

Learning with the Master

Niall O’Riordan on *The Galway Flute Festival in Weggis*

A masterclass with Sir James Galway might sound a little bit intimidating to some people; I know I felt quite scared when I first played for him, but I am really glad I did. The concept might conjure up ideas of high-flying flute players in a competitive atmosphere, one playing faster than the next. This could not be further from the truth, especially the idea of it being a competitive class – although the standard is extremely high. What is immediately striking is the wonderful sense of community this masterclass has from the moment you arrive. Over the years I have attended more classes and conventions than your average flute player but, for me, Sir James’ masterclass in Weggis really stands out.

Each year the Sir James Galway festival is held in the picturesque lakeside town of Weggis, Switzerland. Here the mountains seem to touch the sky and it feels like you are just that little bit closer to heaven. The nuns of Stella Matutina open up their home with warm hospitality to flute players from all over the world and cook delicious food each day, most of which they grow themselves. The whole complex is very comfortable and modern. The tranquil surroundings combined with the peaceful spirit of the nuns make this place heavenly. In fact, on more than one occasion I’ve heard participants referred to the whole experience as ‘flute heaven’, and I wholeheartedly agree.

Every morning, Sir James teaches a technique class for all the students. One of my favourite parts of the day, this

alone is worth coming for. In fact, every year teachers from all over the world come to refresh their teaching. What’s different about learning from Sir James is that he always teaches from first-hand experience: what he has to share with you has come from years of practice



and investigation. We are all very familiar with Sir James, the ebullient soloist, but perhaps not so many have seen him in action as a coach and mentor. He is a very dedicated teacher and is completely committed to helping every student improve. Every morning, time is spent on *De la Sonorité* by Moyses. He has a wonderful way of demystifying this book which really helps in understanding how to approach it. To be honest, I don’t think I really knew what I was doing until I heard him teach it. This class really focuses on showing you what to spend your time practising in order to help you become the very best flute player

you can be. Something that really helped my playing was learning how to practice scales properly and my playing improved dramatically by adopting his approach. Time is spent every day on this topic.

In his masterclass, Sir James is his usual charismatic self. His advice and tips are unparalleled. He has a great way of getting the best from you, and at last year’s class he drew things from me that I didn’t know were there. I felt that he had unearthed a whole new world of learning for me to explore, and I was very excited. Sir James, of course, has very high standards for himself in his playing, and in his class he does his best to bring you to that same level of awareness.

It is fascinating to hear Sir James teach the standard repertoire and share his wisdom. His sense of humour always keeps you engaged, and he works from a positive and encouraging perspective. Nonetheless, he is very honest about what it takes to become a first-class flute player, reminding everybody there are no quick fixes, and that it takes time, dedication, and hard work. My advice to any student thinking of attending would be to spend a lot of time really getting your scales in great shape before you go as you will get so much more from the masterclass with him. He knows when you don’t practice them! Use the *Daily Exercises* by Moyses focusing on letters ABCD for this.

Another highlight of the festival is the evening recitals given by the distinguished guest artists. Last year’s line up included Denis Bouriakov,



Andrea Griminell, Prof Shengqi He, Nicola Mazzanti, Szablocs Szilagyi, Raffaele Trevisani, Jim Walker and Marlene Verwey, winner of the rising Star award. We were treated to amazing concerts every night. Another feature of the festival is that every year various flute-makers donate headjoints as prizes to be awarded to the most deserving students; this is decided by a class vote. This year's prizes were a magnificent Nagahara 16K gold headjoint with platinum riser, a Haynes gold bonded

headjoint, and beautiful headjoints by Lafin and Emanuel. Where else in the world are prizes like this given to students at a masterclass?

Flute players of all ages and abilities are welcome to attend as auditors. A hidden gem is that Lady Galway also hosts a masterclass for the auditors in the afternoon. Lady Galway's teaching style is positive, encouraging and fun. It is no wonder that many of the students return year after year.

Whatever level of playing you are at, there is something at this festival for everybody. High-flying college students and young professionals get an opportunity to learn with the most iconic flute player of our generation, whose wisdom and insights are totally unique. Amateurs and younger players can enjoy taking part in the morning technique class and playing for Lady Galway in her encouraging masterclass, while professional teachers and performers can simply soak in the inspiring atmosphere and recharge the creative batteries for the coming year. In addition to all of this, there is a fantastic flute choir, masterclasses and workshops by the distinguished guest artists, the Rising Star award, the morning singing class, and a spectacular party on the last day. Why not think about coming in 2013 and experience it all for yourself!

The Galway Flute Festival 2013

July 26th – August 4th
Weggis, Switzerland



Masterclasses, Workshops, Guest Artists, Concerts, Flute Choir, Flute Exhibitors, and more.
www.jamesgalwayflutefestival.com