my sound.

How would he do that?

He would just listen carefully and he would say "look, listen to this color by ear, also he looked at my embouchure, "I think you should open up more." It was a mixture between technical, (mechanical) and doing it by ear. Going from there I developed my own stuff about sound, especially about one thing I'm very into now and am getting good results with students, is finding the resonance of the inside of the head, the facial mask. It is like the singers. It is amazing how I usually tell them to blow less air into the flute to get a bigger sound, by using less air. Because if you just blow, you can kill the resonance, you can go past it. If you find the point where the resonance is, you can always make it bigger. But if you miss this point and blow hard, it isn't going to be louder. You get the harmonics out of tune. So those things started with Geoffrey Gilbert. Then I went back to Europe to study with William Bennett and work on the soloist sound . At the same time I was playing solo flute with the Zurich Chamber Orchestra.

When did that happen, when did you obtain that position?

The Zurich Chamber Orchestra just called in wind players when they needed them. So I got on the list, I got some calls for second flute and then while studying with William Bennett, they said, "we would like you to play solo flute." I did it for ten years. That was a very nice experience.

Are you still doing that?

No, I quit because doing all this stuff on my special flutes and having work at the Hochschule Musik Zurich, I just don't have the time. I like this. It is fun.

Did they do much contemporary music?

Not so much. No. They did the classical repertoire mainly, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert Symphonies. They accompany people, in Mozart, Beethoven Piano Concertos.

In 1992 we started a contemporary music group in Zurich called Collegium Novum to perform only contemporary music. The group also went back to the classic pieces of the 20th century, performing Schoenberg and Webern, Ligeti, Xenakis and doing very new stuff, first performances of pieces, commissioned pieces. The goal of the group was to show new tendencies in contemporary music. This group has lasted for more than ten years, which is really great. It really connects with what I'm doing with my personal music, just from a different vantage point.

Can you describe that? You are so into different sounds and colors. How did that start?

Well one thing it was listening intensely to pop music when I was 14 or 15, Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, King Crimson. And the other thing, right after I finished my studies, I was doing studio work in Zurich. I was called in for recordings. And when I finished my soloist exam, I got a call from Andreas Vollenweider who was playing electro-acoustic harp; it was a big shock in the pop world at that time. I knew him from earlier on and he had developed this incredible harp and was a big success. He sold so many copies of his solo recordings. And he said, we are going on tour and doing a new album, I need a wind player would you like to do this job? And I thought, I just finished my soloist exam, why should I go into the pop world? While I was doing my exam, we were recording.. He is all into sound with his music. We spent hours in the studio recording. So I got a great experience of studio work. And then we went on tour from August to the next February with breaks, playing sixty, maybe eighty concerts in the States, in Europe and then two months in Japan. That was fantastic, traveling all over the world, meeting people I knew from master classes. Actually every town I was in I knew flute players, and invited them to the concert. Then when we got back,

I could have gone back with this band, but I decided that a year was enough. I wanted to follow my own path.

And then somehow I discovered the flutes, in the sense that I discovered what was inside the flute. There must be were more sounds coming out of the flute. One night I went to a concert to hear a guy playing the didjeridu and he had the microphone inside the tube. And so I thought, oh, I can do that! I went home the same night and put a microphone inside the flute and went through my home stereo and started doing those sounds. I developed this sound world, intensively all summer discovering all new sounds. Then of course all the technical problems had to be solved. By that time the small microphones were available. I had technicians from Andrea's group helping me to develop all the microphone technology. We are using the fourth generation of equipment, always trying to improve. I knew I wanted to go on with these sounds. I had to sort them out and analyze them so I could made a lexicon of sounds. I worked out how to write them down. I recorded them on a tape at that time notating what was the dynamic range, how long can they be played, (you can't do tongue rams for five minutes), that kind of stuff important for composers to know.

What year was this?

Probably 1990's, about the time I came to LA. I'm working on it again, because I would like to put it on my web page. I'm responsible for contemporary techniques on the Galway network. He took me onboard for this big project. He was very supportive from the beginning of what I did. So was William Bennett. Bennett said, for my final exam, I was already playing the big flutes, "you don't need to play a William Bennett exam for your final recital at the end, play your own stuff." He was really giving me a kick. I remember this. So I'm grateful to him. He could have said to forget this stuff, and do this and that, but still now he is very supportive. And so was James Galway, new sounds, and now, I want t o connect with those sounds on the Galway network, so at our school we are doing a program called "e-learning" we just did videos about contemporary playing techniques, where it is possible to do close ups, how you put your mouth, how the techniques sound. And then we put it on a disk. It may become available on a web site with a link to James Galway. I don't know the time frame. I'll put it on the flute list when it is available. I'm getting asked a lot for this information individually. I can't do it individually. It is insane.

The world is so connected.

How can I not only repeat what has been done on the flute, but how can I explore new fields? People I was admiring were the people who pushed the limits, who through their imagination, went beyond what was in front of them.

So you are really a composer.

I'm a composer for flute. I usually say I'm much more a hunter, a collector. If I find something, I take it and look at it. I just did this piece last summer for the NFA convention, a competition piece. I've revised it now on this tour, I've discovered a terrible mistake in the original. My hope is that I can put together maybe five short pieces like this that cover the whole repertoire of extended techniques that when you want to practice extended techniques, you have these etudes to work out. They should be fun to play, but at the same time cover every technique and change between the techniques. I hope I can do this and bring it out. There isn't anything much like this. It is a question of time.

Robert Dick has his Flying Lessons which is the closest I know to this idea. But students are definitely interested in this, but sometimes afraid of how to get started. Some teachers are hesitant as well. How do you recommend getting started doing these techniques?

There is this opinion around, that contemporary playing techniques might destroy the qualities of your traditional techniques. But if you afraid of that, then stop eating French fries because the salt is bad for your lips, don't eat spinach because it is drying out your mouth, don't eat fresh artichokes because it is paralyzing your tongue, stuff like this. You can go crazy.

It really is the opposite.

It is opening your imagination. Of course, don't overdo it. I always tell people, when you play the Mozart Concerto in D Major, it opens with a D Major scale but that isn't the first D Major scale you have played in your life. You have played D Major up and down. So you have to have the skills to play this. Then you pick up Varese Dnesity 21.5 and you get the key clicks and you read down there. Why am I not able to do this? So the first time you do this these key clicks, you find it in a piece of music. You have to practice it outside of the piece of music. You have to know what a key click is. OK it is D Major. This is a tongue ram. Then you are talking about music once you are in a piece. Very often I ask my students to play a whistle tone out of the blue. Because I can ask them to play an f minor scale and they should be able to do it. Play me a tongue ram. So I think it all helps traditional technique. It is also a way of thinking, oh this is an accoustic effect, this is a technique, and oh this is music. So how am I going to integrate this small technical problem into the music to make it speak?

So it becomes an emotional part, directly emotional part of the music rather than just a technique.

There is playing imaginatively, then there is following the notated manual. Music

can't be this way. Classical music is direct music. We are talking about phrases and lines. Unfortunately in contemporary music we are often talking about doing the right thing on the right spot. It is a different way of looking at music. I hope all my students will know about these techniques when they take their exams. Maybe we need practice books.

And yet I find that my students, when they hear a piece they really like will learn to do anything. Which is great. The inspiration of a piece can send them in the right direction.

My students are having a tough time trying to play Takemitsu "Voice". It is a difficult piece. Before you start this piece, you have to know about multiphonics, whistle tones and aeolian sounds. You have to find out how to produce them. This is where improvisation comes in for me. I feel that improvising with those sounds helps you to find your own approach.

So you integrate them into your technique and your teaching?.

Ask the student to improvise just using tongue rams and Aeolian sounds. Then we imitate one another, call and response.

So do you use improvisation in your lessons frequently?

Not that frequently, When I started teaching I did a lot of this stuff but then I found out I have to be careful. I want the students to be good flute players. If they can do all the crazy techniques but don't have a good sound and intonation, they won't get a job. So what I do is, if they come to my concerts, I show them what I'm doing. They know that if there is something they are interested in, I will show them. They have this available to them. At the same time we have plenty of work fulfilling the repertoire, doing good exams, doing good recitals, mainstream flute playing which is the basis of everything. As innovative as I am in finding new techniques and technologies at the same time I work hard on tone quality, intonation, and rhythm. I just want them to be good, solid flute players. With some who are interested, I do improvisation.

I imagine you get very fine students. You have a fine international reputation.

Yes, I have an international class. I have students from Switzerland, Germany, Serbia, Korea, Japanese, Turkey, Brazil.

How many students do you teach?

I have thirteen students which is the limit that I can do. Each student receives a ninety-minute lesson. You have 90 minutes when you have to solve a problem. It includes the seven-minute break, but usually one goes up to

the hour. It does give some time to say, "Hi, how are you doing". The danger is, I have all this time and you take it slow. I try to fit in as much as I can.

Do your students come in with great preparation?

I have to do a lot of scale work. I'm afraid I'm not as concentrated as Geoffrey. He had his whole focus on this. But after studying with him for a few months I must say I missed the music. But I knew I was there for technique.

I have this wonderful student from Korea, Tete Bae, who studied in England. She has this English tradition of playing and she would do a scales class for me. She would get the students together and play scales. This was a big relief for me. They did the Moyse A B C D, the Taffanel and Gaubert so I could just work with them on the 480 scales and arpeggios. I have reduced them to just two exercises. This I got from Andre Jaunet. He said there are the two things, gammes and arpèges. Don't loose time with all the 480 variations of the same problem. He would have the metronome on all the time.

Do you use the etudes at all?

Of course they have to play me etude every week, always two, overlapping, one to finish and one new. Each etude lasts two weeks. Usually they have done Kohler, Opus 33, book 1 and 2, if they haven't we finish those. Then we do the Boehm 24 Caprices, because they are easy listening but hard to play, then I start with Andersen Opus 15. I may use Opus 60 for someone at the top who keeps things moving and is a good reader. In between the Andersen, I use the Karg -Elert Caprices. They are very nice because they are very condensed. They have musical and flutistic problems. That is basically what I do with etudes.

So what pieces do you teach, the standard repertoire, Bach, Mozart?.

What I'm doing with everyone are the Telemann Fantasias at the beginning. By playing a lot of Baroque material, you really learn a lot about style. They do one a week for the first year. They are short and I do it overlapping. At the beginning work is very intense, with the sound and all this stuff. I often use the Hindemith Sonata. I've had very good experience with it. Everything is written clearly, perfect instructions. At the same time you can work on sound, rhythm, intonation and technique. And then I keep track of what they are doing. I don't propose the next piece. I want them to come and tell me what piece they would like to learn. For some students it is easy, others want more direction. Even if they come with a

difficult piece, if they want to do it, they can do it. Go! Whatever they want to play they should play.

When do you introduce contemporary music?

We do Varese Density 21.5. One piece I like to do it by Toru Takemitsu is a solo flute piece called, Itinerant. It has just a few special techniques but is a real abstract work. I also like to do Robert Aitken's Icicle (1977). I think it is a very good piece. It is all written strange, but at the end if you really work it, it's like "oh I'm really playing this piece, I'm playing music.

How do you start people off with pieces such as the Aitken and the Takemitsu? How do you help them find the emotional value through the abstractness? Do you have them listen to recordings?

No, I probably should do more of this. It is always a problem to help them. I also want them to develop their own working technique I know from my experience this first encounter with contemporary music was terribly hard.

I remember my first encounter. It was the Berio Sequenza. I had to force myself to work on it everyday for a certain amount of time.

You must start from scratch. It is the way you learn contemporary music. You have to read every single thing and transpose it into music. They have just to know that digging out the meaning of contemporary music is the hardest work you do. So they have to accept this. I am always standing at the same point. The first five to ten hours you spend on a piece are just terrible. And then slowly it comes together. They have to get used to that. It is a tough workout.

I think maybe, because it is so much more difficult, if one doesn't have a confidence in one's own ability, then one thinks to be stupid or dumb, thus incapable of doing something different. It is like hear you play, "Oh I should be able to do this right away." In our society we are so used to getting things quickly, we don't have the patience.

That is the point where you can help as a teacher. It is tough, but you can do it. You can't download this stuff. No way around it. We are playing quite a bit of contemporary music at our conservatory. Really emphasizing this at our school. They get the charts from people who have chamber music groups. They have to participate. Sometimes they get really weird charts. I tell them I want to know everything you are doing here at school. I want you to accept my help with everything. I'm in contact with the other professors, because I want feedback on my students. They bring all their music to their lesson and we sort it out. I want them to be comfortable in the rehearsals. I want them to be ready for all rehearsals,

to know how to play. So that is sometimes more efficient than working with flute solo pieces. Other basic repertoire pieces after those beginning pieces include the Berio Sequenza, Takemitsu Voice, and then Holliger, T(air) e, which is terribly hard. The piece is called Taire in French which means being silent and the air is the air. It is all about the limits of being able to express oneself. Sometimes I do the Yun Etudes, maybe #5. Someone might desperately want to do the piccolo etudes.

How do you decide if a piece is worth doing?

Sometimes this is so hard.

Until you practice it you can't really know.

You have to practice it and play it and then decide if it is worth it. That is something you learn. Sorting out contemporary music is facing also that the work may have been done for nothing, that you may have to dump it because the piece isn't working. But there are many good pieces. I have invested hours in pieces where afterwards I had to say that wasn't worth it. But that is part of being out there.

What makes a piece not worth it to you? If doesn't hang together, or you don't feel emotional value?

It is probably the emotional part. You can only tell when you play it well in front of an audience. Contemporary music needs a perfect performance more than classical music because if you play a Mozart Sonata on a piano, which is terribly out of tune, you can still recognize the Mozart sonata. But if you play wrong notes in contemporary music, people may not hear that. You need the best possible performance to find out if the piece is speaking or not. Sometimes I feel like composers are just writing an intellectual exercise, that they can't get it together on an emotional level.

Didn't we go through a period of time in the 70's when composers didn't care if an audience responded to a piece?

Yes, at the same time, where the free jazz people on stage didn't care if there was an audience or not.

Music needs somebody. It needs to be addressed to someone. That is part of the music. There is transformation when somebody listens to it.

I heard an interesting theory about all of that. After WWII some composers who had witnessed the horrific side of war couldn't translate that experience so they chose to ignore their feelings so they wrote more intellectual music instead.

Could be possible. Of course that is hard to prove, but it is an

interesting way to look at it. Classical music has developed in a way. Jazz has developed in a way. They both go through similar states of mind. Music is defined, then intermingled Jazz got really complex, like having this expressive music of Mahler, then it is like a dead end, classical music and Jazz both got to that point where they couldn't get out limiting increasing complexity. There was a rough period for music. Luckily enough there were always people around who knew about emergency exits like George Crumb. He just didn't care about the mainstream classical school of composing. Composers in Europe like Henze and Berio or Xenakis managed to escape too .

On the other hand you have Boulez who sticks to this but is a genius and a big brain. With Elliott Carter I get the same impression

Do you play the Boulez Sonatine?

Yes. It is a tough piece.

Are there specific requirements of the soloist exam?

~~No, but you just want to push the bar.~~—We give them this freedom so they can choose a totally independent program. The exam comes in three phases. First, you present a program of ninety minutes. The day before the exam the Jury tells you what you will play, shrinking the program to an hour. Two movements of Prokofiev, Two movements of a Bach Sonata, a flute concerto etc. At this point, you get a yes or no. If no, you are out of school. Done. This happens after five years of studies. This is at the postgraduate level, the highest level. Second part of the exam is a concerto with orchestra. The third part is a recital where you present an hour's program. All of this happens within half a year. This is the standard in Switzerland We try all over Europe to coordinate these exams. There has been a big reconstruction in order to establish a European platform of education.

We didn't have degrees like the bachelors, masters, and doctorates in the United States. Every place in Europe was different. This is a way to standardize, to make it easier to switch from one place to another There was a time when big universities all over Europe got together in Bologna to make a declaration, we want this across Europe as an answer to the American system.

So that was a big change. All instruments, and jazz and dance, and theater is all integrated. 2009 the Zurich Hochschule will move to another place on a new campus.

Is there much cross-fertilization between the arts?

If I want it, I can find it. I am very much interested collaboration, especially in the area of jazz. I have a student from Turkey who is also studying jazz flute at the same time with another teacher. The Jazz department has a

more conservative approach to Jazz, like the Berkeley College in the Boston. For my student it is still a great chance to broaden his musical experiences.

Do you have advice for teachers and students, how to branch out to do things like you are doing? Listening, exploring

One thing is listening. Expose them to all kinds of different music. I feel that students coming to the level of university don't have good experience listening to a lot of live music. They have to see and hear an ensemble playing contemporary music to know what is going on. They have to get an idea of how an orchestra works, not to hear the flute from a CD, out of a speaker, but out of the orchestra.

Serious students should go to live performances every night. Everything you can get to, jazz, pop, pulse oriented music, which classical music isn't. This is the best way to help students develop an excellent rhythmic sense

So trying to break the barriers between different kinds of music and listening to all musics of the world is important.

Absolutely! This music is here, it is available. That is the great thing about our time. You have to take advantage of it. I still feel like, with all the downloads, i-pods, it is all on an artificial level. You have to feel the atmosphere of live concerts. You are a live musician, you want to play it on your instrument. You have to know about the feeling of listening to the flute from a distance, not just through a speaker. Attend a lot of live concerts.

The other thing is really don't make a compromise about technical things like sound or also body position. Be really critical with these fundamentals You get flute players who aren't totally developed yet, but you don't want to have to start all over again. Still they have to be able to play the flute for the next 40-50 years and therefore really need a professional basic training. You still have to be enthusiastic about what is happening, yet be critical. It is a difficult line. And some kids are lucky, they naturally do the right thing.

Can you give any specifics about how you work on sound?

We all want a big sound. But volume is not always connected with the amount of air you put into the flute. It is more about the overtones. A sound with a lot of overtones carries, and seems loud. I'm trying much more to look at it from a singer's point of view, find the body resonance but especially resonance in your head. The flute has very little resonance itself, it isn't like a piano or cello, it is just a metal stick. So you are the resonance body. A singer has the vocal cords inside and the resonance in the head, and we have the trigger in front of our head, the flute, which is feeding back into our head, creating resonance. I don't know if this picture is right, but I feel like our habit is to use the air in the context of using our voice because we are speaking.

With the flute however we don't think of the air only coming to your vocal cords. It has to go beyond, across the mouth and go much further, double the distance, which means it has to be fast but precise. And as soon as the flute rings, let everything feed back into your head. Don't have the feeling of blowing, but a feeling of exhaling, like cleaning your glasses. Of course, the hydraulic system of the body participating helps, opening the chest cavity. Breathe to your back and let this just be open and have your rib cage wide open, the most open position possible. That is something I'm carefully watching to get into their imagination. I try to avoid talking about the movement of the jaw going up and down, higher for high register, low for low register. Any mechanical advice, we tend to overdo. Talk about the resonance instead. Trigger the listening and imagination of sound.

So if someone is playing an octave and you see them making a lot of motion, and it doesn't sound smooth, what might you say?

I would say "let the cheeks go create lots of space, back at the jawbone, and keep your teeth apart." I talk about the soft palate in the back. This is some movement of the soft palate when you play the octave. I used to think that you double the amount of air for the octave. It isn't true. The air pressure inside the mouth is not higher for the higher octave and lower for the low octave. The resonance chamber must adapt. I met a professor at Stanford University, Patricio de la Cuadra, for two hours. He is doing his doctorate. He measured the air pressure inside the mouth of a beginner flutist and a professional flutist. He said the air pressure from the professional almost doesn't change where as the beginner changes it a lot. The professional has just this little variation of air stream that opens up to the octave. There is a bit of change in the back, the feeling of ah-ou. You get this falsetto voice, head voice.

One basic thing about breathing: We accumulate tension while breathing out and it has to be so. Then breathing in, we must let it go. We usually think about it the other way And collapse while breathing out. We have to build up tension and then while breathing in we let it go. We have to get used to it. Keep the chest up and then let it go. From high to low, just blow down from high register to low register. Your lips do not participate in playing the octave as long as you are at the same dynamic level. Blow down as you go from low to high register. If you play piano, then you have to make the aperture smaller, or come off the mouth hole. The lips work for note bending, for intonation.

Do you have exercises to help students hear and tune the harmonics in the sound?

I have one exercise. It is based on Moyse, De la Sonorite, the half steps. This is very hard to describe, without having the flute in my hands and showing to people. I start in half tone steps at the low register B to the F. Then I blow low F to octave F and to the fifth (C), which is slightly out of tune. Now try to open the fifth up, find the right angle. Then play C-B with the F-E fingering trying to find the sound, the

fundamental of this overtone. Which is the E2 then E1, go up again E to B with E fingering. Keep an open color. The whole flute becomes connected, the intervals feel closer together. Pull out the fundamental of the note you are playing, the octave or the fifth, so that there is more of a feeling of playing multiphonics than a single note. They are very close together. And very often, when I see people play, they are going down, compressing their chest. So as the line goes down, students to move their bodies down. They should go in the opposite direction, up. Let the muscles at the bottom of the pelvis go. Very often we hold from the hip to the pelvis. We have to be able to let them go. When you can let that go totally soft, and on the other hand stay up without collapsing you get the feeling you are a very long, open tube. Then you can jump from low to high register without working.

It sounds like the Alexander Technique, lengthening and widening.

Yes, I think it is some of that idea. The same compression happens in the neck. Basically, the system is, before you do the right thing, you have to stop the wrong thing. The wrong thing not to happen. Then there is space for the right thing to happen. And the opposite of wrong, is wrong. If you try to do the opposite it going to work in the first moment.

Then trying to hard can get in the way.

Definitely. To get down to low C I have to tell the students to reduce the amount of air, because they are compressing the sound and eliminating harmonics. The low note is loud, because I'm finding the resonance, a very low and high frequency at the same time. (Matthias makes a growling sound, multiphonics like the throat singers). That is my feeling for the low notes.

I'm trying to play across the octaves, make it narrower, more compact. The students know

my language. Lift the chest from the sternum without pulling back. It is Alexander Technique, dancers position. Stuff like this I am emphasizing a lot. It is the common denominator of my students. After awhile they hear that they have this quality of sound.

So when you were a beginner, do you remember practicing a lot?

It was regular, but not very long. One thing I recall, whenever I came back from school, I would play the flute. When I was tired, before doing my homework I would pick up my flute and play. It might have been a half hour. When I didn't really want to do my homework, it might have been an hour! (laugh) It was always first. It gave me a good feeling because the energy just kept coming back. Now it also happens, I can be terribly tired and then when I have something to practice, I come home at ten o'clock at night and start playing the flute, after a half hour, I'm energized, if I do it correctly. But, when I was young I just played.

So it was feeding you?

Definitely. I got a lot of it. Of course when you are 14, 15 you improvise for hour long sessions in acoustically nice places with the guitar playing the same four chords. You hang out with your friends and you play to get people to look and say, "Oh, he can play". There is this other level that comes in at a certain age. This actually goes together with getting nervous for concerts. Before you didn't care, then you start to care. Of course you look in the mirror and try to make sure your hair look great. At the same time you get nervous because you can now see yourself from the outside. You pay the price. That's very clear.

So, it is all about spending the time sincerely, when you are practicing and doing it for the love of it because it matters.

Yes, it matters. It goes along with how you have your favorite CD's that you listen to over and over again. And if you as a teacher manage to open up this world to a kid, this is worth much more than just learning how to play the flute and some silly tunes and play them perfectly. This is the world of music and the flute is just a small part of it. Basically you want good musicians playing the flute. If someone is really interested in music and finds out that the flute might not be his first instrument, that he might be a composer of electronic music, whatever, that is much better than having a perfect flute player who just doesn't care about the music.

Yes, I call that a typist.

Yes, right! Exactly. You know, sending out his telegrams, musically perfect

Not from the heart.

A telegram, a birthday telegram or a telegram telling that someone died, looks exactly the same, but have a totally different meaning so we are talking about; something I tell students who are really playing unmusically, "You are just sending a telegram. Please. Have the courage to say something.

Yes.

One thing I always tell them, when you get ready for working with an orchestra for a chamber music group, don't just sit in and just play a general way of the piece you are going to play. Play what you think is correct and play it well. But then be flexible. Always make a proposal to the conductor. The worst for the conductor is when he has people who just play just half way, actually correct, but what can I say about this? You want to sit there as a personality and show the conductor that's my way of playing it. OK. And then he can work with it. He says, "I like this, could you play it like this?" Then you must be flexible. Having a strong opinion

without being rigid about it. That is what you need when you play in the orchestra. Also, with contemporary music, play out and make decision, put it out there, and then let the conductor deal with it, but be flexible.

That is where it gets competitive, you have to use your brain.

For students entering competitions they should do the same thing? They must present a well-researched and thought-out presentation.

Absolutely. Of course it has to be perfect. We are talking about playing every right note at the right spot but then it has to be an interpretation. You have to be convinced of what you do. That is the way I want to play this. This is something they have to learn. Don't show up at a lesson and just play a general version of the sonata. Make mistakes, but take a risk.

My teacher, Robert Willoughby, made a comment that helped me to take that risk, "Make me love it or make me hate it, but don't bore me!"

Yes! Exactly.

Do you have favorite books or Cds that you would like to recommend to young people, that inspired you?

One of the books that I always show to my students is about the great American flutist, William Kincaid, Kincaidiana (published by the National Flute Association, nfaonline.org). It is a fantastic book. He covers so much. From the flute methods, (of course I was born and raised with Taffanel-Gaubert Method which is good), the big exercises, the 17 Grand Daily Exercises are very good to go back to. Usually they have studied them very early. I sometimes have my students go back to those exercises, because they have real flute problems to solve, much more than Paganini. Then I am using Trevor Wye books. You don't have to have them all. You can pick out what you need, Articulation, Tone, etc. Other than that, there is a lot of material that is just fine.

How many compact discs have you recorded now?

I have them listed on my home page, www.matthias-ziegler.ch/. They include a very early Vivaldi CD. Now days, you almost can't do this because it has been taken over by the early music people which is OK. I have a CD of Latin American music, Piazzolla with guitar and I have recorded two CDs with my special flute. One was Marsyia's Song and the other Uakti. Just now there is a CD, improvised music with a trio, three wind players and a have one with the Mark Dressler Trio, which came out on a small Los Angeles label Cryptogrammophone which I think is a wonderful CD, jazz inspired. And I have a Flute

Concerto for my special flutes and string orchestra written for the Zurich Chamber Orchestra. Marvelous piece. I have recorded this for Arte Nova with the Dresden Symphony Orchestra

Right now I am working on a new solo recording, but at the same time I am working on an arrangement on my computer on an arrangement of Bach Sonata for viola gamba played on the bass flute. It is so beautiful and is exactly the range. I want to do this on my bass flute. So now I am doing this arrangement of these Bach pieces, Three Sonatas for viola gamba by J.S. Bach.

You have had wonderful opportunities playing around the world playing everything from standard repertoire as well as your own music.

Yes, I have played both, and would like to do more of both but I have had many opportunities to do beautiful things. When you bring in new stuff, you have to convince the orchestra. If you manage to do it, it is fantastic for both sides. Then they are sitting on the edge of their chairs.

Did you dream about doing this as a kid, or did it just evolve?

Well, I always liked to perform when I was a kid. But I didn't have a complete idea of this stuff. There was always this energy around. It was sometimes difficult for the people around me. I always wanted to do something. It was more a question of how to do it. Somehow I found my own way. The flute has always been a source of creativity. So I am never bored. If I am bored, I have to let it go.

Do you find it difficult to manage the teaching and the performing?

Yes. Sometimes it is. Of course when I am performing, I come back full of energy to teach, the feeling of not being prepared enough for a concert is a constant fear.

I'm glad to hear you say that!

Other people go for parachute or bungee jumping, all that crazy stuff. I think an unrehearsed concert is the same. (Laughter).

So you guard certain time every day to practice?

Yes, as much as possible. Some days I can't. Now, getting up with the children early gives me an hour in the morning when I am really fresh which is very good. I am thinking of changing my schedule for teaching. Usually there are two days when I go from 9 in the morning until 9 at night. I am thinking of starting at 11 to allow myself two more hours. When I really have two hours of concentrated practice it works out best. Then I will have a good feeling teaching. Maybe I might spread my teaching to three days so I have the two morning hours for myself. Then I have to be strict, no mail,

no telephone be strict. It takes a lot of discipline. Then I have a concert when I am in good shape, I want this feeling to last forever. It is part of the conflict. Of course, for the family, a tour like this is rough. Anything longer than ten days is tough for my wife. She has to organize everything. My son is really fun to be around. We do things together. I don't want to miss this. These days are only once. What you miss, you miss, you cannot compensate. You need to build strong ties. You need them now so when they are 13, 14, when they are getting wild that you have the strong ties to build upon. Then they will come back if they are in trouble.

So family life is important to you.

It has to be. I just don't want to mess with it. It is just too important.

Is there anything I haven't asked you.

One thing, practicing, when I was studying I was very often hanging my flute from the ceiling from two cords. That was an idea that developed when I was studying with the Alexander teacher. We usually think that we are standing right and the flute is an extension. It turns out the other way, the flute is right and we are the extension. I would hang the flute in the horizontal position on two ropes and then would pose myself around the flute. So you have the flute here, bring up your arms, then work the mechanics. I have to reach so far. Then I could practice even when I was tired and wanted to collapse. I would still do the right thing. I am checking this out with students. Get two cords made of nylon from a sailing shop. You can use a special knot that can be adjusted. The nice thing about it is that your flute is waiting, anytime!

So how did you originally get into the big flutes?

I was always interested in low instruments. It might have to do with my voice, the range of my voice. When I started the saxophone I started with the alto, then the tenor. And it was similar with the flutes. I came across this bent bass flute and I was really fascinated. Then I discovered the contrabass flute and of course it was perfect for the things I wanted to do with the amplified flute. There was more space, variety, all those sounds were available inside the instrument. I found a whole orchestra inside the flute. By putting microphones to those sounds, I kind of blow them up. They become audible to people in the audience. They are microstructures of the flute that I can hear when I practice or put the flute to my ear. I hear all those overtones, the wind sounds, the key clicks and the whole thing is like take a magnifying glass and go very close to the instrument.

So I had this contrabass flute turning into an orchestra. I have three pedals on stage

for the three microphones on each flute, two inside and one on top where I constantly mix the volume, like having a mixer but doing it with pedals. Depending on the microphone I'm raising, I'm pulling up the volume, depending on this I get more percussion sound or just more normal flute sound colored with wind, so I get all the mixtures. Last year, Eva Kingma, a wonderful flute maker for Holland, made me a special alto flute, she builds the most beautiful alto flutes. She developed a new system, a flute which allows you to play not only half steps on the flute but all the quartet tone steps. Using this same idea, Bickford Brannen shaped a great flute with the possibility of playing quarter tones. That is the Brannen-Kingma System flute. The next idea was building a quarter tone bass flute. So that is what Eva and I did last spring. We called this instrument, because of its shape, The Hoover. I'm able to play quarter tones, which also allows me to play many more multiphonics on the bass flute. Of course I wanted additional special features like special key clicks so I could pull out special colors. We are still developing this a little bit. It is a bass flute in C with additional fingerings going down to low G. It is like having a G foot on an instrument. That allows me to play one octave below the alto flute without having to transpose, which is the first G of the contrabass flute. I am very happy with this instrument, but we have to improve some of the mechanical parts of this instrument. I think it is going to be a great instrument that will be used for flute choirs. It comes down on a stick so you don't have to carry the weight.

Eva Kingma also makes a contrabass flute, which is available now which has a range of two and a half to three octaves. It plays down to the low C of the cello. What is missing in the flute family is a tenor flute and what we call the bass flute, it is actually a tenor flute. So we have the alto flute, then the tenor flute (bass flute in C). You have so much fundamental frequency and not so many harmonics so you get the impression that the sound is lower. So if I play the low C on the contrabass, and the cello plays the C on its open string, I get the impression that I'm one octave lower. It is the acoustic phenomenon of not having overtones. But I'm at the C of the viola.

The contrabass flute is my main instrument. And all the sounds I'm playing are coming out of the flute. They are not synthesized. They are sounds inside the flute that I blow up and pull out and shout at the audience with a microphone system. I usually tell this to the audience.

So what other equipment is needed when you do a concert?

I need equipment for the microphones. I have a mixer, a pre-amplifier for the microphones which are onstage which connect to the pedals to change the volume of the microphones and then I go into an amplifier and two speakers, which I'm usually not carrying with me. That is enough weight with the two flutes. That was actually an issue. How can I reduce weight on my equipment and still have the full range of possibilities?

The airlines like me very much. In Europe overweight is really expensive. Each way in Europe costs me the price of a return ticket. But I have a suitcase with the electronics, 32 kilos, which is about 65 pounds. I have a backpack with the flutes that is about 50 pounds and then a shoulder bag. It is a lot of weight, like a percussionist.

I have to check in baggage. Try to pack carefully. They are wrapped in foam and with material, so I check them.

How much of your music is written down?

Some of the pieces are entirely written down. But most of the others have a general road map. Like in typical jazz notation. I write down something and then I have an open field and will touch base here and there. I take the detours, but that is up to the atmosphere.

So every concert is a unique experience. So you are playing the hall, acoustics, the audience and the PA system.

If the PA system allows lots of low frequencies, the audience will hear lots of them. Of course you react to the acoustic, the environment and you feel the response of the audience.

Great! Well shall we go to lunch? Thank you so much for your time. This has been fascinating! I appreciate all the time you have taken with us. Thanks for sharing your ideas and your music with us!

END OF INTERVIEW