



## PERFORMER CORNER

### Introducing Kathy Kienzle

by Mary Sorlie

Kathy Kienzle is currently the principal harpist with the Minnesota Orchestra. She joined the orchestra in 1993. Originally from Oregon, she received a Bachelors Degree in Harp from Juilliard and a Masters Degree in Harp from the University of Arizona. While she was at the University of Arizona, she received the only harp assistantship in the United States that was offered to students. Originally she wanted to be a soloist, then a full-time college teacher, and finally an orchestral player. "I kept changing my mind as I learned more about these careers," Kathy says.

Kathy began harp lessons when she was seven years old. She started piano lessons with her mother when she was six, as her harp teacher required some basic piano skills before harp lessons. Her private harp teachers and high school orchestra teacher all were strong influences in her musical studies. She began to play with the high school musicals while she was a sixth grader. She played all over Oregon and Idaho all the way through high school and feels fortunate to have been in a place where there were not many harpists. Her first harp teacher had studied in Paris and New York and had great training, so she was lucky to have someone so good from the very beginning. One of her earliest performance memories is playing *Silent Night* for her grade school Christmas Concert.

Kathy's parents asked her to make a serious commitment about playing the harp when they bought her first pedal harp. She was twelve years old at the time. They told her she had a decision to make, and at that time, she was ready to do that. It was when she was a junior in high school that she began to practice three to four hours per day. Kathy feels that solid practice foundation for so many years has prepared her technically to do whatever she needs to play now. She is extremely efficient in her practice today, and rarely needs to practice more than two hours a day. Kathy notes that harpists cannot practice as long as string players in a day because it is physi-

cally hard.

Kathy did perform in a lot of competitions in high school and through her post-graduate years, including three international competitions. She feels that she may have performed in too many of them — "I got so into trying to win that I forgot about the whole point of performing, and that is communicating through the music to the audience. My performing became very perfect and technical and not very interesting musically."

Kathy has served on the faculty of Bethel and Macalester Colleges, the University of St. Thomas and the College of St. Catherine. She currently serves on the faculty of the University of Minnesota School of Music, Augsburg College and MacPhail Center for Music. As for her own teaching, she has been very highly influenced by Mary Kay Waddington, the founder of the Suzuki harp method. Kathy started studying Suzuki teaching after having already taught for 15 years and comments, "the students just keep getting better and better. Repertoire for national competitions is getting more and more difficult for younger and younger ages. The first batch of Suzuki harp students are now winning national harp competitions, becoming teachers themselves and starting to participate in international harp competitions. More new repertoire is written for harp all the time, and as a result, technique is getting stretched further than ever before." The main things Kathy hopes her students learn are a love for music and a love for the harp. She also hopes they learn to be their own best teacher, listening to themselves and striving to improve their playing. Her advice to students today? "If they really want to make a living in music, they have to be determined to give it everything they have. They need to find the very best teachers. Above all, if it is not a passion, they need to find another field — one that is a passion for them."

One of the most exciting concerts that Kathy ever played in was in Lahti, Finland, this past February with the Minnesota

Orchestra. "Despite the fact that we traveled about eight hours that day and arrived at the hall only 45 minutes before the concert, the atmosphere and enthusiasm of the audience got our adrenaline going. We played five encores." This tour also included concerts in Vienna, Berlin and London.

And what else does Kathy do outside of her busy orchestra and teaching schedule?



Photo credit: Ann Marsden

Kathy Kienzle

She is currently serving on the negotiation committee of the Minnesota Orchestra — an experience she says is very interesting. She has also just served on the jury of the USA International Harp Competition, her first international competition as a judge.

*Mary Sorlie is an active as a free-lance violinist and a frequent guest conductor and string clinician. She has been on the conducting staff of the MacPhail Center Suzuki program and is currently in her 4<sup>th</sup> season as conductor for the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies. Mary taught violin and string methods at Northwestern College for 18 years. ‡*