



The New York Flute Club

NEWSLETTER

Winners Share Their Inspirations

Flute Club members who attended the April 12 recital heard the winners of the 2026 NYFC Competition perform. Now we offer a chance to hear some of their thoughts on practicing, musical influences and their approaches to playing. The following Q&As with the winners—Rafael Méndez, Kara Ravaschieri and Matthew Ober—have been lightly edited. Congratulations to all.

Rafael Méndez, 1st prize

What drew you to taking part in the competition?

I am always on the lookout for opportunities to perform and receive feedback. I participated in last year’s competition and it was such a great growth experience.

Who was your first flute (or music) teacher, and is there something they taught you which still serves you to this day?

During my time studying in the Santo Domingo Conservatory with Alaima Gonzalez, principal flute of the National Symphony of the Dominican Republic, I came to realize that I wanted to dedicate my life to

music. She used to tell me “no es la flecha, es el Indio” (it’s not the arrow, it’s the indigenous [archer]). It has remained as one of the teachings that have shaped how I approach my craft, seeing the instrument just as an extension of my body and a resonator of my musicianship.



Rafael Méndez

Who is your current teacher, or a recent teacher, and what are you enjoying about your work together?

Since I met Tara H. O’Connor, I have found what I have been seeking for years of study—complete understanding of what it means to play the flute. Her knowledge and passion have resonated with me since day one, and has never stopped. Every conversation, lesson, and interaction is simply a life teaching. Thanks to her, I am discovering the infinite

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Attend Annual Meeting; Hear Ensemble

The annual meeting of the New York Flute Club, Inc. will be held on Sunday May 17, 3:00-5:00 p.m. Members will elect officers and the board of directors. All current members are eligible to vote and are encouraged to attend.

After the meeting, the Flute Club’s Ensemble will perform their year-end concert, featuring flutists who have participated in the season’s program. Friends are invited to attend at no charge. A reception will follow the concert. Both the meeting and the concert take place in Room 1209, Pearl Studios, 500 8th Avenue (between 35th and 36th Streets) in Manhattan.

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2025-2026

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From the President



**Participation Is
What Makes
This Club Tick**

Thanks to all who made the NYFC Competition Winners Concert such a success. Even though I was away performing in a concert and had to miss the event, I was

thrilled to hear that the winners were supported by their friends, family, mentors, collaborators, and the NYFC membership. A special shout-out goes to competition coordinator Kaoru Hinata. She cares deeply about providing flutists with a safe space to grow as performers in a competition setting.

Nancy Toff’s online program “Flutes and Flutemakers in Early New York,” with Wendell Dobbs, Nancy Groce, and Michael Lynn was also a great success. Hearing historical context alongside brilliant performances was a perfect way to conclude our season’s online offerings. Please let us know what kind of online events you would like to see next year.

Finally, I look forward to seeing you at Pearl Studios on Sunday May 17 for our annual meeting and Ensemble Program concert, which will wrap up our 106th season. Thank you for continuing to explore all facets of the flute and flute playing. The Club exists because of you!

~Lish
president@nyfluteclub.org

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Winners Share Their Inspirations

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Rafael Méndez, continued

possibilities that come with playing this sublime instrument and also embrace the simplicity and humane qualities that come with it. I feel so fortunate to have crossed paths with her wisdom and love for this craft, and I am proud of being part of the legacy that she is building.

What is inspiring you lately?

The people I love who encourage me to keep pushing through.

What piece of advice would you give to a young flutist who looks up to you?

Make peace with your inner voices and be true to yourself.

What piece of advice can you offer for handling nerves for a performance or audition or competition?

Someone that I care a lot about once taught that reframing my thoughts can completely change how my feelings affect me. For example, I am to decide if I want to call the feelings before a performance anxiety or excitement.



Counterclockwise, from top right: Rafael Méndez performed with pianist Marina Iwao. Mendez and Iwao with composer Kacper Madejek. Mendez with Jennifer Grim, who was his undergraduate professor at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music.

Photos: Lisa Vickery

Kara Ravaschieri

Kara Ravaschieri, at 19 years old, was the youngest of the winners. A second-year undergraduate at Juilliard, she was awarded second prize.

Give us a fun fact about your musical journey.

I only tried the flute—I didn't try any other instruments before deciding to continue!

Who was your first flute (or music) teacher, and is there something they taught you which still serves you to this day?

“Hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard.” This is something I try to remember everyday because it doesn't matter where you came from, how much talent you had at the start, etc. What matters is the hard work you put in now. Once you really live this idea, everything starts to fall into place and you will feel less compelled to compare yourself with others.

Who is your current teacher and what are you enjoying about your work together?

Robert Langevin is my current teacher at Juilliard and I really admire how detailed he is with everything, from scales to excerpts. My first lesson consisted of an introduction to his scale patterns that I'd be learning. His method book just came out, so I'm very excited to see all of those same technique and tone exercises in there.

What kind of flute do you play?

I play a Brannen with a Lafin headjoint. I love the smooth mechanism that feels so light under the fingers. I also love the combination of a gold headjoint and silver body. I find there's such a wide range of colors you can



Kara Ravaschieri performing on April 12 with pianist Siyumeng Wang. *Photo: Lisa Vickery*

produce, from very dark to more warm. The gold/silver combo blends very well in an orchestral setting, while also adding a distinct sound in solo passages.

What is your favorite time of day to practice?

My favorite time to practice is in the early morning.

Tell us about a performance that you gave which was the most memorable or meaningful to you?

One of my most meaningful performances was at my high-school graduation. My best friend and I were chosen to perform the Fauré *Fantaisie*. It was one of the first flute and piano pieces I ever heard, and it was such a full circle moment for me to play that at my graduation before coming to Juilliard.

What advice would you give to a young flutist who looks up to you?

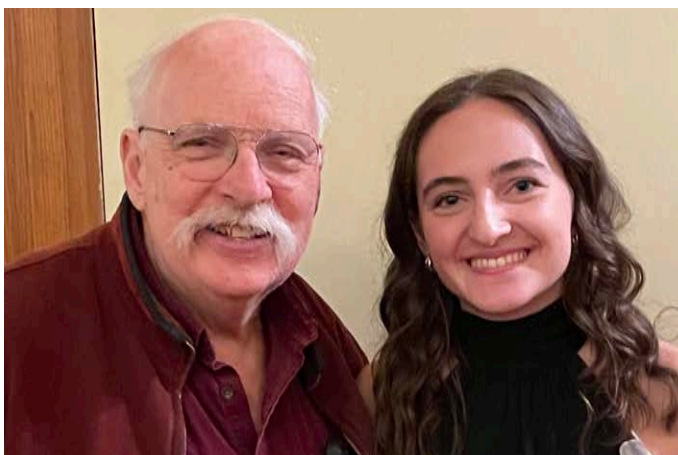
Have fun!! Music is full of so many different emotions, but it should never be the thing that drags you down!

What advice do you have for handling nerves for a performance or audition or competition?

Trust your preparation. You've worked hard for so long, so now you get to have fun and kill it!

What is your favorite warmup or exercise on flute?

The Robert Langevin/Ravel tone exercise.



Kara Ravaschieri with her professor, Robert Langevin *Photo: Lisa Vickery*

Matthew Ober

Matthew Ober, age 26, the 3rd prize winner, is pursuing a Master of Musical Arts at Yale.

What drew you to taking part in the competition?

I had been learning this challenging piece (*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*)—more challenging for the piano, thank you, Marina Iwao—for my recital. I figured it would be great to practice performing it in front of an audience and see what happens!

What flute do you play? What do you love about it?

Brannen solid silver purchased in January of 2021; the mechanism has always been my favorite part about my instrument, and I've only gotten it serviced by Clifford Tretick, former finisher at Brannen, in Virginia every year since then. It's his instrument as much as mine at this point.

Share a fun fact about your musical journey.

I learned about the piccolo before I knew anything about the flute. My kindergarten teacher played her piccolo for the class one day and I knew I wanted to eventually play it one day. Fourth grade came, and piccolo was not a “beginner” instrument, so I was advised to pick the flute—although, the trombone was a close 2nd choice because in the school grade above me there were no trombonists, and I felt I had an obligation to help fill a gap.

Who was your first flute (or music) teacher, and is there something they taught you which still serves you to this day?

I started lessons in high school after five years of being self-taught in the chaos of middle-school band. I met my teacher, Meghan Shanley Alger, while she was completing her DMA with Aaron Goldman at the University of Maryland. Meghan is from Long Island and did her Bachelor's at NYU Steinhardt and her Master's at SUNY Purchase with my “now” teacher, Tara Helen O'Connor. I wasn't the most motivated practicer in high school, and she was the perfect teacher, allowing me to focus on studying for exams, the SATs, work around my hectic baseball team schedule, etc. Meghan was my introduction to classical music and flute playing and I owe my foundational inspiration of music and artistry to her. She showed me how vast music was; the classics of the Bach flute sonatas, to women composers and new music. It has given me an open mind that I am so fortunate to have in this industry.



Matthew Ober performing Debussy with pianist Marina Iwao at the April 12 recital.

Photo: Lisa Vickery

What's your favorite place or time of day to practice?

I tend to practice at night! I get caught up with so many friends at school when everyone's awake during the day, it can be too much fun hanging out with them. But I find that evenings are special and tranquil; as the day slows down, so does my mind, and I am better able to focus on the tasks I need to complete.

What is your favorite warm-up or exercise on flute?

I love harmonics and I thank Aaron Goldman for mentorship through them.

Tell us about a performance that you gave that was the most memorable or meaningful to you.

I got to perform a solo for John Williams (through a livestream). Cynthia, a classmate and friend, had a great-aunt, Dr. Hu, who was a botanist at the Arnold Arboretum affiliated with Harvard University, a place John frequented a lot, and where the two would go on walks together. He dedicated his Violin Concerto, *TreeSong*, to her. It was premiered by Gil Shaham and the Boston Symphony. At Peabody, Cynthia's senior project focused on researching her great-aunt, to gain the rights to form an orchestra and get the concerto performed again. That was 2024; we were the third performance of the work (and the Boston Symphony just gave its fourth performance at the John Williams concert last fall). Three days before the concert, Cynthia approaches me. John texted her a solo flute work,

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Matthew Ober

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Soliloquy, that he had written in memoriam of Dr. Hu, premiered at her great-aunt's funeral. John thought it would be fitting to have had it performed again in the concerto concert, and I was delighted that she had asked me to perform it as a prelude. It was a solo performance that felt so human, and I had no nerves, even knowing John was watching. The whole project felt sincere, and it felt as if I was sharing a gift to Cynthia, her family, and to John.

What piece of advice would you give to a young flutist who looks up to you?

If you are looking to get better at playing your instrument, here is one of my biggest pieces of advice: I find that practicing the flute for a specific goal—such as a performance, a recording, a lesson, or competition—is narrow-minded and has induced more stress and anxiety rather than it being of much help. Playing the flute has become easier now that I have shifted my goal to focus towards becoming the best version of myself. If I always choose to make myself better, even by a little bit, at the end of each day, this deadline towards success becomes blurred, and there's no more race to a finish line. It has taken me a long time to realize that competency in playing your instrument isn't defined, and no one wakes up one day automatically proficient at flute playing. Therefore, since improvement is infinite, there is always something else to practice and become better at, and I believe that by trying to make yourself better every day, you will then be prepared for your next musical task. Short piece of advice: Practice the piccolo. Keyword, practice.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2026 COMPETITION JUDGES

Thank you to our competition coordinator, Kaoru Hinata, and to our esteemed judges—Karen Bogardus, Kim O'Hare Bonacorsa, Sheryl Henze, Hilary Jones, Marya Martin, and Jayn Rosenfeld—for their time, expertise, and thoughtful adjudication.



Winners, left to right, Matthew Ober (3rd place), Kara Ravaschieri (2nd place), and Rafael Méndez (1st place).

Photo: Lisa Vickery



Kaoru Hinata, the Flute Club's competition coordinator, presented the winners with their prizes during the recital on April 12.

Photo: Lisa Vickery

Flute Fair Raffle Winner Gets A Session With Guest Artist

As Flute Fair raffle winner, Ann Chusid enjoyed a private lesson with the 2026 event's guest artist, Jennifer Grim. Grim is professor and chair of the Department of Instrumental Performance at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music, and president of the National Flute Association.

"We played some contemporary duets from a book by Robert Mols—which I purchased at the Flute Fair. I learned some helpful new techniques!" said Chusid, a club member who regularly attends our monthly concerts as well as Chip Shelton's jazz workshops.

Luckily for Chusid, the lesson was held in person because Grim was in New York. Because many of the guest artists are from out of town, the lessons are often over Zoom.

Prof. Grim's appearance at the Flute Fair was made possible in part by the generous support of the Wm. S. Haynes Co.



Ann Chusid, left, with guest artist Jennifer Grim.

Education Committee Launches Flute Scholarship Program

The Education Committee is proud to report the first step in our Flute Scholarship Program. We are giving flutes to four students in the New Rochelle Public School System. Their arts administrator has chosen four outstanding middle-school players to receive the loan of excellent flutes, as identified by Fred Marcusa and purchased by the Club. (The flutes are silver-plated, open hole, low B, French arms, split E, and engraved "NYFC.")

The Scholarship Program provides for 1) designation of outstanding flute students as New York Flute Club scholars, who will receive free membership in the Club and 2) donation to the School Board of high-quality step-up flutes to those NYFC scholars who otherwise would not have access to similar flutes.

We are thrilled to enable this community outreach, and hope it will expand exponentially to include schools and young flutists throughout the New York City area.

Please join us in enabling its expansion by donating flutes to the Club for inclusion in this effort, identifying schools and students in need, establishing contact with schools and teachers who might help with or participate in the program, and/or making a cash donation to the Flute Club earmarked to this project. For more information, please contact Fred Marcusa <fred.marcusa@gmail.com> or Jinni Rock-Bailey <Rockbailey1@gmail.com>

FLUTE HAPPENINGS

When: June 2, @ 6:00 p.m.

Where: Flute Center of New York, 307 7th Ave., Suite 401, NYC

What: Kathleen Nester and Wendy Stern, with pianist Allison Franzetti, will perform three works for low flutes and piano by Daniel Dorff. (The composer will be in attendance to answer questions.)

Ensemble Fine-Tunes May 17 Program



Kneeling, left to right: Bill Giannone, Natalie Ward, Andrea Ma (guest from London), Kathy Saenger, Ambika Bansal, Elizabeth LaBarbera, Lester Yu. Standing left to right: Lily O’Heir, James Marcus, Prashant Kumar, Gail Tishcoff, Doug Ramsdell, Roger Brooks, Frances Lenci, Lily Zwanka, Cora Reichert, Sam Ostrowski, Judith Thoyer, Heather Johnson, Lauren Kurtz.

Photo: Mark Vickers

The NYFC Flute Ensemble held its seventh rehearsal of the season, with 20 members (19 returning, one new) participating at Studios 353 in Manhattan on April 19.

We also had a visitor from London, Andrea Ma, here on business, who is a regular performer with the Ealing Flute Choir and Ealing Wind Orchestra and a sub with the Fulham and North London Symphonies, all in London. She said she found it interesting to play with a group of American flutists similar to her ensemble at home.

The ensemble focused on fine tuning their selections to be performed on May 17. Director Mark Vickers led the group through *Flutes and Vegetables* (arr. Cohen), *Fantasy on “Amazing Grace”* (arr. Louke), *Birdland* (arr. Lombardo), *Valoshki* (arr. Siniakova), *Sheep May Safely Graze* (arr. Giannone), and *Japanese Silhouettes* (arr. Buonanni).

The icebreaker question was “What was the last performance you attended that was not classical or flute related?” Answers were quite varied, including an Allman Brothers Tribute Show, Snarky Puppy, Jane Monheit, a K-pop show, jazz at Smalls, and some current Broadway shows and contemporary opera. It was clear that members have many musical interests outside of the classical flute world.

The ensemble will perform on May 17 right after the NYFC’s annual meeting, which begins at 3:00 p.m. at Pearl Studios, located at 500 8th Avenue in Room 1209. The performance is free and open to the public. Invite your friends. A reception will follow the concert.

To join the ensemble next season beginning in September, you must be a current member of the NY Flute Club. No audition is required. We accept all levels of players. If you would like to participate, email Ensemble director Mark Vickers at ensembles@nyfluteclub.

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