

Music Trades

DECEMBER 2018

THE GLOBAL ISSUE



North Bridge Winds

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artist-led educational programs**

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Flute artisan Chris McKenna hand-crafts the all-important headjoint for each North Bridge instrument.

THE WEB PLATFORM and the international film score clinic would come later, but for North Bridge Winds, it started with a step-up flute. Established five years ago as a division of Anthem Musical Instruments, North Bridge came to the step-up category with a flute built around the instrument's most critical piece: the headjoint. By pairing a headjoint crafted by longtime flute artisan Chris McKenna with a body made in a respected Taiwanese factory, North Bridge maximized the instrument's tonal potential while hitting a sweet spot in pricing and dealer margins. For advancing players in the market for a step-up instrument, the concept yielded a flute described as both flexible and responsive, delivering the projection and control they need to support the high notes along with the finesse to play at softer volumes.

"Making the step up to a musical instrument offering more professional features is an important decision," says McKenna, who co-founded North Bridge Winds alongside Anthem's David Kilkenny and Brent Beech.

"The step-up instrument is often the 'bridge' that transforms the budding student into the professional artist.

Our goal is to facilitate that transformation."

Where North Bridge flutes may have surprised even their creators, though, was how quickly and decisively they impressed the professionals. Less than a year after launching, the line drew the attention of eminent flutist Paul Edmund-Davies, who earned an international reputation during his 20 years as principal flute of the London symphony. Besides performing and teaching on five continents, Edmund-Davies has been featured on hundreds of movie soundtracks—from *Star Wars* to *Harry Potter*, *Beauty & The Beast*, *Braveheart*, *Interstellar*, and *Thor*—and that's where the artist has made his unique mark with North Bridge. Since partnering with the company in 2014, Edmund-Davies has been featured in numerous North Bridge-sponsored "movie clinic" tours for advancing flutists. Clinic participants, often more than a hundred at a time, are able to play along with the artist on some of his best-known soundtracks as they develop skills on breathing, finger work, and articulation.

Article as seen in the December 2019 issue of *Music Trades Magazine*.

"In a saturated flute market, North Bridge flutes shine brightly," Edmund-Davies says on his alliance with the company. "Great work from a company that understands what young flutists are really looking for."

Educationally speaking, the next step for North Bridge arrived this year in the North Bridge Flute Academy, an online learning resource for both teachers and students. Based on repertoire available from the ABRSM and Trinity Exam systems, the North Bridge Flute Academy gives flute players (especially those stepping up from beginner flutes), clear evaluations of their progress along with recommendations for future advancement. The Academy comprises a growing program of free educational materials including video performances by Edmund-Davies and John Alley of the London Symphony, MP3 play-along piano tracks by Alley, and lesson videos providing background information on each piece, as well as tips for performing. Learners using the program can log in for free at northbridgewinds.com.

"The North Bridge Flute Academy has been established as a one-stop solution for aspiring flute players by providing information on various well-known flute works in an educational, systematic and musically stimulating way," says Brent Beech, vice president of North Bridge.

In retrospect, say the three principals behind North Bridge Winds, the combined skillset they've brought to the project has delivered returns none of them could have achieved alone. David Kilkenny, once a member of the Powell flutes team, had learned the ropes of launching a new line when he wrote the business plan for Powell's Sonaré range in 2002. Brent Beech, a music industry veteran, brought experience in performance, instrument repairs, and managing overseas operations. As for McKenna, a high-level flute artisan for more than 30 years, it would be hard to find a more re-spected authority on the all-important headjoint.

"Our marketing and headjoint have really opened up some great opportunities," says Kilkenny. "We have a solid team with a great track record based on quality and education. That's what sets us apart."