



# *Playing it forward*

Lorrie Berkshire Brown, EdD '08  
(center on ladder)  
Adjunct Professor of Oboe and Woodwind Education Methods,  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, Virginia





By Dena Roché  
Photos by Bruce Racine

For Lorrie Berkshire Brown, EdD '08, her fierce determination and passion for music have served her well as a soloist, entrepreneur and adjunct Professor of Oboe and Woodwind Education Methods at George Mason University.

You've heard the phrase, "Those that can, do, and those that can't, teach." Nothing could be further from the truth for Lorrie Berkshire Brown.

As Adjunct Professor of Oboe and Woodwind Education Methods at George Mason University, Berkshire Brown teaches group and private lessons to students ranging from the 6th grade (through the University's affiliation with Potomac Academy) to 60-year-old adults, while maintaining a full-time position as Oboe Section Leader with "Pershing's Own," The United States Army Band and Orchestra, and running a business as a world-renowned oboe repair technician. But talk to the effervescent Berkshire Brown and it's clear that educating the next generation is her true passion.

"I think from the first moment that you study, your gratitude toward your teachers is so profound it's just natural for you to want to bring someone else along," she says.

Berkshire Brown was blessed to have amazing mentors along her path who clearly influenced her professional career, but even more importantly set the tone for the type of teacher she became.

### The seeds of education are planted

Although she decided at age 9 that she was going to be a musician, Berkshire Brown didn't have any private tutors until she was in college. Despite not having a teacher of her own, she was already teaching younger kids and fixing their instruments.

At Arizona State University she finally had one-on-one tutoring, but it was Dr. Richard Strange of the Symphonic Band who really encouraged her. "I doubt there was anyone outside of my mom who expressed such confidence in me as he did," she says. "I do not teach a day or play a note without thinking of something Dr. Strange said or did."

Berkshire Brown continued to teach while in college, serving as an oboe instructor and counselor at the ASU Tontozowna Music Camp, and she studied woodwind repair with Jim Wade of the famous Artley Corporation.

### One mentor leads to another

After graduating in 1982 with a Bachelor of Music in Performance, Berkshire Brown moved East to study

at the Vermont Guild of Flute Building. When she heard a recording by Al Genovese, the principal oboist of the Boston Symphony, she knew she had to study under him. The only problem? He wasn't interested. In desperation, Berkshire Brown and a friend convinced a school bus driver to drive them to his house in the Berkshires. Clearly, pulling up in a huge yellow bus made an impression and Genovese took her on. Berkshire Brown commuted five hours every Saturday to train with him while also balancing her studies and her first adjunct position at the University of Vermont teaching Adult Music Appreciation.

"Al never charged me a dime for lessons, which was good because I also had a job at J.C. Penny's just to keep a roof over my head," she says with a laugh. "He would take me to lunch with his incredible colleagues. They shared stories and I soaked it all in. Truly amazing."

In 1983 Genovese told Berkshire Brown she had to go to the Manhattan School of Music to study with Joe Robinson, one of the most influential oboists in the world. No questions asked, she auditioned. "His reaction was so positive that I [cancelled] my audition with Julliard that was later that day," she says.


Thankfully, she was accepted into the program and while earning her master's degree was "adopted" by Joe. "I was invited to Thanksgiving, became his daughter's oboe teacher and even house sat for him," she says. "I owe him and Al both my career."

### Professional and teaching careers take off

After earning her Master's Degree in Performance, Berkshire Brown continued to weave a career incorporating performing, instrument repair, and of course, teaching.

For many years she worked as a freelance oboist with orchestras in New York before landing a substitute position with the New York Philharmonic in 1986. To help make ends meet, she ran a flute and oboe repair business out of her studio apartment that attracted top musicians. She taught at the New York State Music Camp and in Taiwan before securing another university position in 1990 as Instructor of Oboe at The Manhattan School of Music.





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Berkshire Brown believes her diverse experiences are a strength she brings to the classroom. “When teachers are still in contact with their field, they’re excited about it and not jaded and cynical,” she says. “I bring students to my rehearsals. They have to know that kind of energy or they won’t be ready for it.”

Despite all the real world experience she brought to the classroom, Berkshire Brown reached a point where she wanted to learn something new. And she can’t say enough about how her experiences at the University of Phoenix impact her teaching. “The program was so practical. I can apply every single class,” she says. “Attending was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

### She’s in the Army now

In 1989, Berkshire Brown won a spot in “Pershings Own” The United States Army Band and Orchestra. She’s performed for six presidents, countless world leaders and many celebrities during her 23 years in the ensemble. But when asked about it, the first thing she mentions is how she sits second chair to one of her former students.

Clearly, Berkshire Brown is having an impact on the next generation of musicians. Her students have won spots with ensembles like the U.S. Army and Navy Bands, performed at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and given back as educators in K-12 and higher education positions throughout the country.

“When I get an email from a student or run into them and they tell me how much my class meant, I know it was all worth it,” she says. “All the work I put into it had a point. That is staying power.” 🌟

Dena Roché is a freelance journalist covering lifestyle profiles, travel and health and wellness. She is based in Phoenix.