

Veronica Thompson

City of Residence: Milwaukee

Instrument: Clarinets / e-flat, soprano and bass

How long have you been with Concord?

Two years

What is your earliest musical memory?

My father says that back in Chicago (my home town,) composer John Downey counted my fingers and toes during a rehearsal break when I was a baby. I guess you could consider that a crib-side concert! My earliest memory is that of hearing my father “crow” on his oboe reeds (although there may be vigorous debate as to whether this sound constitutes music among various practitioners of the arts.) Every time I hear that sound, I think of my dad. My brother and I routinely refused to go to bed until my dad played the oboe solo from Ravel’s Tombeau du Couperin. Double benefit for my dad!



What got you interested in music, and what was your involvement growing up?

There were lots of musicians in my family. Both my father and godfather were orchestral oboists, one playing in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and one in the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. I had two uncles who were jazz musicians in Kansas City. I don’t actually remember how I began playing clarinet. Maybe it was an act of protest against all the “oboe-ing” going on at home. Maybe a clarinet followed me home from school one day and my parents neglected to make me take it back. At any rate, I was always locatable within a 4-block radius. As a young person, I took lessons, I played in school groups, I taught clarinet and saxophone, and I hired myself out as an extra in area pit orchestras for high school musicals. I majored in Instrumental Music education at UW-Milwaukee. My favorite methods instrument was the bassoon, which I took home with evil intent. (My apologies to bassoonists who play the instrument for benevolent reasons.) I waited until midnight and then played the lowest note, three times, outside of my mother’s bedroom door as loudly as possible. When she did not run out screaming as I had expected, I opened her door to find her sitting on the edge of the bed shaking her portable radio. In retrospect, oboe might have been better after all.

Why do you perform with Concord?

CCO is so much fun! The music is great and the themes are creative. Most all of us make our livings in non-musical fields but we make our lives rich in making music together. Jamin is the good-natured heart of our group. I have never attended a rehearsal in which I did not laugh at something Jamin has said. (Most of his comments are meant to make us laugh. The rest are a gift!)

What has been the high point of your involvement with Concord?

Any time I play the clarinet, I consider it a high point. But if I had to select a single concert that stands out as a stellar experience, I would say that the last holiday concert was “the one!” All of the best elements of human-created loveliness came together in that one space. The Basilica was glittering with Christmas beauty. The Parkside Choir and soloist in combination with the orchestra (Poulenc Gloria) and the receptive audience made for a glowing event. I think it was the best we ever played! I later heard the MSO play this same piece in March... not bad.

What do you do for a living?

I have been an educator in Milwaukee Public Schools for the last 21 years, most of which were spent as librarian and most recently as Middle Years Coordinator of the IB program at Rufus King International School.

Tell us about your family.

I am the mother of 21-year-old twin sons. One is in school learning to be a film animator. Some of his short films are on YouTube. He has also published a scary comic book called *The Book of Akahana*. The other is enjoying a gap year and playing in a punk rock band called “Vex Nation.” They used to be called “Rechid,” so you can see they got better. This group plays in area music venues and actually sound really good... also loud.

What are your hobbies besides practicing and playing?

I am a person who prefers to be out-of-doors. I run and have completed three half marathons, I cycle (even disguised as a reindeer last Christmas), golf badly, hike, fish, canoe, work in my garden, and cross-country ski.

What is your favorite recording?

My favorite recordings rotate in cyclical fashion. My current favorite has been a 2-CD set from VoxBox2 called *Music for Winds* featuring the works of Messiaen, Barber, Poulenc, Ibert, Francaix and Fine, as performed by the Dorian Quintet (with Barry Benjamin on French horn!) Jean Casadesus on piano and the New York Philomusica.

Who is your favorite composer?

Not a fair question! Brahms has always been number 1 in my heart, but I also am quite enamored with Strauss and have been caught flirting with Shostakovich. Then there are the unrequited feelings I have for Samuel Barber...

What is something most people don't know about you?

I have been playing clarinet for about 5 years after a very long hiatus of over 25 years. I was part of a short-term layoff which left me with nothing constructive to do so I cleaned out my closets,

finding my old clarinet from college days. Since it had not yet quite fossilized, I took it to the repair shop and then began playing in the UWM Community Orchestra and finally taking lessons again as a decidedly older student. Right now, I play in up to five musical groups depending on their clarinet needs. Did you notice me in the Colders' Furniture commercial with the Milwaukee Police Band? I also play in a clarinet quartet made up of the entire clarinet section of the CCO. Also, I occasionally dance while playing the bass clarinet (the French horn section will attest to this little known fact, poor dears).

What is your advice for kids who are interested in music?

My advice would be to join a musical group for fun. This will make practicing feel worthwhile. Go to concerts to hear experts playing your chosen instrument. This will provide inspiration. Remember also, that not all the best music teachers charge the highest fees. There are a lot of hidden gems out there!