

ARTIST IN THE LIGHT
AMY PORTER



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On an early Autumn evening after work I sat down nervously, thinking in a few moments I will be connected with a musician whom I have admired for many years. 'I hope I created the meeting link correctly', I thought to myself. 'What if the wifi cuts off' 'Have I calculated the time difference correctly between Helsinki and Michigan?' A moment later Amy joined the meeting and the minutes flew by as we started chatting.

One of my favourites moments when asking artists about themselves is hearing how it all started for them as young musicians. 'I sang before I spoke' Amy said. With musical parents Amy played piano and sang. When she was in the fourth grade her parents asked if she would like to pick up another instrument. At this time she had seen someone playing the flute in school and this impacted her greatly. 'All my neurones were fired, and I knew that was it' With a natural talent Amy successfully skipped multiple classes in her first 3 days of starting band. This set a strategy for her in that moment. 'I am not afraid of the instrument...it's not so hard. This is a journey to be on'. The following year in 5th grade she found her 12 year old self routinely playing through her flute fingerings on a pencil under the desk.


On the board was a difficult maths equation, and she thought 'this is a hard equation, but playing the flute is easier' Already at this time her parents were bringing her to Philadelphia every Saturday to the Settlement Music School. Her musical foundations were getting stronger and this ultimately led her to her studies in Juilliard, New York. At Juilliard, she studied under prominent flutists Jeanne Baxtresser (then principal flute of the New York Philharmonic) and Samuel Baron. She also studied with Alain Marion Peter-Lukas Graf in Europe.



In the early 1990s, Amy served as Associate Principal Flute of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Yoel Levi. This role marked her as one of the few young female flutists at the time to hold a top-tier professional orchestral position.

As we talked about this time in Amy's life one realises how important those really early years are. They condition you for the career ahead. Whether it's working out difficult music theory, to playing in front of difficult conductors and asked to play solos, all of these moments at a young age build us up for the road ahead, and we must draw on these early times to give us the self confidence knowing we have prepared for all that is ahead. When talking on one's future Amy suggests to ask questions. Where do I fit in? Where do I fit in, in State level, in my country, internationally? The world will bring positivity when you are curious. In Amy's case after her professional studies she questioned what else is there for her, and then came the momentous occasion of the Kobe competition in Japan.

In 1993, Amy was a top prizewinner at the 3rd Kobe International Flute Competition. She received Second Prize, a major achievement on the world stage. She was also awarded a Special Jury Prize for exceptional artistry. The competition was far from easy with harsh critique from some of the jury. 'The girl who they all thought was from Canada' who 'soaks her appoggiaturas in wine'. Amy's curiosity took her to the top, 'I have been winning awards all my life, can I still do this?'. This was her Olympics and she drew everything out from age 15 until that moment and gave everything on stage. The fertilisation of the soil since a young age brought her to this moment. She emphasised that the importance of the small things consistently over the years will eventually serve you in the long run. I think for young players there is such importance in these words, although it sounds simple. Stay true to your music and musicianship, whether it's a concert or competition, they want to hear music, play music.

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a dark blue suit and black high heels, is playing a gold flute. She is leaning against a white brick wall, with her left leg raised and bent. The background is a white brick wall, and the floor is light-colored wood.

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Alongside an immense playing career Amy is Professor of Flute and the Chair of the Department of Winds & Percussion at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance. She has been on the faculty there for over two decades; in 2023 she celebrated 25 years of teaching at U-Michigan. In addition to her regular studio teaching, she leads intensive flute residencies at colleges and universities. Amy emphasises holistic musicianship, combining technical excellence, musical expression, physical awareness, and wellness. She founded the workshop / curriculum “Anatomy of Sound” (started around 2003) which incorporates mindfulness, breathing, movement, and awareness into flute playing. For more inspiration visit www.aosworkshop.com Her new book The Anatomy of Sound: An Invitation to Discover the Inner Musician was published this year On May 1st, A MUST READ! She also started resources and platforms for students beyond just one-on-one lessons, such as her Blue Flute Studio (exercises, audition materials, performance technique support) and PorterFlute Pod (podcast). More recently, she launched AOS-Wellness.com to extend her ideas about wellness, breathing, meditation, movement, etc., making them more accessible. She co-developed a teaching aid / innovation called “My Breathing Buddy”, a lung / ribcage / diaphragm simulator, via her company VoiceBox 3-D, to help students understand the physical mechanics of breathing and sound production.

Talking with Amy was like breathing fresh air. Intelligent and down to earth, with so much common sense. She has always done what she knows and stayed curious along the way. She advises ‘start early in knowing your gifts. If you can give, it takes you away from being selfish. Keep asking questions. Where is the universe putting you in this moment? Life won’t reveal all its secrets at once, but with curiosity, the world unfolds in layers of wonder and discovery.’