

## **From Violetta to Dolly Parton – “own the stage”!**

*NZSO principal flautist, Bridget Douglas, took a woodwind masterclass at Conference 2019. With her upbeat and relaxed approach, she offered sage advice for wind players and indeed all musicians. Cathy Martin shares some of the highlights.*

### **Interpretation**

Research the piece, eg what does the title mean? What inspired the composer? Does it express a physical movement or tell a story? In working on a Prokofiev March, Bridget asked the student to walk back and forth while the pianist played the beat, to get a feel for martial discipline. With an arrangement of Violetta's aria from Verdi's *La Traviata*, she encouraged the student to “own the stage” like an opera singer. Bridget likes students to sing the melody so that they are more aware of the vocal line.

### **Articulation**

Follow the composer's instructions carefully, as articulation broadens the colour palette. Tonguing can get in the way of the sound: “The air flow needs to be consistent and what often happens is that it gets cut up by the tonguing.” Think of the tongue being propelled by the air.

### **Breath control**

Nervousness is simply excitement about performing - who knew?! Bridget gave us a breathing exercise, drawing the air in slowly, feeling it as cool on the lips, then the teeth, then the tongue, then the throat. She suggested we visualise the tone: “Think about the sound being spun, it's like a spool of thread... you can colour, thicken it or make it smaller... the bonus is when we breath well we're in tune..... Wind players can learn so much from singers in terms of breathing, that sense of openness and extension across the chest.”

### **Posture**

Wind players often make the mistake of bending into their instrument rather than bringing it to themselves, keeping their posture lifted like a singer. The chest needs to be open and full: “think Dolly Parton physique”!!! Musicians that play standing should distribute their weight evenly without locking their knees. Rather than resting on the heel of the foot the weight should be forward on the balls of the feet.

*Catherine Martin (Cathy) teaches piano and has been national representative for Trinity College London for nearly 20 years. She holds Grade 8 flute and has collaborated with several flautists including Bridget Douglas. Cathy is an active member of IRMTNZ and Communications Coordinator for the Institute.*