



Oboist finds new life after near death

By Valerie Hill, Record staff

June 8, 2011

KITCHENER — A week before a concert with the Cambridge Community Orchestra, oboist Katrina Lisa Liddell nearly lost her life.

"I was worried who was going to play the oboe," she said of the day she collapsed in agony. She soon learned her gallbladder was moments from rupturing.

Yet the ever-smiling Liddell said the experience didn't change her, at least nothing like the life-altering event of having a child. After all, she'd been through a lot in her young life, including a couple of brushes with death, six surgeries and a difficult childhood. This gall bladder experience was just one more issue to deal with.

Now in her 30s and the mother of a four-year-old son, Liddell teaches music in her Kitchener home and at the Renaissance School of the Arts in Waterloo. She also plays with the Cambridge orchestra, substitutes with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, performs with various groups including the baroque ensemble Arcady and is in demand as a soloist and a singer. Liddell is also assistant conductor with the Cambridge Community Orchestra and in March she was shortlisted after auditioning with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

"I was very privileged to get that far," she said.

It's a busy life for a young musician but it seemed she was destined for the role.

"I was 16 months old when I started plunking on the piano," she said. "I picked up the recorder in Grade 1 and in Grade 7 you had to pick your instrument." It was her music teacher that exposed Liddell to the oboe and "that was it, I was in love."

Liddell received her first award in music at 14 and said that music always came easily to her. Any instrument she picked up at school, she could manage a tune. "No one else was able to pick up an instrument and play it," she said.

Despite her happy disposition, Liddell's life has never been easy. Her father left the family when she was a couple of months old and so Liddell's mother moved her and her three children into their grandparents' home. Problem was, grandpa was an alcoholic.

"I moved out when I was 17 and went to school," she said. So young and so far from home, she studied music at the University of Western Ontario under full scholarship, driven by her passion for music. After one year, health problems erupted. Liddell had to leave school. After recovering from surgery, she started over, switching to Wilfrid Laurier University, where she shone under the tutelage of one of Canada's premier oboists.

"James Mason is phenomenal," she said. Liddell graduated from Laurier with a music degree in oboe

performance.

On Saturday night, she will perform with the Cambridge Community Orchestra in their final concert of the season, *Vocal Splendor*, featuring a program of highlights from opera, operetta and musical theatre in a pay-what-you-can concert.

"I'm a full-time mother at this point in my life," she said. "It is still a struggle. Being a musician, it's really hard."

Her next great hope is for her son Emmett, who is only four but already showing promise as a musician. "He's so gifted," she said.

Doctors had told her that, given her many medical conditions, she'd never have children. "It was a tough pregnancy, he had a growth on his neck. They told me to terminate the pregnancy, but when he was born, it (the growth) was gone. He's perfectly fine."

That seems to be the story of Liddell's life: no matter the obstacle, just soldier on and everything will turn out fine.

vhill@therecord.com

Concert

Vocal Splendor

Cambridge Community Orchestra

Saturday, 8 p.m.

Forward Baptist Church

455 Myers Rd., Cambridge

Pay what you can

www.cambridgeorchestra.ca

This article is for personal use only courtesy of TheRecord.com - a division of Metroland Media Group Ltd.
