

Youthful Excellence

New Associate Principal Flute for the Sydney Symphony Emma Sholl talks to **David Vivian Russell**

Born and bred in Artarmon, the ebullient and youthful Emma Sholl at 22 is now Associate Principal flute of the Sydney Symphony. She spoke to me recently about her rise, the importance of hard work and the role Jacques Zoon played in her development and success.

DVR: How is it being a Sydney Symphony person now? ES: It's great. I've been there four years now and it's just flown – I can't believe it's four years. It's a fabulous job. Sometimes I think it's just amazing that I've got this job. I was Second [flute] at 19 on contract and got the 'real' job a year later. Then I went away to study and never imagined the day I would get a phone call from Janet. [Janet Webb, Sydney Symphony Principal Flute].

How did you feel? Oh, completely shocked.

Nevertheless, what did you think? Did you think 'Oh my God - all this responsibility' or 'I don't want to get tied down'? I grabbed that opportunity as I knew it was quite rare to be asked to do that at my age.

Someone must have seen something there. What is it? I think it's the ability to adapt and be quick to pick things up. I was like a sponge when I started but now it seems harder and harder to get a job young. All the flute players in the symphony were young when they started but opportunities don't come around regularly. Four flute jobs in the Sydney Symphony and four in the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra: so eight flute jobs in Sydney. It is incredibly difficult for instrumentalists to live in Sydney [This is a point Edo de Waart made in an interview in October 2003 *Fine Music*. ED.] But I'm living with my parents still so I'm doing okay.

So, are you having a reality check given that you're one of the leading flute players in Sydney? It's a bit weird sometimes. I mean you work so hard for so long and in the end it comes down to



being in the right place at the right time. Then I was away studying, improving and came back with extra knowledge and yet it was still all about timing.

What did you learn in your overseas study? A lot there about sound production he has a method of producing sound that incorporates the entire cavity of the mouth. [Jacques Zoon] is a huge man with incredible breath control. Which I don't have because I'm small so he teaches this way of projecting sound in the concert hall. He teaches it to all but tailors it to each.

Is that what you recognised you needed to develop? I wasn't sure. Janet went to him in Boston and I've never heard anyone say they don't like his playing. I'll hear him and think, 'How does he do that? That's really incredible.' His is a fluid musical approach, huge tone, amazing facility and he plays all sorts of music that isn't written for the flute like Richard Strauss's *Violin Sonata*. He does that to challenge himself.

How would you describe your own playing? It feels natural, though I haven't analysed my playing a lot; it's always come quite easily. It feels like my playing is not out of a textbook. I may have soaked up a lot subconsciously. I think if you really love doing something, you just do it.

Jacques Zoon said he'd never met someone so prepared and determined to work hard as you. Really!? You'd never think that someone else would notice that.

Are you a hard worker? Yes, I would say I am. I've always been quite driven. I've always had goals in mind. A friend of my father worked at Sydney Symphony and at that time they could not fill the assistant principal position. I remember saying, 'I wish they'd keep it open that little bit longer as I'd really like that job.'

And now? The joy of playing in an orchestra is fantastic when you have that core of sound between the wind instruments – it's the blending that I really enjoy. Playing with strings and trying to match their *timbre*. The orchestra is challenging too – there's nothing quite like the way your heart races before a solo though I have good control of my nerves. I'm quite fit and I find that helps. Nerves are strange as they hit you at different times. The best way to deal with them is to stay fit, eat bananas (natural beta blockers) and think of what my dad always says: 'Just remember everyone in the audience wants to hear you play your best.'

