

# MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

## DISCOVERING CELTIC MUSIC

by Wendy Ellen Ledger

I discovered Celtic music after a long, hard winter when I seriously considered giving up the piano. I'd been sick for months and the thought of making music receded to the back of my mind until it felt like it disappeared. I might never have returned to it if my music teacher hadn't called me and said that she had 50 prospective students on her wait list, and I needed to make up my mind on what I wanted to do. I told her I had no energy. Some days I couldn't even eat. She told me I couldn't keep canceling our appointments. If I wanted to play music, I needed to show up.

For the past two years, I had studied jazz standards. I had played this music in a café down the street, a once promising spot that was mismanaged down to the ground. When the café closed, I knew I needed to stop playing the music that I had worshipped ever since I was a child. I could no longer believe in "My One and Only Love." "Misty" felt dreary. I didn't want to be flown to the moon. I wanted my feet on solid earth.

When my teacher called and challenged me, I easily could have quit. However, I found myself back at the piano, uncertain of my direction. In my music binder, I came across three forgotten handouts from my last lesson—a set of reels, one of jigs, and a waltz. In the past few years, my teacher had begun performing Celtic music. "You might want to try it," she said, handing me the sheets before I turned to go. Now I stuck a page of jigs in front of me and began to play these simple melodies. An hour passed, and I was still engaged. I found myself wanting to return to the piano each day.

The songs were spare, often just four lines, divided into two parts. It's a repetitive music, built for dance. Play Part A once, then repeat, and the same for Part B. Then repeat that whole process before you move on to the next song. The last note before that transition into the new song should jump. We are entering new territory now. There is a magic in that infinitesimal pause before we're off into the next dance.

CASAD AN C-SUGHAN.                      THE TWISTING OF THE ROPE.  
Moderate.

115

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The first staff is for 'CASAD AN C-SUGHAN' and the second is for 'THE TWISTING OF THE ROPE'. Both are in 3/4 time and marked 'Moderate'. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and accidentals.

"The Twisting of the Rope" O'Neill's Music of Ireland, Mel Bay Pub..

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Get Together at a Music Workshop This Summer!

## HOW GOOD DO YOU WANT TO BE?

by Sydney Rott

A thread arises from time to time in the instrument-related e-mail lists on the internet.: an adult beginner, or an adult who has returned to an instrument after a long absence, will object to being required to practice technical studies and insist that a teacher should adapt to the desires of the student and accept that all students do not have the ambition to play at a professional level. This is always answered by shrieks of dilettante, and tirades about how the only standard should be excellence. The rebuttal to that points out that excellence is difficult to achieve in the half hour a day a busy schedule leaves some amateurs for practice, and that some people play because they love to and only want to entertain their families and perhaps perform a hymn occasionally in church.

So far I've refrained from joining in these discussions because I'm not sure which side of the argument I agree with. It is admirable to strive to do one's absolute best, but I can also understand people who want to play for fun and don't want to work at it. The problems arise when musicians with different standards attempt to play in the same group.

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# THE IN BOX

## WONDERFUL ARTICLE!

Hi Ted,

I so enjoyed the April 2001 issue! Having just returned from Santa Fe where my violin, "Jake", had its annual checkup and my bows were re-haired at Robertson's Violin Shop, the clever article by Eileen M. Benoit entitled "The Patient Speaks" was very appropriate. One year ago "Jake" had major restoration surgery, and it was a very traumatic time for "him" and for me. I am please to report this year "Jake" is in excellent shape, and singing every day. What a joy it is to play chamber music! Thanks again for providing such fine material to all of us.

Char Britten  
Denver, Colorado

## EMINENT AMATEURS

Editor:

Several famous amateur musicians come to mind beyond those mentioned on your web site ([www.musicfortheloveofit.com](http://www.musicfortheloveofit.com)). The first is Robert Burns, the Scottish poet who also composed poems and helped preserve what we now call folk music through the Scots Musical Museum. Many local public libraries have collections of Burns' poems and information about his music. Another is The Lady Carolina Nairne, a politically inclined noblewoman in 19th-century Scotland who wrote the very satirical "Laird of Cockpen" and the lovely "O Rowan Tree." Then there was Thomas Moore, Irish 19th century musician/poet. Margery Kennedy-Fraser, a soprano, set various Scottish Gaelic folk songs with Kenneth Fraser ("Songs of the Hebrides" for voice, harp and piano, many of which have been recorded by the Scottish singer, Kenneth Mckeller). And George IV of Britain, the son of George III, the Regent, was a talented amateur musician as well as art collector; he became one of Britain's more controversial rulers for his misuse of public monies. As far as I know, none of these individuals made a living by being musicians.

Carol Bodenheimer  
cebodenheimer@msn.com

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## WHERE CAN ONE MAJOR IN CHAMBER MUSIC?

Dear Ted,

On behalf of a young violinist, I would like to know: what colleges offer a choice of chamber music as a major? This is part of a larger concern of mine, which is that an intelligent amateur cannot "major" in an instrument without being considered a "soloist." I'd love a much more "liberal arts" approach to a college education in music, which stresses the human interactions that grace chamber music over the single-minded soloistic pursuit of "career." Let's return the arts to their proper place among the humanities! Can your readers help with this?

Alice Parker  
Hawley, MA

## NEW WORKSHOP LISTINGS:

### Dvorak in Prague

The Manhattan String Quartet will sponsor and coach a workshop on the Dvorak String Quartet in A-flat Major, Op. 105, in Prague, Czech Republic, February 2-10, 2002. Coaching will be in English. It is open to adult amateur violin, viola and cello players of intermediate to advanced ability and all ages. Both pre-formed groups and unaffiliated individuals will be accepted, up to approximately 28 participants. The application deadline is October 15, 2001.

The program includes six morning sessions of coaching, visits to Dvorak and Mozart Museums, a master class with Evzen Rattay (cellist and long-time member of the Talich Quartet), opera and MSQ concerts, freelance playing with members of a leading Czech amateur group.

Coaches will be Eric Lewis, violin, Calvin Wiersma, violin, John Dexter, viola, Chris Finckel, cello, Evzen Rattay, cello. Accommodations are in a four-star hotel in center city Prague. \$1,550 (\$250 additional for single room) covers eight nights lodging, breakfast and lunch daily, all conference activities, plus weekly transit pass. Contact John Dexter, 212-874-4037, 115 W. 73rd Street, #7A, New York, NY 10023, [msqenterprises@aol.com](mailto:msqenterprises@aol.com).

### Kenai Peninsula Summer Strings Festival

The Kenai Peninsula (Alaska) Summer Strings Festival, August 2-12, 2001, will include master classes, lessons and ensemble coaching with the DeVere Quartet. Contact Laura Norton, Festival Manager, 315 West Pioneer Ave., Homer, Alaska 99603, [norton@xyz.net](mailto:norton@xyz.net), 907/235-6318.

### Let's Make Music in St. Petersburg.

Peter Mayes of *Let's Make Music* has announced a week of orchestral playing for amateurs in St. Petersburg, Russia. The tour will include a week of making music with musicians from around Europe as well as local

people. Accommodations, sightseeing, theatre and concert visits will be arranged. Start date is July 29-August 4, 2002. Participants will have to arrange for their own visas from the Russian Embassy in their home country. Rehearsals will take place each morning with afternoons free for sightseeing and evenings for concerts, theatre, eating or whatever. There will a full day excursion during the week. Local musicians will be involved if possible, and an audience will be invited for the final evening. Cost will be kept as low as possible. Reservations should be made now or at least firm expressions of interest. Full information and costs will be sent to everyone interested during September 2001. Contact Peter J. Mayes, [letsmakemusic99@hotmail.com](mailto:letsmakemusic99@hotmail.com) or write sending International Reply Coupon or SAE to Let's make Music, 24b Bedford Grove, Eastbourne, BN21 2DU . United Kingdom.

#### **Madeline Island Music Camp Adult Program**

Chamber music coaching for adult amateur string players and pianists with the Cavani String Quartet, on Lake Superior, July 17-22, 2001. Contact Madeline Island Music Camp, 118 E. 26th St., Minneapolis, MN 55404, 612/871-7781, [info@music-camp.org](mailto:info@music-camp.org)

#### **New Horizons Bands and Strings Institute**

This is a program for adult players who have recently taken up or returned to their instruments, at Chautauqua, NY, September 23-26, 2001, led by Roy Ernst. The offerings include three separate groups:

- Classes and ensemble playing for beginning to intermediate level string players.
- Classes and ensemble playing for beginning level players of band instruments.
- An intermediate to advanced level band, including sectional instruction.

Program fee, including lodging and meals, is \$275. To register, contact Judy Bloomquist at the Chautauqua Institute, PO Box 28, Chautauqua, NY 14722, [jbloomquist@chautauqua-inst.com](mailto:jbloomquist@chautauqua-inst.com)

#### **Saint Martin's College Chamber Music Workshop**

Now in its second year, Saint Martin's College Chamber Music Workshop will be held at Lacey, Washington, July 16-18 and July 23-25, 2001. An opportunity to become personally acquainted with a large amount of chamber music for 40 intermediate or advanced adult (senior in high school to senior citizens) strings, woodwinds, horn, and piano participants. \$125.00 covers tuition only; housing and dining are available on the campus or in a nearby motel and restaurants. Lacey is near Olympia, Washington, and a one- to two-hour drive from Mount Rainier National Park, Mount St. Helen's National Volcanic Monument, and Seattle. Contact Mary Jo Rydholm, Director, Music Department, Saint Martin's College, 5300 Pacific Ave SE, Lacey, WA 98503-9986, [mjrydmus@yahoo.com](mailto:mjrydmus@yahoo.com).

#### **ELDERHOSTEL PERFORMANCE WORKSHOPS**

Elderhostel programs are open to persons aged 55 or older. Contact for all Elderhostel programs is Elderhostel, Inc.

11 Avenue de Lafayette

Boston, MA 02111-1746, 877/426-8056

Further information and online registration at [www.elderhostel.org](http://www.elderhostel.org). Lower prices are available for double occupancy.

#### **Sing, Sing, Sing**

*Auburn University, Auburn, AL, October 21-26, 2001.*

*Elderhostel Program 01166-1021-21, \$651 single*

A "participatory learning experience" in choral singing. No prior training required: just bring a willingness to learn and perform Broadway show tunes and choral classics.

#### **National Elderhostel Chorale**

*Hidden Valley, Carmel Valley, CA, October 14-20, 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 05494-1005-21, \$722 single*

Popular and classical genres. Two concerts.

#### **National Elderhostel Orchestra**

*Hidden Valley, Carmel Valley, CA, October 21-27 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 05494-1014-21, \$722 single*

For experienced classical players. Public concert.

#### **National Elderhostel Concert Band**

*Hidden Valley, Carmel Valley, CA, October 5-14, 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 05494-1021-21, \$722 single*

For experienced concert band players. Full public concert on Friday evening.

#### **National Elderhostel Big Band**

*Hidden Valley, Carmel Valley, CA, October 28-Nov. 3, 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 05494-1028-21, \$722 single*

For experienced saxophone, trumpet and trombone players. Public concert.

#### **National Elderhostel Recorder and Gamba Week**

*Hidden Valley, Carmel Valley, CA, November 4-10, 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 05494-1104-21, \$792 single*

Technique classes, consorts, rounds singing. Other early strings and harpsichordists may also apply.

#### **Third Annual New Horizons/Elderhostel National Concert Band**

*Albany/Troy, NY, October 21-27, 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 32883-1021-21 to 35, \$708 single*

For band instrumentalists who have started or returned to their instruments within the past few years. Learn to play basic band music under a patient teacher-director.

#### **Choral Voices: Learn and Perform Great Choral Music**

*Abingdon, VA, October 28-Nov. 3, 2001*

*Elderhostel Program 46758-1028-01, \$377*

Schubert *Mass in G*, Fauré *Requiem*. Some choral experience desirable but not required. Two daily rehearsals, short concluding performance.

# SPIKE UP THE BAND

by James B. Kimberly and Ted Rust

Recognizing the need of many older people in his community for a musical outlet, Professor Roy Ernst of the Eastman School of Music formed the first New Horizons Band in Rochester, NY in 1991, coached by professional musicians and students. The band received prominent media coverage, including NBC's Today Show, and soon there were requests for Dr. Ernst to help form similar bands in other communities. Ernst now receives grant funding from the National Association of Music Merchants to travel the country regularly and assist new, existing and potential community bands. As a result there are now 66 "New Horizon Bands" in the USA, and several in formative stages.

In Santa Barbara, California, Nick Rail, a music store owner, took the initiative and offered to sponsor a New Horizon Band in August 1995. Now called the Prime Time Band, it has played dozens of free concerts every year, providing an outlet for musical talent of mature amateur musicians. It has its own nonprofit 501(c)(3) designation, a board of directors and a newsletter, "The Bugle." The conductor is J.B. Vander Ark. The band is so big, with 87 members, that more musicians would not fit on the stage. Consequently, they formed a subsidiary band called the Silver Prime Time Band, which now has 30 members.

At the opening Fifth Annual Summer Pops Concerts on June 21 at La Colina Junior High School, the lights went out at 7:30 PM exactly as scheduled. The music began, but it was terrible! Honk. Tweet. Zoot. Scrawk. While the cacophony was nearly puncturing our eardrums, the concertmaster introduced Maestro Vander Ark. He took the podium and immediately announced that what we were hearing over the loudspeakers was not this band. It was this band playing its first rehearsal five years before! The audience roared with laughter, and the concert began in earnest.

They opened with "Strike up the Band," a George Gershwin march from 1940. Anyone not charmed by this tune might well head for the local video store to rent the movie of the same name, starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland. The La Conga line is alone worth the price of admission. Then followed "Canadian Sunset," "Bill Bailey," and medleys from "Chorus Line," "Cats," and "Mary Poppins." Afterward, the happy audience of some 300 gathered on the school terrace for free lemonade and cookies.

Persons interested in forming a New Horizons Band in their community may be interested in attending the New Horizons Concert Band Institute, January 7-12, 2002 in Santa Barbara, CA. Contact J. B. Vander Ark, 121 Bath D-2, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, 805/965-4755,

VanPTB@aol.com. For those interested in joining an existing New Horizons Band, here are some of the band names and locations:

- The Atlanta (GA) New Horizons Band
- The Calgary (Alberta, Cda) New Horizons Band
- The Hagerstown (MD) New Horizons Band
- The Indianapolis (IN) New Horizons Band
- The Las Cruces (NM) New Horizons Band, New Mexico State University Music department
- The Lawrence (KS) New Horizons Band
- The Lisle (IL) New Horizons Band, Maryann Flock, director.
- The Madison New Horizons Band, Madison, WI, Peter Ziegler, director
- The Milwaukee New Horizons Band, Milwaukee, WI, Scott Emmons, director
- The New Horizons Band of the St. Cecilia Society, Grand Rapids, MI, C. David Bass, conductor
- The New Horizons Band of Sonoma County (CA)
- The Northern Colorado New Horizons Band, Glenn Shull, conductor
- The Olympia (WA) New Horizons Band
- The Rapid City (SD) New Horizons Band
- The Santa Barbara (CA) Prime Time Band, J. B. Vander Ark, conductor, 805/965-4755
- The Senior Center Band of Charlottesville, VA
- The Tacoma (WA) New Horizons Band
- The University of Dayton (OH) New Horizons Band, Dr. Linda Hartley, director
- The Wilmington (DE) New Horizons Band, Sellers Senior Center, George Roewe, director
- The Winston-Salem (NC) New Horizons Band

For further information about the New Horizons Bands please consult the national New Horizons Band web site at [www.newhorizonsband.com](http://www.newhorizonsband.com), or contact Roy Ernst at 716/396-0299, [royernst@aol.com](mailto:royernst@aol.com).

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# YOU CAN'T HAVE TOO MUCH RHYTHM

by Ted Rust

*You've Got Rhythm: Read Music Better by Feeling the Beat* by Anna Dembska and Joan Harkness, Flying Leap Music, 1348 71st St., Brooklyn, NY 11228. 126 pages, paper, \$27.95, ISBN 1-930644-03-6; order information and rhythm tips at <http://www.fleap.com>

Like most experienced amateur musicians, I like to think I've already got it. I can read fairly complex rhythms with precision and security. When a new piece is really tough I can slow it down, piece it together, then crank it up and *voilà!* But do I know what beat we're on when my mind is preoccupied with a half-dozen details of ensemble dynamics, intonation, tone color, balance and the last mistake I made? Not always. It's hard to be too rich, or to have too much rhythm. What this book can do is free your mind from having to count meter, by teaching your *body* do it. Your mind will thank you.

"But I *do* use my body: I move with the beat and I breathe with the phrases." Not good enough: a tapping foot may handle beats, but it's baffled by meter. What Debska and Harkness offer is a physical language of meter: an articulate set of gestures — slap, clap and tap — that signal specific parts of any meter. (As they acknowledge, conventional conducting gestures can serve the same purpose.) They then provide as exercises their beautiful rhythmic text settings of classic English and American prose, which I consider reason enough to buy the book even if you do have perfect rhythm. Who since Cole Porter has come close to this:

## Stage-Fright

from *The New Home Speaker* (1911)

Frances Putnam Pogle

Joan Harkness

[ 8 ] Stage - fright is mere-ly a - no-ther form of self - con-scious - ness -

[ 2 ] un - cer-tain-ty as to ap - pear-ance and cor-rect-ness

[ 2 ] of poise. There-fore it is ve - ry im - por-tant that you should know ex -

[ 7 ] act - ly how to poise your-self so that when you get

[ 7 ] up to re-cite, you will not be bo-thered by a ques-tion such as,

[ 7 ] "Am I stand - ing right?" or "Is my po - si-tion grace -

[ 7 ] ful?" but you will know that it is all right.

In this time of discovery, jigs turned out to be my favorite of all Celtic music. Played in 6/8 time, these songs can be trance-inducing or studies of courage and resolution. I sway when I play jigs. My arms seem to float. My spine straightens as I approach these tunes that haunt me. Will this jig make me feel dreamy or determined? Jigs make me understand the concept of a spirit soaring.

*Fair Jenny's Jig*

by Peter Barnes

“Fair Jenny’s Jig” *The Portland Collection*

On the other hand, reels challenge me. Set in 4/4 time, these songs demand a perkiness that I often feel is beyond me. When I play reels, I imagine I should be wearing a starched white shirt and a navy blue blazer with gold buttons, and perfectly pressed trousers. The answer is clear when playing a reel. Self-doubt is nowhere in this equation.

*The Blind Man's Reel*

“The Blind Man’s Reel” *The Portland Collection*

With waltzes, I get to use the pedal. The tempo slows down for this music made for sweethearts. To play a waltz is to believe in the power of love and the goodness of people. Inside a waltz, the world shimmers.

When it came time for my lesson, I sat down at my teacher’s piano and I played these songs from my heart. My teacher welcomed me back. “You’re playing with energy,” she said. “I love this music,” I replied. We set to work.

**FAR AWAY**

1985

Pete Jung

“Far Away” *The Waltz Book*

Celtic music is physical music. It demands hand strength and flexibility. For notes that look so simple on the page, it’s challenging stuff, often awkward to play on piano. This is a music created for fiddlers. In fact, pianists who play Celtic music often only play accompaniment, banging out the chords while the fiddlers romp through the melody. These songs move at a clip. Set the metronome to 115, say a prayer, and let your fingers fly. The trick is, my teacher told me, not to think. And the way to get there, she said, is through practice. Have these tunes under your fingers, know them deep inside your soul, and then when it comes time to play, abandon your mind. To play Celtic music is a spiritual discipline.

There are times when I think to play this music on piano is a fool’s dream. Once at a lesson, my teacher warned me not to play triplets with my thumb. She believed she tore her tendon that way, and a thumb’s tendon will never heal. Play it 5-4-3, she advised, and I worked at that fingering starting with the pinky. It does not come naturally, and I still can’t play that reel up to anywhere near the speed it demands. “You can always cut out some notes,” my teacher said, and I agreed that was an option, although we both knew it would be the last resort. With these old tunes, we both felt that the melody was sacred.

This fall, I began playing in a string band. There are a lot of fiddlers, some mandolin players, a guitarist, and me, often holding down the rhythm, but sneaking in the melody whenever I can. This winter I plan to join a salon of musicians who come together to share their work. My immediate goals include writing songs for my niece and nephew: a waltz for Sarah, a jig for Joe.

Like all things, this music is not for everyone. My teacher told me that after the last student recital, several

people had complained about the preponderance of Celtic songs in the program. "They found it boring," she said, and we sat silent for a moment, pondering that notion. "I guess you need to be born into it," I finally said, and my teacher nodded. "It's in the blood," she told me, tapping a vein on her wrist.

— — —

These are my Celtic music songbooks:

### **Wendy Ellen's Celtic Music Library**

*The Fiddler's Fake Book* by David Brody, Oak Publications, 1983, \$24.95

*Interview with a Vamper: Piano Accompaniment Techniques for Traditional Dance Music* by Peter Barnes, Canis Publishing, 1993, 5 Sandy Pond Road, Lincoln, MA 01773-2006

*O'Neill's Music of Ireland: Eighteen Hundred and Fifty Melodies*, published by Mel Bay Publications, Inc., ISBN 0-7866-2498-1, \$24.95

*The Portland Collection: Contra Dance Music of the Pacific Northwest* by Susan Songer with Clyde Curley, ISBN 0-9657476-0-3

*The Waltz Book*, collected and edited by Bill Matthiesen, ISBN 0-96337-87-0-8, \$12.00

*Pianist Wendy Ellen Ledger is a frequent contributor to Music for the Love of It, The San Francisco Chronicle and other journals. She lives in Alameda, California.*

### **HOW GOOD? continued from page 1**

When I started to play the oboe at age 48—having all but ceased to play my first instrument, the flute, for a decade or so—my goals were very modest. I planned to retire from teaching 10 years from then and wanted to be able to enjoy playing in some ensemble after my retirement. I didn't have to wait ten years. I very shortly found myself playing in the Community Orchestra. Two years later the principal oboist left for her freshman year at Harvard, and I inherited her chair. I was frequently the only oboe player in those early years, with someone or other talked into playing the second oboe parts for the concerts. The orchestra was great fun and became very important to me. It wasn't a very good orchestra, but everyone had a good time.

Then the orchestra changed conductors and became a much more serious matter. The people who were there just for fun and rarely practiced between rehearsals were forced out. Some of those who had to leave were

bitter, and I wondered if the changes were for the best. Is a community orchestra for the benefit of the musicians or the audience? Should it serve a social function and nurture its members, or should it attempt to attract the best possible players and replace people who don't meet certain standards, regardless of how long they've been orchestra members and how unhappy they'll be without it? I know how much some of the musicians forced out loved playing—but I also know that they were not committed to improving and were not studying or practicing their instruments. Several of them, doctors and lawyers, led busy professional lives and played to relax. They were happy playing at the level they'd achieved. Was it good or bad that the orchestra had moved beyond them?

Eventually, as the orchestra improved even more and affiliated itself with the local university, I had to make a decision. Did I want to give up my place or attempt to improve my playing to keep up with the orchestra's new level? I chose the latter course, and find myself, at the age of 61, studying at the university with a professor who holds me to the same high standards that he does his university students. I enjoy the lessons and I make the time to practice—often more than two hours a day. I like the improved community orchestra, too. But there have been trade-offs. In the old group I was delighted if we made it all the way through a piece with no major disasters. Now, I feel unhappy if we've played less than our best, and depressed if I've made any kind of a mistake myself. I worry much more about the performances, and consequently enjoy them less. Problems with pitch or ensemble that I wouldn't have noticed before bother me now. The present orchestra is more fulfilling, and certainly better for the audience, but the early orchestra was more fun. It made me happy more often. Although I doubt that I could enjoy playing in a group like it again, it certainly held an important place in my life at the time—and if the orchestra had not improved I might have been content to continue playing at that level.

In my day job as a woodwind repair technician, I meet many adults who love making music and derive great pleasure from it: they range in ability from professionals to people who can just barely play a simple tune. One of the wonderful things about music making is that it can be experienced on so many different levels. It can bring challenge, pleasure, fulfillment or just amusement. It can be explored in great depth or enjoyed superficially. We have to decide how much we want to demand of ourselves and, if we're lucky, find musicians to play with who adhere to the same standards.

*Oboist Sydney Rott lives in Fresno, CA and has contributed many articles to Music for the Love of It.*

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JUNE 2001

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