

THE MAGIC [OF] FLUTE

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A bit of magic happened at the end of 2017. First, rewind to September 23 of that year: It's a concert night at The Music Room where the KW Chamber Music Society (KWCMS) is presenting a program featuring flutist Patricia (Patty) Creighton and pianist Peter Allen. Like many musicians who perform there, the duo has arrived with copies of their CDs in case anybody wants to purchase one after the concert. This time, though, Patty has an extra package, and it includes one big poster, and a stack of small flyers, all picturing a young man with a flute.

That young man is at the centre of the story, a story that spans about 10,000 km, old friends, new friends, talent, generosity, and dearly held hope.

Patty was born and raised in Kitchener, earned a performance degree at the University of Toronto, and since 1984 has been Principal Flutist of Symphony Nova Scotia. She has not lost touch with her hometown, though, and occasionally returns to visit her twin sister, Jackie Wall¹, and play concerts in the area (such was the case last September).

In addition to her orchestra job, she teaches at Dalhousie University's Fountain School of Performing Arts in Halifax, and that's how she connects to the young flutist pictured on the flyers. As Patty tells the story:



"Several years ago I received an email from Lagos, Nigeria from a young flutist interested in coming to Dalhousie to study flute with me. He applied to the Fountain School of Performing Arts in March, 2016, was accepted with a renewable scholarship but since he couldn't raise enough money to cover costs, was denied a Canadian Student Visa. He was devastated but I suggested he defer the application and re-apply in March, 2017, which he did. We stayed in touch over the course of that year; occasionally he'd send me video links of his playing and I'd critique him, and we often dialogued about flute skills, etc. The mentor/student relationship developed over the year.

"In March, 2017, this time he auditioned with more advanced video audition materials and was accepted with a very high one-time entrance scholarship which triggered a successful attempt at getting a student visa. He arrived here in early September and has been studying flute with me since then. Up until that point he'd never had lessons with an actual flute player. The young man is very talented, with all of the ingredients necessary to eventually make it on the professional scene. His name is Ogo-Oluwa Sobukola."

As a youngster, Ogo-Oluwa took piano lessons from a music teacher at his local church, but one day when he arrived for a lesson he heard the teacher trying to play a flute, and at that moment he lost his heart to the sound of the instrument. Suddenly he knew that playing flute was what he wanted to do. Trouble was, there weren't really any flute teachers around, so, at age 17, Ogo-Oluwa set about teaching himself how to play.

Self-teaching of an instrument doesn't always work out so well, but Ogo-Oluwa's piano teacher was so impressed by his progress on flute that he suggested he enter MUSIQUEST, the Nigerian national music competition. Results? The young fellow with no flute teacher other than himself placed first runner-up!

At that point Ogo-Oluwa began to dream of studying flute abroad, and his search for where to do so led him to Halifax.

Whatever Canadian students pay in tuition, International students usually pay at least twice as much, and for Ogo-Oluwa, that was a heavy (as in impossible) burden. One of four children in a family of modest means, he knew that in order to be able to stay in Canada and do the work necessary to become an accomplished professional flutist, he would need a lot of money.

Patty Creighton, who describes herself as "a pay-it-forward kind of person" made it her mission to help this talented young person achieve his dream, and she launched a crowd-funder campaign – that's what the poster and flyers at the September 2017 concert were about. The flyers ended up in the hands of people at KWCMS concerts, and electronic versions of them made their way around social media.

A former KWCMS member who now lives in Ottawa contributed to the campaign, and so did other music lovers from this region, including one Kitchener woman who became an important link in the story.



When Patty was looking at the list of crowd-fund contributors, there was a name she remembered from many years ago: Pauline Finch. She used to know Pauline when they were both a few decades younger, and in fact Pauline once lived in an apartment in a house that Patty's family owned. Patty looked



through her old photos, and voilà, there was a photo of the teenage Pauline and Patty playing flute duets!

It didn't take long for the two former musical friends to reconnect via email, and plans were hatched to get together during a period when Patty was planning to be back in Kitchener in December for a family event.

Pauline, meanwhile, had been looking at the video of Ogo-Oluwa featured on the crowd-funding site, and she had two main thoughts: (1) this was a very talented young person, and (2) he needed a much better flute.

Pauline herself plays flute (and is known to others in several other capacities, e.g., freelance journalist, editor, organist), and she had recently purchased a high quality flute, planning to keep her old flute as a backup. As she told Joy Struthers of the *Waterloo Chronicle*², "I had been very fortunate to get a new flute that was way beyond the quality I thought I would ever have, a used instrument beautifully restored by a local lady, Lora Langer..."

That's when her generous heart intervened, and Pauline told Patty that she'd like to get her old flute "tuned up", and then give it to Ogo-Oluwa since it would be a big improvement on the instrument he had. "If you have the opportunity to match your tools and teaching with your own innate skill and talent, then that's how you really discover yourself as a musician", Pauline said.³

It would have been nice for Pauline herself to be able to give her flute to Ogo-Oluwa, but many kilometers sit between Kitchener and Halifax, so Patty decided that on the day in December she and Pauline would be getting together to play duets, she'd make a video of Pauline speaking to Ogo-Oluwa. Then, when she was back in Halifax and visiting the young man to give him some Christmas presents, she would make a little video of him opening the present at the bottom of the box –Pauline's flute– and then show him the video of Pauline saying that the flute was her gift to him.

All happened according to plan, and on a cold December day in Halifax, there was an ecstatic 23 year old flute player whose heart was filled with warmth.



No doubt readers in this region will remember the KW Symphony's popular former Assistant Conductor, Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser. Daniel is now in Halifax too, as Artist in Residence and Community Ambassador

for Symphony Nova Scotia's 2017/18 season, and he said "I first heard of Ogo-Oluwa through a campaign that Patty Creighton began many months ago. Patty is a wonderful musician, so I took her recommendation seriously. I went to the list of videos that he had online and began listening. I listened to his performance of the Chaminade *Flute Concertino*; I was so impressed that I thought it would be wonderful to have him be part of our February Concert that focuses on Black Music and Musicians. I was not looking for anyone at this point; he just played so well in the video that it was necessary to add him to the program. The piece is not very easy, and he is incredibly virtuosic throughout. It was quite a performance!"

UPDATE: After Ogo-Oluwa's performance with Symphony Nova Scotia, Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser said: "Ogo-Oluwa is a talented and welcome addition to the Halifax music scene. The incredible dexterity displayed on his youtube videos was on full display at Pier 21 this weekend. An audible ripple went through the audience when I told them he had only begun playing at age 17. His elegant playing, intelligence in speaking, and unique perspective furnish him with the right stuff for a great career."

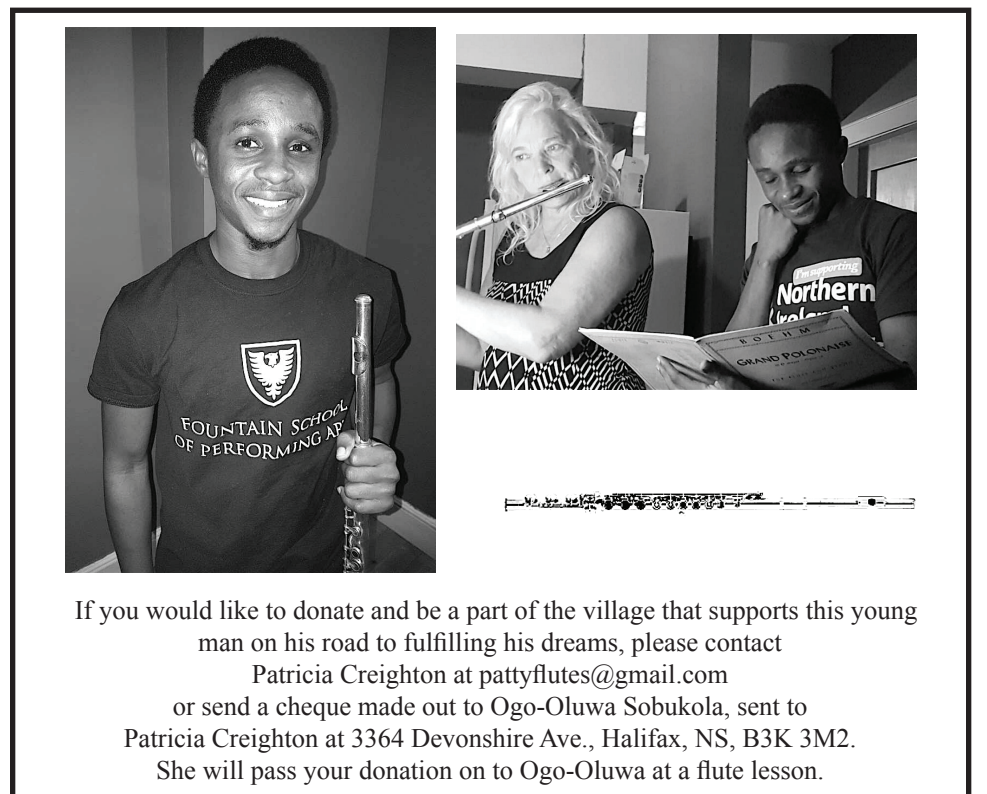
The crowd-funder is now closed, but Ogo-Oluwa's need for financial help continues and is still great. Patty Creighton and all those who have heard him play are hoping that people who learn about this remarkable young musician will be moved to pitch in and help him stay in Canada to complete his studies at Dalhousie.

FOOTNOTES

¹ If you had a copy of the last issue of the *Music Times* (January-February), you will have seen an article by Jackie Wall about how she and her husband Paul are opening a Yamaha dealership in St Jacobs.

² Joy Struthers, *The Waterloo Chronicle*, December 29, 2017

³ *Ibid.*



If you would like to donate and be a part of the village that supports this young man on his road to fulfilling his dreams, please contact Patricia Creighton at pattyflutes@gmail.com or send a cheque made out to Ogo-Oluwa Sobukola, sent to Patricia Creighton at 3364 Devonshire Ave., Halifax, NS, B3K 3M2. She will pass your donation on to Ogo-Oluwa at a flute lesson.

photos:
top: Ogo-Oluwa;

left: teenage flutists Pauline Finch & Patty Creighton;
Pauline & Patty's flute reunion, December 2017

right: Daniel Bartholomew-Poyser; Ogo-Oluwa & Patty Creighton at the Fountain School of Performing Arts