

M Kat's Tale

By Carla Reublin

Musician and composer, Kat Epple has an extraordinary resume. This year's recipient of the Angels of the Arts award for Performing Artist of the Year, the flautist has produced film scores and television soundtracks for The History Channel, National Geographic, Carl Sagan, *The Cutting Edge* and NASA, just to name a few. She has won 8 Emmy Awards, been nominated for a Grammy and has released 18 music albums internationally. Epple has traveled all over the world from the thick brush of the Amazon to the low coastal plains of Kenya to take in the diverse cultural and musical language of our planet. She has performed at the Guggenheim in New York City and Spain, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hollywood Palace, as well as a slew of art openings, charity benefits and cafes. The Worldwide Peace Marker Project named her ambassador for the United States, she shared a deep and loving friendship with artist Robert Rauschenberg, and recently sat next to former president Bill Clinton at a memorial for the artist in Washington DC (where they discussed, at length, his extensive saxophone collection).

Kat Epple's life is an impressive one by any standards, and you might automatically envision her as an on-the-go multitasker, frenetically on the phone moving and shaking. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Although, admittedly she always has many "runs in the fire", Kat Epple has a serene presence that is entirely in the moment. Soft-spoken and seemingly shy, she has a quiet strength not immediately apparent, that radiates from her delicate features.

Kat was born in Ohio, the shy, quiet daughter of a psychologist mother and a father who was an environmental manager. Her

parents saw music as a hobby, something to do for fun but never considered it a valid career choice. Listening to her parents' albums, Kat reminisces upon hearing the flute for the first time: "I remember hearing the sound of the flute, and even before I knew what it was, I wanted to play it. My father had a lot of classical music, but I think the first time I really heard it was on a Brazilian record."

Kat's father died when she was very young, but her mother finally recognized her daughter's talent as substantive and noteworthy. "I think I was around 40 when my mother recognized that I had achieved a measure of success," she says with a laugh. "When she saw me performing in larger venues and then talked with people who respected my work, I think she thought 'Well, OK, maybe I don't get it, but others obviously do'."

Kat began her career studying music in college but was discouraged by the rigid learned methods taught by professors. "When I first thought that I wanted to be a music major, some of the professors started making it so much like work and intimidating that I thought that I did not want my love of music and my freedom in my music to be taken away. If you follow instruction then I feel you are going to be regurgitating the same thing."

In keeping with this individualistic personality, Kat has experimented in many different genres of music. After leaving college, she performed in a rock 'n' roll band which led her to found an avant-garde synthesizer group named Emerald Web, based in San Francisco, which she describes as an "ambient" type of band lined with new age. Emerald Web went on to record 11 albums, and tour the US, and it was during this time that Kat moved to Fort Myers to be near her mother.

In 1989, shortly after moving to Fort Myers, Kat met the legendary artist Robert Rauschenberg and they quickly formed a friendship which would last for the next 20 years. The two met at a party hosted by Dr. & Mrs. Fanning at their home located on the Calosahatchee riverfront. "I believe it was a wine and sushi party and Bob was there playing with his chopsticks banging on the wine bottles making melodies...ting ting ting...and I picked up bottles and began blowing into them making different notes. And we made this incredible music. We had an immediate connection."

Kat lights up as she talks lovingly about the world renowned artist, who passed away in 2008. "I miss those talks about art and how it relates to the world and peace and love." She credits him as a kindred soul and her biggest influence. "A passion for art and a passion for life, those are the two greatest gifts that Bob has given me."

Her friendship with Rauschenberg afforded Kat the opportunity to travel frequently, performing at many of his shows around the world. "I have always had wanderlust; I always wanted to travel and wanted my music to be my ticket." Throughout her travels, Kat has had the opportunity to observe and interact with many different societies and cultures. "People really aren't all that different. We are all really motivated by the same things...parents protecting their children, wanting good food, clean water and a place to live...I know that is very universal."

Kat is currently working on film scores where she is exploring the feel and mood of two very powerful subjects. One is a documentary on the art of the Olympics — how many of these athletes have moved from accomplishing amazing athletic

feats to creating incredible artwork. The other is a documentary about art psychotherapy, focusing on people with severe mental illnesses who, through art therapy, become functioning members of society. "It's really a learned skill to create a sound that projects emotion. It is not a song, a song doesn't work. I have done it through trial and error. You try twenty things before something starts to work."

According to Kat, the biggest misconception people

have about her is that she is timid. Although her voice and manner may echo the pitch and sound of the flute — somewhat soft and ethereal — it is clear that a lifetime of challenging musical convention, a steadfast refusal to compromise, a passion to encourage peace and more than 20 years of toasting the world looks less like timidity, and more like courage. ■



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