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# Ana Batinica: Contemporary Classics from an Ancient Coast

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## Ana Batinica: Contemporary Classics From An Ancient Coast

The recipient of the 2015 Myrna Brown International Scholarship, who was born in a small, medieval town on the Croatian coast, spoke with the scholarship committee's coordinator about her musical life and her passion for modern works.

by Nicole Molumby

The Myrna Brown International Scholarship was first offered to international flutists in 1993 and was created to honor the influential Myrna Brown for her dedication and devotion to the National Flute Association. The scholarship provides financial assistance to flutists from non-U.S. nations to attend the NFA convention and perform as ambassadors from their home countries.

Ana Batinica, the 2015 recipient, is from Zagreb, Croatia, which belonged to Yugoslavia until its independence in 1991. She graduated with honors from Zagreb Music Academy with Renata Penezić in 2012. During a year abroad, she studied at the Music Academy in Ljubljana with Matej Zupan. In 2014, Batinica graduated with honors in Strasbourg with Mario Caroli. She is a permanent member of the Zagreb Flute Ensemble and second flutist with the Zagreb Philharmonic.

Committee members were impressed with Batinica's technical and musical approach to performing contemporary solo flute pieces. When formalizing her recital program, the committee asked if she would commission a solo flute piece by a Croatian composer to perform at the convention in Washington D.C.; thus was born *Five Moods for Solo Flute* by Dubravko Palanović (born 1977), premiered by Batinica.

### How are you enjoying your first NFA convention?

It is incredibly awesome! I am amazed at just how large the festival is. It is



Ana Batinica: "I like the challenge of learning new music."

really incredible the amount and variety of events offered. Everything is an option: piccolo masterclass, baroque interpretation for teachers—I really like that every aspect of our profession is offered and that all flutists are engaged. Croatia has only four million citizens, and flutists are not as united in my country.

### You have just performed your debut NFA recital, which you titled "Contemporary Classics for Solo Flute." Give us an idea why you chose to perform these pieces.

I like to play 20th-century pieces for flute and piano. I feel comfortable playing modern pieces. From the beginning of my studies in Zagreb, I had the chance to play in one contemporary ensemble, Cantus. Additionally, several years ago I attended the Slovenian Flute festival in Zagorica, and there was an Italian flutist, Mario Caroli, who performed a recital of all contemporary solo flute pieces. He performed the whole recital from memory and it was amazing. I found his performance so musically expressive and narrative. I was amazed at how such pieces could be so touching and inspiring.

When I finished my studies in Zagreb, I decided to attend one of his masterclasses, and after that I went to study with him. He is a complete artist, and he is devoted to contemporary music. While I studied with him, I decided that I liked to play this music. It is quite challenging, full of new things; it is full of barriers and walls that we have to learn to move. That is a nice thing because I like the challenge.

Yet, everything is a challenge—to play Mozart well is a challenge, it is not easy. But learning contemporary music is very



Ana Batinica

difficult in the beginning. It is very complex and full of details. I like the process of learning this music and working on it.

### **How long have you been with the Zagreb Philharmonic?**

I started having substitute flute engagements with the Zagreb Philharmonic and the Opera in Zagreb after the end of my master's studies in 2012. Immediately after receiving my diploma, there was an audition, and I was really lucky to have this opportunity. In Croatia, there is only one audition every 10 to 15 years because there are only five orchestras in the whole country. I was really concentrated on an orchestral music career from the beginning of playing the flute. When I was younger, I played in what Americans would call marching bands. There are many of these bands throughout small cities in Croatia, and I played there since I was a little child. Throughout my education, I have always been most interested in playing with other people. So when I came to Zagreb, I immediately auditioned at the conservatory to play on big projects, and that is how I somehow pushed myself into that direction.

### **Where did you grow up in Croatia?**

I'm from Šibenik, a small town on the coast of the Adriatic sea near Split. It is a small, medieval, beautiful city.

### **Tell me about your typical orchestral rehearsal schedule and concert season with the Zagreb Philharmonic?**

Every week we mostly have a new guest conductor because for now we do not have a chief conductor. But next season (2016–2017) we will have a chief conductor. Currently he is working in Chicago—David Danzmayr—he is Austrian. He is a young and talented conductor who worked with us several times last season. And every Friday there is a concert, sometimes two concerts per week. We rehearse Monday to Friday, three hours in the morning every day. And on Friday there is a general rehearsal and concert. Every week we have a new program and new conductor.

Every week we also have rehearsals with the flute ensemble. The flute ensemble is trying to be really active and promote the flute instrument in Croatia. I find in the United States it is really nice—there are a lot of amateur flutists. However, in Croatia, it is not the case. People either play professionally or they do not play. Now there are some changes, but people still do not play flute just for fun.

### **How many weeks are in your season?**

From mid-September to late July or early August. It depends on summer festivals. Usually the intensive schedule season ends in mid-June. After that, there may be some concerts outside of Croatia during the summer.

### **Can you tell me about the Croatian composer whose new work you performed at the convention?**

Dubravko Palanović is a very dear colleague of mine and also plays with the Zagreb Philharmonic. He recently wrote a cello concerto, and he has one wonderful piece for flute and piano titled *Manic*.

Unfortunately, Croatian composers are not promoted either in Croatia or internationally. So I am really happy that

I had the chance to perform a Croatian piece by him at the NFA convention.

I really like the piece; *Five Moods for Flute Solo* has, of course, five sections with different moods. I asked him for some kind of programmatic instructions, but he is not really the kind of composer who will tell you specifically what he wants. No, he says that this is music and you do it like you want. I personally imagined it as one day in a person's life, from waking up to going to sleep.

However, in this case, it is not like you are going to sleep because the last movement is very *alive* and is like a dance, a party in the evening. The beginning is very mystical and a bit lazy. It is a bit worried, like you do not know what is going to happen today. And then you get to go through all the moods—"I am happy, let's do this." It's especially interesting because it all comes from one motif that goes through the entire composition, and that one motif, for me, is actually that one person, the same person, but with different faces.

### **Can you recommend any other Croatian pieces for flute to American flutists?**

There are two nice sonatas by Bruno Bjelinski (1909–1992) for flute and piano. And there is a lot of chamber music by Boris Papandopulo (1906–1991), a composer that I think Americans would love. He has a lot of folk influence in his music. Papandopulo has one piece called *Paraphrase*, based on Mozart's *Magic Flute*, for flute, piccolo, and percussion—percussion ensemble; it is cool.

### **Are these pieces published?**

I believe they are, by the Croatian Composers Society. (See [hds.hr/en/about/croatian-composers-society/](http://hds.hr/en/about/croatian-composers-society/))

### **Ana Batinica on "Contemporary Classics"**

I believe that experiential knowledge is the most effective way of learning and that it can be very motivating when we hear other young flutists using contemporary language as their own, because it actually belongs to the youth. I think it is particularly important to give special attention to works for solo instruments because it's the best way to develop our artistic identity. —Ana Batinica

### **Great! Now back to the Zagreb Flute Ensemble. What kinds of pieces do you perform with that group? Special arrangements? Do you collaborate with Croatian composers?**

Most pieces are newly composed for the ensemble. So mostly we play contemporary music. We've had some projects with arrangements such as Grieg's *Morning Mood*. The ZAF has just finished our third season performing together. But in the beginning, we had many different projects: "La Perle du Nord," "Hommage a Baroque," "Phantom of the Opera," and, in the 2015 season, "Migrations." We also played Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, which is a beautiful quartet. We don't always play in the same formations. In the ZAF, there are 10 to 12 of us, but we change parts, depending on the piece.

### Do you rotate parts?

Yes, often. However, for example, I play piccolo when it is needed. And some other colleagues play bass flute, so it's not such a difficult or big change to play piccolo and then switch to bass.

### Do you do any creative staging during performances?

Yes, we try to make every concert special so that it is not just a concert; we try to have some cooperation with contemporary dancers, actors, or directors. Actually, every season we have one director who does a special theme to tie together all our concerts and tell a story. For next season our theme is "Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow."

We have a premiere on every concert, mostly but not necessarily by Croatian composers. At NFA conventions, there is a lot of music for flute ensemble in the exhibit hall, but in Europe, flute ensembles are not so active. There are some, but it is not so popular as it is here. So actually we should try to explore more American music.

### Perhaps the Zagreb Flute Ensemble will someday play at the NFA?

That would be *great!* This November we are working on a performance tour to Slovenian, Austria, Slovakia, and Czech Republic.

In both her application and her convention performance, Ana Batinica absolutely captured the essences of the cultural and professional exchange that were so integral to Myrna Brown as a person and are so central to the scholarship's focus. We all wish her success in her future musical endeavors and look forward to our paths once again crossing, either in the U.S. or somewhere along the Dalmatian Coast.

*Nicole Molumby is professor of flute at Boise State University and is the Myrna Brown International Scholarship Liaison for the NFA. She is a performer and clinician in the U.S. and Eastern Europe and is an MSR Classic Records recording artist.*

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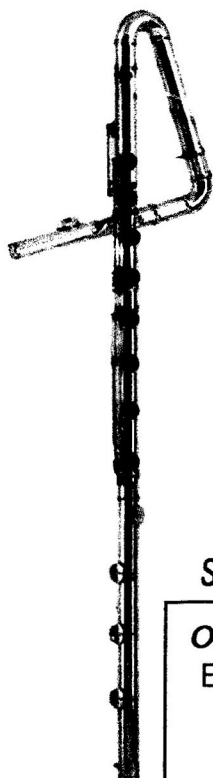
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