



Voice of the Circle

The Northern California Flute Circle Newsletter

Winter 2008

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NCFC Spring Flute Festival, April 26-27, 2008

The NoNahme Clan is busy preparing for the Second Annual NCFC Spring Flute Festival which will take place in Georgetown, CA. This year the event is being expanded to two days and combined with the Arts in Nature Fest.

WHAT: NCFC/NoNahme Clan Spring Flute Festival
WHEN: April 26-27, 2008
TIME: 8 AM - 8 PM each day
WHERE: Georgetown, CA (northeast of Sacramento, between Auburn and Placerville)

The event will be open to the public and no admission is

required except for Saturday nights' concert. Children are welcome and there will be young performers on the amphitheater stage.

Beginning at 10:00 AM on both Saturday and Sunday, there will be "amateur" performances at the amphitheater at times when there is no concert.

Workshops include Kathi Elias' Beginning Flute Playing for Young People age eleven and under; Mike Oitzman's Beginning Flute Playing Workshop; Scott August's Anasazi Workshop; Feather River Singer's Native American Drum: Heartbeat of Mother Earth; Scott

August's Advanced Flute Playing Techniques; David Blonski's Didgeridoo Made Easy; Don Schulz' Make Your Own Drum. To sign up for a workshop, contact Lew Price (530 - 333 - 9470).

The concert on Saturday features The Talking Drum men's group, The Feather River Singers, and recording artist Scott August.

Eric Ray & Friends perform on Sunday afternoon.

There will be many flute vendors and other vendors in attendance.

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Mary Youngblood sings to her granddaughter during the NCFC Summer Gathering 2006

Mary Youngblood's Birthday Party, June 21, 2008

Save the date! We're going to help Mary Youngblood celebrate a very special birthday this year and all NCFC members are invited to the party. There will be lots of flute playing throughout the day. Several workshops will be offered, including one with Mary. There will be food, friends and flute makers.

WHAT: Mary Youngblood's Birthday Party and Summer Flute Gathering.

WHEN: Saturday June 21, 2008

TIME: TBA (all day)

WHERE: Fair Oaks, CA

Once again, we cherish the opportunity to spend some time with Mary Youngblood. Mary continues to produce wonderful music and this is our chance to

show her how much we love her, her music and all that she has done for the growth of the NCFC and the Native American Flute in Northern California.

You must RSVP for this event. To RSVP for this event, send an email with the subject: RSVP Mary Youngbloods Party to: rsvp@naflute.com



Has Your Email Address Changed?

If so, please contact Mike Oitzman, at ncfc@naflute.com, so we may update the NCFC membership database, and continue keeping you informed.

“I’ve messed with some unusual tunings for the NAF, and I’ll be offering them as an option pretty soon.”
Geoffrey Ellis



This is one example of Geoffrey Ellis’ new inlay style which he is now offering on his flutes.

Interview with Flutemaker Geoffrey Ellis

By Cryss BlackWolf

(Editors note: this is an edited version of the interview. To read the full interview: www.sierraravenclan.com)

If you are reading this it is probably because you have been bitten by the flute bug and have subsequently begun to develop a synergetic relationship with the Native American flute. Before you realized it you probably found yourself as a member of a local flute circle (or have started your own). Looking back you realize you have truly begun your amazing flute journey one note at a time. It is my desire to give credit to those that make this possible for those of us who do not have the time or skills to make our own flutes. These are our esteemed Flute Makers who have made the Native American flute accessible to us, and to everyone for generations to come.

As a way of paying tribute to the Flute Makers for their art form, for their expertise, and for their efforts to produce consistent quality in their offerings that are continued to be offered at a reasonable price, I will be featuring an in depth interview with one or more of our flute makers. Full interviews will be published on the www.SierraRavenClan.com blog, with an abridged version with each edition of "The Voice of the Circle".

If it wasn't for our flute makers a lot fewer people would be enjoying the bene-

fits and the healing that the Native American flute brings, and many of us would not have our "Voice".

Geoffrey Ellis of Earth Tone Flutes has been making quality flutes for 11 years now. What started out as a passion for him turned into a successful career where he is able to harmonize with his creative muse and make a successful living being immersed in doing something he is quite passionate about. This passion is quite evident when you see the detail in his work, when you hear the tone in the finished product, and when you are told about his unconditional guarantee on every flute he sells.

Geoffrey has also been busy with the successful new launch of the Flute Portal Forums, the only online forum of its kind. You can sign up for a free account and access by clicking "Forums" from the main page at www.fluteportal.com. He has also been busy with the new Scott August Signature line of Anasazi flutes, available the Spring. More information will be available soon at www.earthtoneflutes.com.

I sat down on the phone with Geoffrey and learned quite a bit about his passion and where it comes from.

Cryss: Please describe your earliest experience with the Native American flute and, or NA flute music.

Geoffrey: Hearing R.Carlos

Nakai’s Earth Spirit CD was my first exposure, around 1989. I never actually played one until 1995 when I bought one as a gift for my brother (a Coyote Oldman backpacking flute from Michael Allan)

Cryss: From this, what was the experience at the proverbial crossroads where you made the conscious step in the direction of becoming an accomplished flute maker, rather than just a collector and player of the Native American flute?

Geoffrey: Well, I only ever owned one flute before I became a maker. My brother, in his turn, gifted me a High Spirits flute when I moved back to California from Portland, Oregon. I had been working in Portland restoring old houses and doing pastel painting. I decided to try to make it as a full time artist, and so in February of 1997, at the encouragement of my retired parents, I moved down to Humboldt County, CA where they lived. They have 20 acres up on a ridge, and my Dad and I started building my home/art studio in a corner of their land. They had always been really supportive of my art, and they were thrilled that I was going to make a go of it, so they wanted to help.

The construction took more than a year, and when we weren’t working I was sitting on a stump in the woods playing the flute. About this same time two things hap-

Spring Flute Festival (cont)

Attractions include:

- Native Plants - Storytelling by Young People and Adults for Young People and Adults
- Books - Hikes through the Beautiful Nature Area - Art and Craft Exhibits
- Booths selling Food, Herbs, Art, Crafts, Musical Instruments, and more (See the list of past vendors)
- Music featuring Voices, the Native American

Flute, the Australian Didgeridoo, Drums, & Rattles

- Workshops and Activities for both Young People and Adults on Nature, Arts & Crafts and Music
- Booths with Free Information on Nature (such as forestry and watersheds)

For more information check out: <http://www.softcom.net/users/greebo/festival.htm>

Yosemite Flute Festival

The First Annual Yosemite Flute Festival is planned for Sept 26-28, 2008.

This event is being planned by the Yosemite Flute Circle and is being held in the town of Oakhurst, CA. There will be workshops each day.

On Friday and Saturday night, there will be concerts featuring Mark Holland, Jeff Ball and other artists yet to be named.

For more information:

www.yosemiteflutefest.com

How to read your address label:

The address label contains two important pieces of information:

- Your membership number is the number found in []'s
- Your membership expiration date is the date next to your name.

Geoffrey Ellis interview (cont)

pened concurrently: I wanted some more flutes, and I realized that I needed a job while I was getting my studio started! We were out in the sticks a bit, and I didn't own a car, so the idea of trying to find a job in the town (25 minutes away) was not very attractive. My Dad had a fully equipped wood shop that was pretty much dormant when we weren't building, so I took it in my head to try to make some flutes for myself. It was only after I had made a couple that the light bulb went off and I thought, "I could try doing this for a living!"

I had bought some books by Lew Price (Creating and Using the Native American Flute series) and was starting to teach myself the basics. Because I had no other distractions I was able to commit a huge amount of time to the process, so I got pretty far pretty quickly. By

Spring of 1998 I had made Earth Tone Flutes official with a presence on the internet, and by 2000 I was supporting myself full time at flute making (I had been working at it full time from the get go, but it took nearly three years to build up to it being an actual livelihood.

Cryss: I know that some of your customers – myself included – have come to you for a flute but pretty much give you full, creative and artistic license. What do you draw from as a muse to assist you when creating something for someone in complete, proverbial darkness who has given you no parameters or coordinates to triangulate from? Do you, perhaps, take the Pygmalion, breath life into the finished product from its solid wood origins, and just let your hands and instinct guide you as you shape and embellish the flute and let it

manifest the way it will?

Geoffrey: That's funny! No, no Pygmalion. I've always shied away from trying to "assess" my customers in any way that is remotely psychic (for lack of a better word). I actually try to stay out of the way completely, actively avoiding letting my opinion (about who they might "be") get involved. I've always felt that a flutes "spirit" is given to it by the player, not by the maker. If someone has no preconceived ideas of what they want, I might ask them a few very simple questions, such as: Do you like low tones, medium tones, or high tones? Are you allergic to any woods? That sort of thing. It actually doesn't happen that often that a player says, "Do whatever you want---surprise me." Most people have an inkling of what they want, even if

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"I've received hundreds of e-mails from customers telling me how happy their new flute is making them, how they use it for healing, meditation, inspiration..."
Geoffrey Ellis



Geoffrey Ellis, flutemaker

Geoffrey Ellis Interview (cont)

it's just the key of the flute. So I don't have a "muse" per se. I have a fair amount of practice, however. I've made over 2,000 flutes at this point, so picking a nice wood and nice accents, and matching them with the key of the flute is pretty easy. When someone doesn't know what they want, I make what I feel like making in the moment, and so far that has always worked (which is nice).

Cryss: What is the most unusual request that you have received? As you might recall from a conversation several months ago, I had a bone or two laying around from my college days as a Biology Major. I asked if you'd make me a flute from the human Fibula I bought from UC Berkeley's Bone store. I don't blame you for your declining, by the way.

Geoffrey: A bone flute probably takes the cake. Prior to that, I've had requests for quadruple barreled drones and the like--nothing too crazy. I've had some very odd decoration requests, but only one that was so bizarre and out-of-character for me that I flatly refused to do it. I won't say what it was, in case the customer is reading this (I managed to disguise my incredulous horror behind a plausibly urbane exterior).

Cryss: How do you resolve the symbiotic relationship between you, the flute maker, and the medium you

use to create? Do you consider yourself a creator, inventor, and artist... or perhaps more of a Channeler or Instrument yourself from which a greater creation occurs through your gift and art form?

Geoffrey: Wow, man...this is a perfect opportunity for me to say something really pretentious! Tempting....

Seriously, I'd call myself a craftsman or artisan. Flute making is a bit of both: an art and a craft. I'd only call it a gift insofar as "artsy" things have always come very easy to me (things like drawing, music, crafts of different sorts). That is not something a person can claim any credit for--we each have a gift of some kind. I was lucky in that I grew up in an environment that told me it was a good thing, something to be pursued. But that didn't mean that I stepped into a wood shop and started making good flutes! Lots and lots of practice is the only way to become a good instrument maker.

I will add one thing that I think is very important, and I fear that this will sound pretentious, though I mean it in the humblest sense. You can't be a good instrument maker if you do not have an "ear". I've had a lot of discussions with my friend Colyn Petersen on this subject, because we've had an uncanny number of parallel experiences in our flute jour-

neys. Your guide, as a flute maker is always your ear. You have to be able to hear in your imagination how you want the flute to sound. If you have that image clearly available to you, then you can't go wrong. You may struggle to adapt your physical skills to the task of reaching that image, but you will get there in time. If you don't have the "ear", no amount of technical skill will get you there. Added to this is the fact that your ear continues to refine. My ability to hear nuance within the voice of the flute has gotten more and more honed with practice. And after having enough "shop time" to build the craft-based skills that are needed to make the physical flute, refining this image of the flute's voice is where the essence lies.

I should also say, that I'm talking about successful, commercial flute-making. To do that, you really need to be very consistent from flute to flute. Hit and miss flute making is actually not that hard. My first flute sounded amazing (because I was copying another flute). My next two were not very good at all. Then a good one, then a mediocre, etc.. You get the idea. There are a lot of part-time makers, hobbyist makers who do it for love, not money (meaning they don't have to make a living) who can make a good flute. There are a tremendous amount of skilled woodworkers who can make a wooden work of art--something truly amazing to

look at, but that can barely be played (we've all seen these--Nakai called them "wall-hangers"). And there is everything in between. For people to come back to you again and again, and for them to recommend you to their friends, you need to be very consistent, and that will only happen if you have a consistent ear. However, I do need to offer a respectful tip of the hat to makers who embrace a different philosophy. I've talked to makers who truly feel that every flute should be unique--different voice, different character, and they make no attempt to have a consistent "sound" that is representative of them. This is a valid approach as well, and more suited to certain players.

Cryss: As the adage says, "If you do something you love you never work a day in your life". It became apparent to me early on that you really love what you do. For starters, the flute I wanted would require a process you do not perform in your shop. You made a couple of recommendations as to whom I should speak to. When I jokingly said I felt like I was "cheating on you" you said, "Most seasoned players will have flutes from more than one maker. Besides, there's plenty of business to go around". I have come to really appreciate how much you have lifted your competition up and placed them in a peer role, showing that you are all giving back to the Flute Community at large. I found that not only refresh-

Other upcoming flute events

The Zion Flute Festival

The Zion Flute Festival has become one of the largest flute-related events in the western United States. New this year is the addition of a three day flute workshop. The event also features a huge lineup of performers.

WHAT: Zion Canyon Art & Flute Festival

WHEN: June 9-15, 2008

WHERE: Zion Canyon, Utah

For more info:
www.zioncanyonartandflutefestival.com

NAF Workshop in Cambria, CA

Our friends from the Central Coast Flute Circle are presenting a weekend workshop featuring the instruction of Vince Chafin. This will be held at the beautiful Camp Ocean Pines in Cambria.

WHAT: Native American Flute Workshop

WHEN: May 16-18, 2008

WHERE: Cambria, CA

COST: \$155

To register:
<http://campoceanpines.org/>

River School Concert

The NCFC Valley Clan has coordinated with the River Charter School in Napa Valley, CA to setup a wonderful fundraising event featuring Scott August.

There may be a workshop opportunity with Scott prior to the event. Stay tuned.

WHAT: Fundraiser featuring an evening with Scott August

WHEN: May 10, 2008

COST: TBA

Regional Clan Contact

BAY CLAN

Contact: Frankie Sierra; email: bayclan@naflute.com

JOAQUIN CLAN

Contact: Dan Ricketts at 209-527-0363; email: joaquinclan@naflute.com

LOPING WOLF CLAN

Contact: Dan DiCicco
 email: lopingwolf@naflute.com
www.lopingwolf.com

SIERRA RAVEN CLAN

Contact: Cryss Blackwolf
 Email: sierraravenclan@naflute.com
www.SierraRavenClan.com

NONAHME CLAN

Contact: Doc Cole;
 at 530-621-3227

VALLEY CLAN

Contact: Lynn Peck at 707-255-7425;
 email: valleyclan@naflute.com

Geoffrey Ellis Interview (cont)

ing, but common amongst the seasoned artists such as yourself?

Geoffrey: I just think that I have the coolest job in the world. When I first started making flutes I was just looking for something that I could tolerate doing that would make me a bit of money to support my art. Well, it totally swept me up and I haven't painted a picture since I became a flute maker! I was really happy to have it turn into a sustainable career that I could do from home in a peaceful setting--that was already a huge blessing, but there was another aspect that I didn't anticipate at all. I think a lot of makers will relate to

this, but I didn't foresee the thanks that would be offered to me.

I've received hundreds of e-mails from customers telling me how happy their new flute is making them, how they use it for healing, meditation, inspiration...how it has changed their life for the better. They thank me for my art and for creating this for them. That just blew me away--I never saw it coming. To have a "job" that I enjoy doing is already a great blessing, but then to see all of this gratitude and joy is intensely moving. Humbling, really, because every time I get an e-mail or phone call like that it immediately shifts me into this "higher" viewpoint. I never feel at

those moments that I was "doing" something cool, but rather that I get to be a small part of this beneficial stream of creation that is manifesting in this person's life. It's nice to be the middle-man, if you know what I mean, but a person cannot take credit for that any more than they can take credit for having a good singing voice, or the ability to run a marathon. Sure, you practice to get better, but the ability is God given and therefore not eligible for ego-identification (ideally). There are times when I indulge in a bit of pride, but I try to keep that nonsense in check as much as I can.

Remember...

Check the online calendar at:

<http://www.naflute.com/calendar.html>

Cryss: What advice can you offer with regard to buying a flute?

Geoffrey: Hmmm. I can only really say what my own values are when I pick up a flute: playability first. Good response, well tuned with a pleasing voice. I don't care at all what it looks like if it really sings. Beautiful wood, embellishments and decorations are all pointless if the flute does not sing to the ears of the player. If it plays well and the player feels a connection, that is all that matters--Doesn't matter if it is a \$400 flute from a famous maker or a \$30 flute from the craft fair.

Flutemaker Discount Program

The following fine craftsmen offer discounts for active NCFC members:

Need to contact the NCFC:
Northern California Flute Circle
578 Sutton Way, PMB 184
Grass Valley, CA 95945
Phone: 530-432-2716

Earthtone Flutes, Geoffrey Ellis, (707) 839-5199, <http://www.earthtoneflutes.com>

Featherridge Flutes, Randy Stenzel, info@featherridgeflutes.com

Love Flutes, Stephan DeRuby, (800) 435-8837, <http://www.deruby.com>

RV Flutes, Russ Veneble, (505) 577-0394, <http://www.rvflutes.com>

Stellar Flutes, Tom Stellar, (888)427-8850, <http://www.stellarflutes.com>

Wine Wood Flutes, Brian Revheim, (707) 253-1325, iswinewoodflutes@sbcglobal.net.

Woodland Voices, Colyn Peterson, (402) 932-6894, <http://www.woodlandvoices.com>

Yazzie Flutes, Martin Yazzie, (951) 924-0926, <http://www.yazzieflutes.com>



Time to renew your NCFC Membership?

Please take a moment to fill out the Membership Form, or pass it along to a friend, and invite them to experience the magic of the Native American flute!

Security Guarantee:

No personal information will be given to anyone else, or used for any purpose other than sending you NCFC and other Native American flute information.

Questions?

Check out our web site at: www.naflute.com or call the NCFC at 530-432-2716 or email: ncfc@naflute.com

Thank you for your support!

Membership Application for the Northern California Flute Circle

1

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY, USING ALL CAPITAL LETTERS

Renew New Member Newsletter opt-out: No Yes (I'll get my news from the web site)

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone _____ Email _____

2

Please select only ONE of the following four categories:

Individual Membership

\$15: 1 year, or...

\$25: 2 years

Family / Household Membership

\$20: 1 year, or...

\$35: 2 years

Office Use Only 1.07
Date RCV'd:
Check #:

3

Please select your HOME CLAN (you are always welcome to attend any and all flute circles or meetings):

Bay Clan (San Francisco Bay Area, Lower Marin)

Loping Wolf Clan (Sacramento, Yolo and Nevada counties)

NoNahme Clan (Garden Valley)

Sierra Raven Clan (Mother Lode and Southern Sierra)

San Joaquin Clan (Fresno and Central Valley)

Valley Clan (Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, Upper Marin)

4

Please make your check payable to the "Northern California Flute Circle", and send it with this form to:

Northern California Flute Circle
578 Sutton Way, PMB 184
Grass Valley, CA 95945