

Flute Examiner Interview Transcript with Dr. Katherine Emeneth  
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**Laura Zabanal (LZ):** Well, welcome, everyone, to the Flute Examiner. I'm Laura Zabanal, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Dr. Katherine Emeneth, who is one of my mentors and really dear friends. We're just going to talk a little bit about her experience as a musician, and her career path and journey because it's super interesting and not, I think, what we typically think of when we think of someone who has gotten all the degrees, and has been a professional flutist in many capacities, so, Katherine, welcome! It's so great to have you and talk with you today.

**Katherine Emeneth (KE):** Thanks, Laura, and thanks to the Flute Examiner. It's a pleasure to be here, and an honor to be here to talk about my very wild journey in this career.

**LZ:** Awesome. Well, can you just tell us about yourself a little bit? Anything you'd like to share? I know you wear many hats.

**KE:** Yeah.

**LZ:** I'd love to hear [it], in your own words.

**KE:** Yeah, sure. So, I live in Sugar Hill, Georgia, which is a cute little name for our city, and there's a big river that runs through this area called the Chattahoochee River, which I'm sure if you're from the southeast, you're familiar with that. They used to make, back in, like, the late 1800s/early 1900s, they used to make moonshine on the river through prohibition and everything, and there's lots of railways and stuff in this area, and so one of the trains was transporting a big thing of sugar, and then it had a wreck, and so people started referring to this area as the place where the "Sugar Hill" was, you know? And then that's kind of how it got its name.

**LZ:** Oh, that's cool. I didn't know that, that's awesome.

**KE:** But anyway, since we're history nerds, you know...

**LZ:** Yeah!

**KE:** ...throw in that little bit of trivia. But yes, I live here with my husband, who is German, and he's an aerospace engineer, software engineer, my dog, Barney, who's 10 years old, and an Old English Sheepdog, and our daughter, Eloise, who is almost 17 months old and just started walking a couple weeks ago. So, yeah, this is where we are. I teach a private studio of middle and high school students. I go out into middle and high schools almost every single week to teach sectionals and support band programs. I run a summer flute music program for middle and high school students in our area. And I have an online business called KE Creative, which I started 10 years ago. I offer different types of real-

world education courses, and experiences to help musicians learn how to bridge what they learned in music school with actual, real-world skills. So, I'm very happy, and I do a lot of different things, and it's... all of them are super wonderful and fun, and I'm grateful to be able to do so many different things on a daily basis.

**LZ:** That's awesome, thank you. Yeah, I can't believe it's been 10 years!

**KE:** I know, it was crazy.

**LZ:** That's incredible. I was one of those many, many years ago, I don't even remember what year exactly, but...

**KE:** Yes.

**LZ:** ...in the throes, probably, of COVID, I think. I took the "Music Teacher's Playbook" course and benefited greatly from it, and, of course, [I] had the pleasure of working with you later.

**KE:** Yes, you were very, very important part of the team for a long time!

**LZ:** Yeah, that's what's crazy! 10 years, though. That's awesome.

**KE:** I know, this will have been a long time.

**LZ:** So can you tell us a little more about either each one of the facets of your portfolio career, or some highs and lows, or what does that look like, even day-to-day? What is your... what does your [day-to-day] job look like when you're balancing all those different things?

**KE:** Yeah, for sure. So, like most musicians, I didn't start off with this grand idea that I was going to be a portfolio career musician. No, no, no. When I was in school, you know, in college, I wanted to be a performer, because that's what all the cool kids did, and luckily, my parents made me get a degree in music education. And at first, I was like, but I don't like kids, I don't want to get a music ed degree. That's what the non-serious players do, but I'm so glad that they did, because through that, I discovered a love of teaching and educating and bringing people together.

So, when I was in college, I was already building a portfolio career before I even knew it, so I made sure that since we know that music is very difficult to get work in that I had a lot of experience doing administration, as well as teaching, as well as performing. And so, I wore many hats in college, even, and I would take almost every single opportunity that I could, just so that I could deepen my skill set and be more marketable later.

When I was student teaching [during] my last semester of undergrad, and I was applying for grad school and stuff—luckily—I did not get accepted anywhere my first year, which was a big blow at that time, made me feel like I was awful at everything, and that I shouldn't do music, and I just wasted all this time and money. But anyway, it was actually a blessing, because I was able to get a job teaching general music at an elementary school. And that's where I actually learned that I like kids, and that I like teaching kids, and I like music. And I also met my now-husband that summer, too. So, I think that's also another reminder, like, even if things don't work out how you want them to work out, then there's always going to be something that shows you why, or that there's always a reason.

So, I got my foot into public school teaching and learned all about that, and learned what it was like to be a public school music teacher during that time, but I was really itching to go back to school. I'm a big nerd—I love learning; I love libraries; I love researching; I love writing. So, grad school it was. And during grad school, I had this background with teaching all of these different subjects and being in public school. Then, of course, anytime that there was something that was a little bit off the beaten path that they needed somebody to do or to teach, people would always ask me to do it. When I lived in Seattle and was at the University of Washington, I tutored the athletes in their non-major music classes, and I got to learn all the curriculum for history of rock and roll, and history of American ballad, which I loved, because it was so interesting for me to learn about those things through teaching them.

And I just kept on collecting tons of experiences. And, like many of us, I applied for lots of jobs to be a professor—a flute professor—and I got to the final three seven times. I went in for on-campus interviews and stuff, and performances, and I was a nervous wreck, and I kept trying and trying and trying and trying. And nothing happened with that, with landing a job. And in hindsight, yet again, I'm really glad that it didn't, because it really showed me how much I could do on my own and how much I could do for the world on my own and not necessarily through having a big title or through a big institution.

So, I decided that I was going to do everything I was going to do anyway through higher education, but I was going to do it on my own terms. And so that's why I built my private studio teaching kids, and they are awesome. I mean, I have 13 students right now; they're playing mostly college-level repertoire. They're excellent humans, they're leaders in their band programs, and I keep in touch with them for many years after they graduate my studio, which is super cool, because we are a family.

So, I am still teaching. I perform still, I play gigs here and there, and I'm always excited to sit right in the middle of the orchestra again. I speak at different places to give entrepreneurial advice to different people as well as perspective about what it's like to have a portfolio music career. And then I have my online business, which I work on a little bit every day. It is definitely a lot of things, and I'm really glad that [it] turned out this way, because, yes, my schedule is pretty different every single day, depending on what's going on. No two days are the same.

Just as a general framework or idea of what the schedule looks like: you know, in the morning, I'm Mom most of the time, because my husband works for a European-based company, so his morning hours are very important because of the time difference. So, in the mornings, I'm mom, and so we do all the stuff around the house, we do the laundry, we'll go on a walk, we'll take care of the dog, you know, we'll work on different things that we're working on for physical therapy, or we'll read books, or whatever. I'm very conscious about not working and not having my laptop out around our daughter, because I don't want her to, you know, see me doing that all the time, thinking that that computer is more important than her. So, we stay really busy and go grocery shopping, or whatever. And then as soon as she goes down for her nap, then that's my time to switch gears, and I put on non-mom clothes, which, if you're a mom, you know what those are, right?

**LZ:** Absolutely!

**KE:** Right? Your mom clothes are full of stains, and snot, and all sorts of unpleasant things.

**LZ:** Oh, well, the sleeve is the snot wiper, I mean, that's the fill-in, for sure.

**KE:** ...the sleeve is [for] the snot and the drool, yeah.

**LZ:** Yeah, all the time.

**KE:** Yeah, yeah, always. So, I change into my other clothes, and then I might eat lunch, and then I start working. I usually will do email and be looking at the calendar for the rest of the week, and prepping stuff for afternoon lessons...working on my social media posts, thinking about our content strategy, as well as, like, replying to clients with all of their stuff that they're working on for their studios, and feedback and advice that they need...while also looking a couple months into the future. And then as soon as 3 or 4 o'clock rolls around, that's when I put on my teacher hat, and we teach the lessons in the afternoon, and I teach 3-4 hours, almost every afternoon of the week, and so that is nice and fulfilling and wonderful to get to work with kids and hear all their "tea" and hear about their drama in their life and everything, as well as create some awesome music together. And then, by the time I finish around 7[pm], I go upstairs, my husband has cooked dinner, and the baby has been fed. I do nighttime/bedtime, and then we eat dinner, and then usually I get about another hour/hour-and-a-half of work done before it's time for lights out. So, that is a typical day.

**LZ:** Yeah.

**KE:** And there's, like, maybe two days a week that sometimes in the morning, I will go to a school, or I'll have another important meeting, or something I have to attend to. And we're so fortunate because my mom lives about 25 minutes away, so even though she's getting

older, she's still awesome and just an amazing superhero of a mom and grandma, and so she'll take over taking care of the baby so I can have the mornings to do a little extra work.

**LZ:** That's awesome. Wow, and I'm sure you've seen, kind of, that your typical day-to-day has evolved over time, especially with having a young child. [I'm] so glad you brought [that] up, you know, because Eloise is such an important part of your life, and, you know, often we separate ourselves from career, and we're like, our identity is like, I'm this person when I go to work, and I'm this person when I'm at home, and I mean, the fluidity with which we actually live and need to represent ourselves when we go out in the world and talk with other people, and work with other people, it's like, yeah, I am a mom, and that, I know for me, too, that's, like, a really big part of being who I am as a whole person and not just this facet of myself that I tuck away for certain times.

**KE:** Yeah, yeah, for sure.

**LZ:** That's really awesome. Yeah, thanks for sharing that.

**KE:** Yeah, and I think, you know, it's [hard] for folks who have been so dedicated to music for so many years, when you do become a parent, it is an identity shift, because you're so used to throwing everything you've got into working every single day towards your craft and your career. [With kids] all of a sudden, you can't do that anymore, and that's actually a good thing, honestly. It makes you reassess your life. It makes you think about how you can work with both parts of yourself in order to make yourself more complete, and, you know, a better person, and more authentic. And it was a struggle [for me]. I'm sure it was a struggle for you, too. I feel like most of us have that type of thing, of like, who am I? Am I a mom, or am I a professional musician? How could I be both? But then you figure it out, and you're able to show up how you want to show up most of the time for both facets of your life.

**LZ:** Yeah, awesome. Thank you. Thanks for sharing that.

**KE:** Yeah.

**LZ:** So, what do you find in all of the many things that you do day-to-day, or even long-term over the years? What has been some really meaningful work to you? What does it mean to have meaningful work in your portfolio career?

**KE:** Yeah, yeah, and I, you know, I think that that's the main reason why I do what I do, is because it is meaningful, you know? And, it does create impact, and it does create change. And sometimes when my husband's like, well, you know, why don't you look into getting/doing this type of job, or this type of work, like, in corporate America, and I'm like, no. I want to have my hands in helping create change at the local level.

So, for me, for meaningfulness in my private studio a lot of it comes from watching kids evolve and being one of the main people that is in their life for many years, and seeing how

they change, and supporting them through everything. Whether it's getting braces, or getting their driver's license, applying to college, going through their first breakup, going on their first date, you know, just being a person that they have that is part of their village, who can be there to support them and cheer them on. So that's super meaningful, and it's hard when you're in the trenches to, you know, remember that, but when you get the emails or the texts from them years later, and they want to meet up for lunch and tell you all about their news, and then they will share how meaningful you were in their life. That's when it's like, oh yeah, this is why I do this. So, that's obviously great—that relationship and supporting someone and seeing them go through life as well as, obviously, their musicianship development. And taking them from learning all the "BAG songs" all the way up through the Nielsen Concerto is super fun, too.

Then for our online business, as you know, when we work with clients and we see their transformation of, you know, not quite sure how to be a private studio teacher and run their own business, all the way through, oh wow, I have a full studio and a waiting list, and I never thought I could do this in a year, and I'm doing it. That's always so great to know that you helped give someone the confidence that they needed in order to achieve their goals, which is amazing. So, that... that's very meaningful, too.

And then for everything else that we do, in terms of going and speaking at different colleges and universities, or even for teachers' professional development, just offering people new ways of looking at things. It could be a game changer. So, I did a marketing seminar for professional development for a teacher workday recently in Colorado—it was over Zoom, of course—and we talked about marketing and band recruitment and retention. I shared with them lots of different marketing things that we talk about and different ways to talk to parents and students about what all is involved. The next week, I got an email from one of the teachers saying that she was able to recruit this person who had been on the fence for a long time by using some of the strategies that I shared, and so that's also very meaningful to know that you're filling in some blanks for some people to get them to their next level that they didn't know existed.

**LZ:** That's really cool. I'm curious: you've had many, many years of being a professional at all of these things, and I wonder how it felt at the beginning, or are there things even now that [are] barriers or hurdles that you've had to go through to maintain your calm and your resolve, because you know you have this meaning and this purpose behind what you do?

**KE:** Yeah.

**LZ:** How have you managed challenges that you've faced in the course of developing your career?

**KE:** Yeah, I mean, when I started this thing, I was so terrified, you know? When I started a studio, same—like most people do, will anybody even want to pay me to learn from me, you know? And then, as we go, the more confident we get, because we start getting that

validation and that feedback that, yeah, you do know what you're doing, and yeah, you are making a difference, and yeah, sometimes you're going to screw up, but you figure it out. You use that information to figure it out, and I keep moving forward. So, from starting the teaching studio, to starting the online business, that was super scary. No one was teaching online in the music realm. When I started this 10 years ago, I was one of the very first. And so I remember posting that very first [social media] post, and just being, like, sweating, and almost like, you know, passing out from fear about what is everybody going to think about this? Do they think I'm a failure, that I couldn't get a job in higher education? And then, all of a sudden, you know, I'm offering this thing, does it sound too gimmicky? You know, so lots of questioning and everything. But then when I saw how many people were actually interested and felt like they needed to have this type of education, then that gave me the confidence to keep going.

And as I've shared before to you and to lots of other people, oftentimes, the way you have to think about it is if you believe in something so strongly, that you don't care what anybody else says about it. You're not going to change the way you think about it, then that's another really good way to build your confidence for either posting on social media or for launching something new or trying something new. If you feel deeply that it's going to help others, and that it's meaningful work to you, then it doesn't matter if there's going to be naysayers, because if you believe it in that strongly and are that unshakable in it, then that's what you have to lean into.

So, yeah, of course, even these days, you know, I always question everything. That's the thing with being an entrepreneur—there is no way to know if what you're doing is going to continue to work and to know how you [will] have to shift it to make it continue to work to evolve for others. For people with, like, Type A high anxiety (which is me) that is the worst career path possible. Like, how did I end up here? I have to be able to predict the future at all times, and knowing what's going to happen, and all of that. But with entrepreneurship, you don't really have that. All you can do is you can look around, you can see how you can help, and you lean into that, and you try, and then you try again, and then you try again, and you try a different way. You just know that, you know, it might work, but it might not work, but even if it helps one person, then it's worth it. And so that's how you have to keep on going. So yes, even today, when I try different things, or post different things, of course, I'm always nervous if it's going to flop, if it's going to fail [or] if it's going to succeed, if it's going to show me a new path. There [are] so many questions all the time, but you just have to keep going and know that you're going to come out okay on the other side. Even if it doesn't work, it's still going to be fine. [The experience is] going to give you the information you need to try something different or to try it again.

**LZ:** Yeah, that's great advice and it reminds me of what you were talking about earlier, where, you know, you got out of undergrad, and then you taught for a year, and that was, like, not what you were expecting to do immediately, and just to know that that ended up being exactly the right thing, the right place/right time for you.

**KE:** Yeah.

**LZ:** ...because it taught you something different, and led you to meet your husband, and things like that.

**KE:** Yes.

**LZ:** That's pretty cool. I'm sure many of us, whether you're thinking entrepreneurially or not, I mean, there's always kind of trial and error and that uncertainty of not knowing whether things are going to work or not. But that's amazing to have the resolve to continue on regardless of mistakes or hurdles and things like that.

**KE:** Yeah, yeah.

**LZ:** Thanks for sharing that. Is there something you're working on right now that's really exciting to you, or something you're looking forward to in this next year, in 2026?

**KE:** Yeah, yeah, so it's really cool right now because one of our clients actually lives in Saudi Arabia. She's from Houston originally, but she lives in Saudi Arabia, and so we're helping her to build up this children's music program that she's going to offer at different daycares and different schools for very young children. And that's something that has not ever happened in Saudi Arabia before, but there's a new prince and new royalty and they've said that they really want to lean into arts and cultural things. So, we're helping her with that right now. So that's super fun, you know, to know that you're having a hand in helping create a new culture in a completely different culture. So that's been really fun and fascinating for us to not only help, but for us to actually also learn, too, from what is happening in music education around the world. That's been fantastic.

Something else that's super great is we've created a new podcast that just finished its first year. It's hosted by myself, but mainly by Nathalie Simper, who is part of our team. It's called "The Limitless Musician." That's been on the back burner for many years, about having a podcast, and so that has been Natalie's main project, and it's been really cool, yet again, to, you know, learn something new, learn how to do something new, and to learn how to evolve it in order to reach other people. So that's been fantastic.

We have a couple of other things that are coming up that we're hoping to do this year for KE Creative. Some of them are some more digital products that are helpful tools for musicians to help with different things in their life, like budgeting, as well as curriculum ideas and other things like that. So, we're working on that, and those will be coming out in the next few months.

And we're about to be in another enrollment period for the Music Teachers Playbook for our online program, and we always change it every year. So, we add things to it, and we change how we do things based upon what our clients want and need. We're mapping that out right

now, getting ready to do another big enrollment push for people who want to learn how to build sustainable private studios that promote authenticity, community-building, and relationships, and really making an impact in people's lives through music—like most of our music teachers did, right? So, we're excited about that as well.

Plus, FLING!—the Flute Intensive of North Georgia is coming back again. We've got some really cool guest artists lined up for this year, too, so I'm going be working on that in the next several months to get the word out to as many young flutists as possible to join us for that.

**LZ:** That's awesome. Yes, having participated in a FLING! a few years ago, it is like the BEST time ever!

**KE:** Yeah, it's always fun.

**LZ:** That's really awesome! And you have such an impact on your local community, and then you're talking about also just this international reach that you've created through all the different things you do, so that's... that's really amazing.

**KE:** Yeah, this is so fun!

**LZ:** Is there anything personally you're looking forward to? To go back to thinking about our whole selves, and I know your daughter, you said she's almost 17 months—that's hard to believe—so she'll be two sometime this year, I imagine.

**KE:** Yeah, yeah, I'm excited for her. We're going to start doing a half-day daycare situation pretty soon, and I'm excited for her to get to be around other kids more frequently, because yeah, she's in Kinder Music, and we go to a play class on Wednesdays, you know, of course, but something that's more just her on her own; letting her find her independence, letting her spread her wings. And I know it's going to be so horrible for me for, like, a month or whatever, but I know I'll get over it, and I know it'll be the best thing for both of us, for me to have more time to do my work and for her to learn how to become a person.

So, we're looking forward to that, and we don't have any vacations or anything planned, because our dog, Barney—poor guy—he's falling apart right now, and so his legs are just awful. He has to wear these special braces, and he can't really go on a road trip, and we don't really like leaving him very much. So, we're just staying around with a few house projects here and there. And then my in-laws from Germany are coming in April, so they'll be here for about a week or so. That'll be very special to have them here to see our lives and Eloise, and get to know her more, and all of that.

So, yeah that's pretty much it. We're pretty chill! We're not jet-setters and that type of thing. We're nice homebodies. We like being at home.

**LZ:** I totally get that.

**KE:** And making home our happy, peaceful place.

**LZ:** Yeah, sometimes the joy is found in the minutiae, right?

**KE:** Yeah.

**LZ:** It's just the little things, and that's how you're building memories, too, which is cool with your family. Well, I hope Barney is doing okay. He's the sweetest puppy out there.

**KE:** Yeah... yeah, he's good. I mean, he still has his personality, you know? It just hurts us to see him hurting sometimes, but we're going to keep him going for as long as we can.

**LZ:** Yeah, absolutely. Thanks again for sharing all of that. Can you think of any—I know you probably have loads of it—but one or two pieces of advice for people who are [thinking about pursuing] career paths and going into music? [Or advice for folks] thinking of music as a career, whether they're younger or if they're older and they want to switch career paths and go into music more seriously? [Or the idea of] monetizing our art, basically, you know, like, when you make that decision, it somehow feels different to be like, "I'm going to be a musician that is paid to be a musician, and not just someone who does it because they love it."

**KE:** Yeah.

**LZ:** Both are, you know, super valid and important. But I'm just curious if you have any words of wisdom for people who are really thinking about music specifically to pursue career-wise.

**KE:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, I think that something that is incredibly important that doesn't get enough attention is not only looking at what you want to do as a musician, but looking at what the world wants, what hole can you fill, [or] how can you use music as a vehicle to bring about what people need. When I coach musicians, and they come to us with these ideas about, [wanting to] be an ensemble coach online, where I coach folks online and give feedback for upcoming performances, or, like, I want to be a Baroque ornamentation specialist. You know? It's like, yes, that is wonderful, that is great, that is needed, that is valid. How can you do that in a way that people will want to jump to work with you and will want to pay you to do that thing?

So yes, music is important, performance is important, all of these things are important, but you also have to make sure, if it's going to be your career, [that you can] get paid for it. So, whatever you choose to do in music, it has to be not just because you like doing it, but it has to be something that is missing, something that can better people's lives, something that can get people a result that they definitely desire, and desire enough to pay money for, or education, or something to make their life more fulfilling. That's great that you love

playing, you know, concertos and concerti and sonatas, and all these things, but how can you make it so that other people will pay to hear you do those things?

So, you have to think outside of the box, and you have to look at examples from across the industry of people who are doing things like that, that are unconventional, that are helping fill a hole somewhere. Use those as models instead of just having tunnel vision and playing your recital jury and being like, “Okay, I learned [a lot and] I'll be okay. I got an A on my jury, [therefore] that means I'll have a satisfying career in music.” We hope so, but you have to think beyond that.

So, even if you are coming back to music after doing something else for several years, or for a long time—same thing. Like, what do *you* do that is very important to the [population you want to serve] that can solve a problem that people will invest in, that people will want to work with you for? There must be a bigger reason than just music, right? Like, music itself, of course, is enough, but if it can be paired with something else, a different vehicle to get people excited or to get people motivated to hire you to do different things, then that is where the sweet spot is. So, it's all about combining what you love with music with what you see that other people need enough that they would be willing to pay for it.

**LZ:** Awesome. Super important words of wisdom. Thank you for that. Is there anything else you want to chat about, or other things that we didn't touch on that you think are important [from an entrepreneurship standpoint]?

**KE:** Yeah, and I would just say, for everyone who's pursuing a music career, something that I've waited for is feeling like, okay, I've reached my pinnacle. I can relax now. And I feel like that never really comes, and I feel like that you can't really bank on that happening. So, that's why it's so important that when you are in a music career, that you are doing things that are meaningful to you, because the only thing that you can really bank on is that things are going change. Evolution is always going to happen. And yes, it would be wonderful if we could just land a job and then be happy and set and no change would happen. But really, would it? Like, I feel like I'd get bored.

So, you know, just remember that if you're in a music career, just keep on going and keep on making sure you're doing work that feels meaningful to you and makes you want to continue doing it for a long time.

**LZ:** Thank you so much, Katherine. I'm always so inspired to talk with you. You're such a community builder for flutists and musicians all over. And it's just really been a pleasure interviewing you today. Thank you! We'll include information about your KE Creative business and other things as part of our [feature], so [listeners], you'll be able to all see that later.

**KE:** Thank you, Flute Examiner readers/watchers!

**LZ:** We look forward to talking with you next time! Thanks, Katherine!

**KE:** Thanks for having me!