

Interview with Anna Noakes - 3rd March 2023

Interviewer: Alan Fortune Audio & Summariser: Rozanne Gomes

Born - 1957, Gravesend, Kent. Mother - artist. Stepfather - sculptor.

- Musical Interest - Godmother paid for her piano lessons. Then had flute lessons. Grandparents were both actors so also had their influence re: music.
- Started at the Royal Academy Junior School, then Royal Northern College Music, practiced for many hours. Worked at London Festival Ballet, Bilbao. BBC Symphony Orchestra started via recommendation from tutor, then as a first extra player and got lots of work. Did a world tour with RPO which was incredible.
- First session - 1984 at old CTS studios in Wembley. Met her husband, experienced percussionist Gary Kettel - on same film - learnt a lot in her first session.
- Different studios: Abbey Road Studios, Studio One - incomparable to any other (sound produced- incredible, austere) Air Lyndhurst - converted church, balcony covered in mattresses to absorb sound - was a very friendly place. CTS studios - part of Wembley stadium, no longer exists. Whitfield Street Studios - pop music/small albums. British Grove Studio in West London, no reverb. Not as satisfying to play there.
- Challenges - getting to places on time! Parking tickets/fines/trains not working. Coping alongside having young children.
- Exciting to be part of a session with so much talent, learning from others.
- Session work obtained from word-of-mouth mainly, never sure when your time is up!
- Main type of music - orchestral. Big scores for Marvel films, Bond, Harry Potter. Big British productions. Disney film remakes more recently. Audio network makes library music for TV companies to use. Video games. Pop backing tracks rarely use woodwind.
- Typical day: 10-6pm, or 2-9pm.
- Skills & Qualities - absorbing the situation - sometimes tensed/ relaxed. Recalling playing techniques. Very sensitive people around you and knowing what you need to do. Sense of humour. Adaptable.

- Creative process - experience helps you know how you should play. Eg. solo vs ensemble. Now you don't see action in films, you have to be told placement.
- Biggest fear - playing too loud!
- Atmosphere - Very concentrated. Now: alcohol & smoke-free. Time focused. Mutual appreciation. Great friendships formed.
- Types backgrounds of players in session work were mainly upper middle class/Oxbridge people. Specialist music schools. Arty background plus Academy. Everyone intensely dedicated to their music.
- Hierarchy - fixer is the boss! Leader(concert masters) are respected, sort issues, and are good communicators.
- People who stood out in sessions - Brass players are the best in the world. Richard Watkins - first horn. John Barclay - very specialised trumpeter. Skaila Kanga- specialised harpist. John Anderson - Oboist, had a dark sound, mellow, expressive sound.
- Women's roles - at least 50% women now in session orchestra. Plenty in brass now. Flutes - mainly women. Woodwind - occasionally women. Last 15 years, more women in string section. Anecdote - Abbey Road Studios Ladies facilities.
- Special studio: Abbey Road- when 100 people playing; quick greeting, less refreshments. Compared to a soloist - treated like a queen! (At the same venue) Air Studios has a great cafe. British Grove had to walk far to get there, no parking. No change in vibe as each studio provides a different service.
- Payment - cash initially £150 /single session (35 years ago). Now, fill out a form, paid by bank transfer. £207 - 3 hour film session, not as lucrative. No royalties before PPL. String players benefit more from playing on pop tracks.
- Overdubbing on flute is rare. Gary Kettel - percussionist on films-earns 3x as she does. Tracking is overdubbing, you are playing on top of yourself.
- Accreditation -Alberto Iglesias credits her & writes for her beautifully. Fixers & assistants get credited. Very few musicians get accredited; named below gaffer and grip!
- Musicians Union- became a member because you had to be in order to be employed by fixers until 15 years ago. Musicians Union helped her with a problem at a Conservatoire.

- Difficulties-can't be ill ever. Always on form-even after recovering/bereaved etc you have to just forget and play. Covid anecdote re: session player choking.
- Balance between work & family life-she played when her children were young as she thought she'd forget how to play. Introduced her children to art.
- Most memorable session - (brought a picture) working on Harry Potter 3 film with John Williams -excellent player. He writes virtuosic music- hard to play. Anecdote - film sessions.
- Tech changes - 'Click' didn't exist when she first did films. Now it's used continuously during sessions, can change bar to bar. Less of a musical experience. James Horner never used Click, just hands to conduct. Comparison of sessions today to earlier work -composers rely on computers for composing. Music can be unplayable as a result! 7 pages of woodwind music without spaces to breathe-unrealistic to play. Anecdote - prevalence of synthesised sound.
- Session work meaning - played with the best musicians, played fantastic scores, as freelance player she's been open to playing all kinds of music. No orchestral politics in session bands.
- Anecdote -American strike showed that UK rates and royalties are very low.