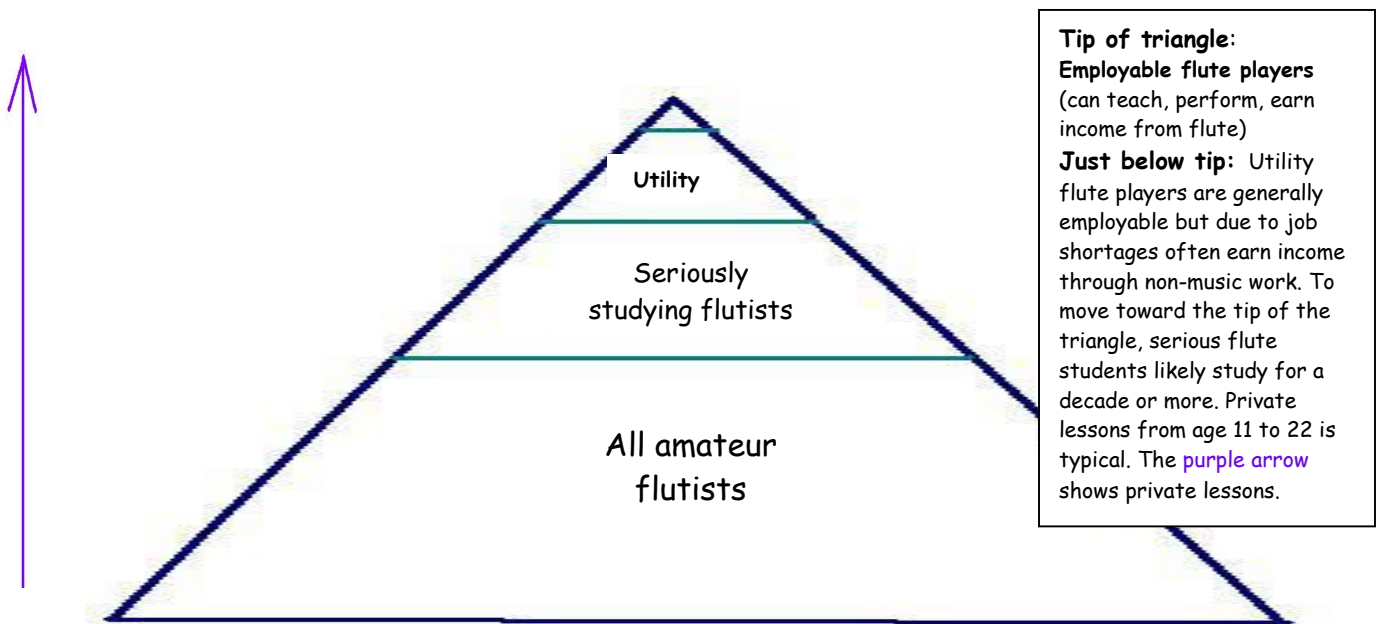


The Flute-playing triangle of accomplishment

Jennifer Cluff May 2008

Through a recent discussion on Galway's Flute Chat, Sir James Galway was questioning how it was that young flutists showed up at his masterclasses to play for him, but they didn't seem to know their scales (in extended form, a la Moyse, through the whole range of the flute.) nor did they seem to know many etudes. He thought that perhaps their teachers had been taking "short-cuts" with them, and not insisting on etudes and scales in lessons.

I wish to respond by explaining about the North American band program, and how it produces flutists who may have *avoided* private lessons with a qualified flute teacher. I work in the music department of a small college, and am shocked each year by the number of auditioning flute players who wish to become performers or teachers, but have reached the age of 18 without ever taking private lessons. I often show them this triangle of flute accomplishments to help give them an idea about the levels of flute playing and where they are today.



1. The basic triangle of flute skills. The fastest way up to the tip is through private lessons with qualified flute teacher.

What is it about being a highschool band or amateur flutist who hasn't ever had private flute lessons?

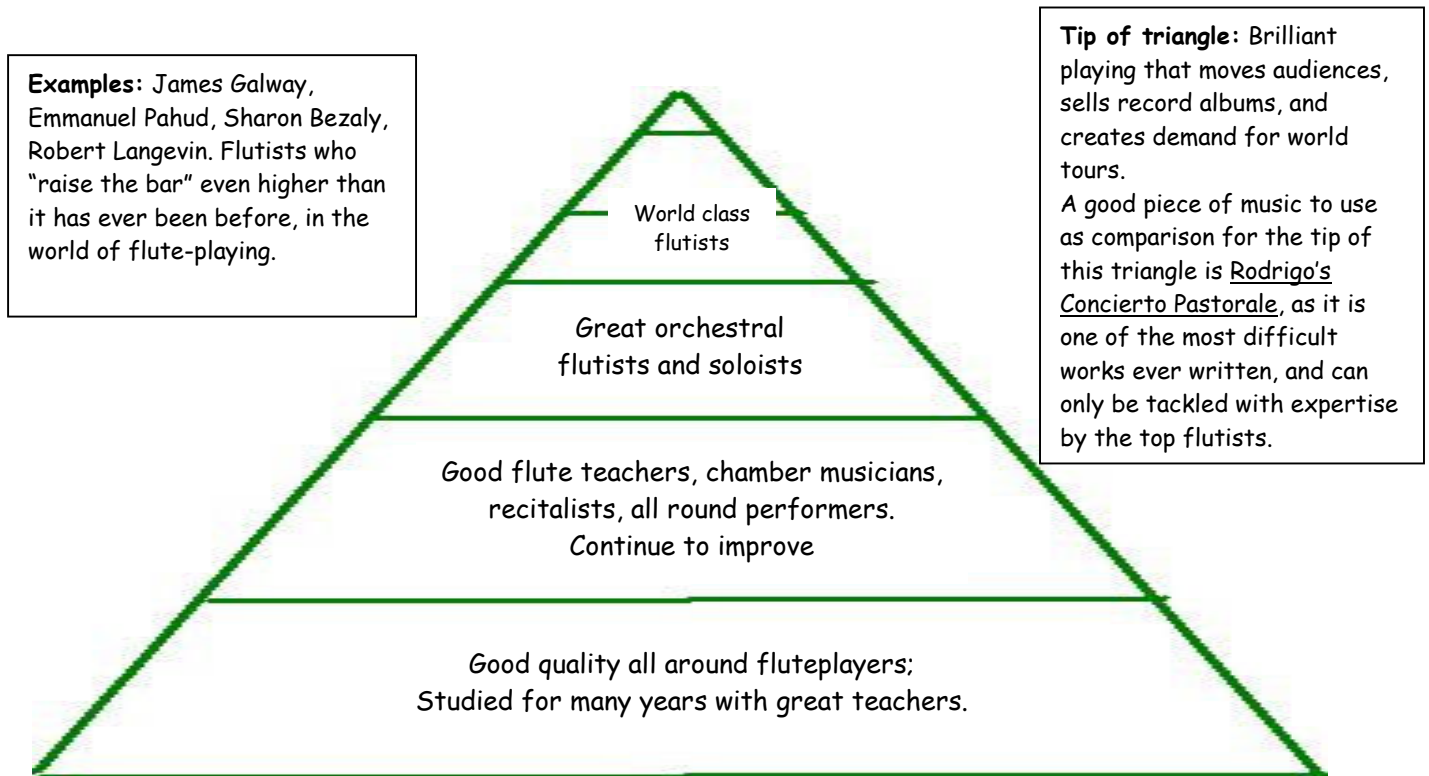
Simply put: These young band-flutists or amateurs who've never had private lessons do not understand the number of skill levels they must secure before they can move upward. For example, an 18 yr. old who wishes to pursue music as a career should have been taking private lessons since the age of 11-13, and continue their serious study until they are at least a "utility" player in order to teach others, or to become an education major with an eye to becoming a band teacher themselves. The skills a teenaged student will have been learning in the private lessons and in 1-3 hours of daily practise will be found on a [CHART](http://www.jennifercluff.com/chart.htm) of flute skills. Without these skills you should not be teaching others, and you probably should seriously consider whether or not to perform at a masterclass for a world-class flutist.

Chart: <http://www.jennifercluff.com/chart.htm>

Now let us look at the tip of the triangle, to find out where those world-class flutists are, and what they achieve at the tip. Of course not every flutist makes it so far, but those who do can point the way.

The top flute players in the world: Let's start at the top!

This is an example of the tiny tip of the triangle, if it was enlarged to show levels of flute skills at the top of the field of flute-playing. The very tip has about five to ten professional, world-class flutists:



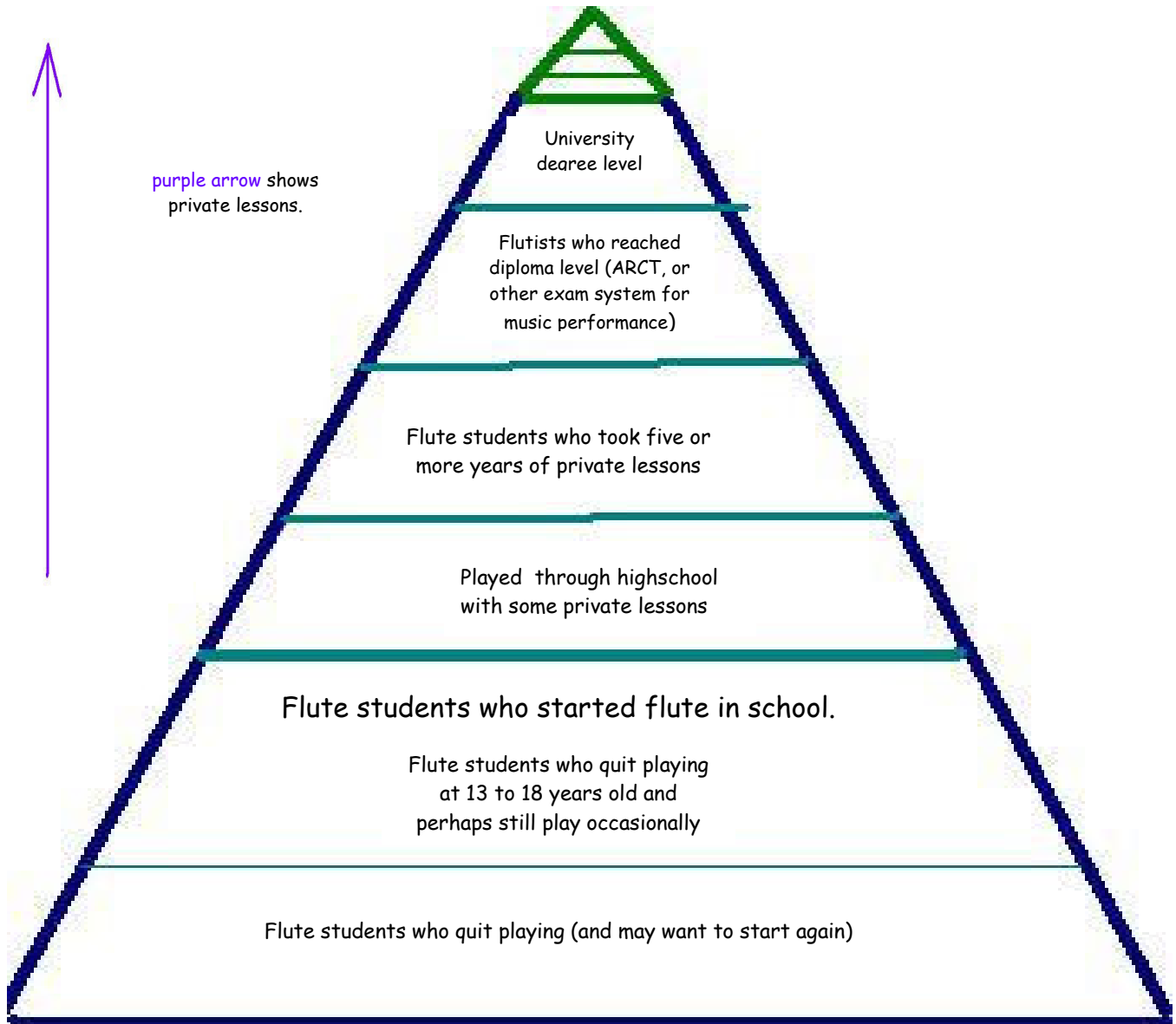
2. The top of the flute playing profession.

At the top of the flute playing profession there are a handful of fantastic flutists who raise the bar for flute playing every year. These outstanding players are equally adept at orchestral playing, chamber music, solos with orchestra, solos in recital, and at technical demands that most normal levels of talent and skill cannot match. These outstanding players still practise for hours everyday in addition to running their own careers. Sometimes they teach, sometimes they give masterclasses. Often they are too busy to teach or give advice on the internet. If so, follow the advice of those in the level just below "world class", and listen to recordings of the world-class flutists for inspiration.

Note: If you are a flute student preparing to attend a teaching seminar or masterclass with James Galway, Emmanuel Pahud or Robert Langevin, you will want to be seriously studying, with many years of quality private lessons, and all the technique of scales, studies, etudes, orchestral excerpts and solo repertoire. You need to be at quite a high level in order to utilize the information that they will be able to give you in your few minutes onstage.

This green triangle tip is greatly expanded in the above diagram. See next diagram for the blue triangle of flute students that are working their way upward to the higher levels.

At the base of the flute playing triangle:



3. Most flute players who ask questions on the internet seem to be at the skill level of this basic blue triangle. The kinds of questions they ask about scales, tone, practise methods, and skill development are representative of these developmental areas of study above. If a flutist performs at the University or Diploma level then they should consider taking masterclasses with the top flutists they can find. Otherwise, it is advised that they continue private lessons to diploma level, and audit professional-level masterclasses. Note: the size of the base of this triangle, flute students who quit after a year or two of band is much larger than represented above.

If you wish to advance from the base of the pyramid to the top, you will need specialized training for up to ten years, to play at the peak skill levels. You'll need to practise up to 3-6 hours a day. To rise upward, you need good work-ethic, have special talents, and be truly dedicated. It is not a career for everybody, and many are very happy as good all around utility players. Articles on flute skills and finding a private teacher can be found at www.jennifercluff.com