

Janet Phillips



I love playing the oboe! First of all, we are the first ones to get to play because we tune the orchestra. And, we have the most beautiful exotic sound in the orchestra. Third, it's a very challenging instrument. Those little double reeds are not like that trumpet or trombone mouthpiece that you can just put in the instrument and bite your lip, or even those clarinet reeds that you buy at the store, or the flute that you just pick up and blow across the mouthpiece. The oboe reeds

require a great deal of care. As many hours goes into whittling on these reeds as goes into practicing. It is a complex instrument; but again, I think it is one of the most beautifully exotic sounds I've ever heard.

My dad had a lot to do with me picking the oboe. When I was in fifth grade, I am pretty sure I was headed towards a flute or a clarinet, even the trumpet. When my dad heard the oboe, he goes "Oh! That's a really a neat sounding instrument." Then there are the influential sales people at the fifth grade band tryouts saying things like "Only special people play oboes." And then they also mentioned that there are only one or two people who usually choose to play the oboe.

My Dad, knowing my type A personality and competitive nature, said "Wouldn't you like to be just one or two in a section rather than 20 clarinets or 20 flutes?" So, I decided I would like to be in a section of only one or two. Dad was right.

I am compelled to work hard, practice, and come back to play more - for me, it's the idea of being part of a larger entity - the orchestra. We haven't had an orchestra in Muscatine for so long. I think it's something that a town the size of Muscatine needs to have. I think it's an amazing opportunity for the players and students, and it really is the example of something I say over and over, "music is a lifelong activity." Part of creating music is sharing. When you are a pianist you can play for your own enjoyment. When you are any kind of instrumentalist you can play for your enjoyment. But when you are

an instrument that is part of a band or an orchestra, it's just so much more complete when you put it with that ensemble. When you blend with all of those other instruments, that is the ultimate experience. For the musicians of Muscatine to have this opportunity is very important to me.

I will never forget, when after a concert in the second year, after we reorganized the orchestra, that Earl Franz came up to me and said, "Jan, I never thought I would have the opportunity to be playing music like this again." I think that says it all.

Carmina Burana is a concert where I was completely transported - I just thought that was an amazing concert. I had the privilege of choosing the soloists and preparing the MCC concert choir and the Muscatine Civic Chorale. I played in the orchestra for the concert. That choir of sixty voices behind us: the Civic Chorale, the MCC Choir, and the Muscatine children's choir was wonderful. (Whenever children sing, no matter what they are singing, that pure, innocent tone gets me (emotional) every time.) There were several what I would call "goose bump" moments in which I probably didn't play because I was so transported by the sound. The combination of the orchestra and the choirs, and the intensity of the composition just blew me away.

