

Congratulations 2017 Graduates! We have gathered today in celebration of the time we've spent at CU-Boulder. Time studying, practicing, teaching, performing, composing, growing, laughing, crying and now we are here to celebrate our next steps-both whole and half.

A huge thank you to all the people that have come to celebrate our graduation. Thank you to parents, siblings, and extended family members. Thank you to our professors, administrators, teaching assistants and excellent staff. To our peers: best friends and friendly acquaintances. Without this community, we would not be here today. As I look back at my four years here, I am amazed at all the outstanding accomplishments this class has had: winning orchestral positions, winning the Performing Arts Track at the CU New Venture Challenge, moving on to graduate school, teaching positions, and more. Our class has achieved a lot. Just remember it's okay to occasionally rest—but make sure you keep counting. While I'm excited for what's next, I am also sad to leave such a great institution. So, I want to share a few stories that exemplify what I will take away from my undergraduate experience.

When I was a sophomore, I played in a woodwind quintet. We decided at the beginning of the fall semester to play *Summer Music* by Samuel Barber. This quintet piece has some very difficult technical passages and during the final performance, I fumbled some of the technique. I was disappointed—I wanted to be perfect! After the performance, as we were packing up, I said to the flute player, “I’m sorry I totally messed up that section.” She looked at me and said, “I like you. I like playing with you and that’s what matters.”

I like you. I like playing with you. That's what matters. These sentences have stuck with me throughout the rest of my undergraduate experience. The flutist in my quintet taught me an important lesson that day. She showed me that what matters in music is the people and the relationships we form. It is the connection that we have with our collaborators, with the audience, and in the relationship that we create with the music. I've had many more experiences with this in the College of Music. In the large ensembles I have played in, Professor Lewis and Dr. McKinney constantly tell the students that they value us, our work, and the time they get to work with us. It's easy to take those statements and write them off. After the conductor says this, I often hear grumbles of "no pressure" or "I hope I don't mess this up now" and I've found myself falling into that as well. But that is completely missing the point. They are telling us the same thing that the flutist told me. Music is about relationships and about people. It's about a willingness to be vulnerable, to bring ideas, to be yourself.

I've also learned how important joy and play are in this process. I would love to look back and tell you how I intensely debated musical ideas with my classmates in all my collaborations, but as I look back at the many sectionals, coachings, research meetings, and rehearsals, in addition to the hard work, I vividly remember the laughter. I remember times when we made jokes, told stories—some quintet rehearsals we even played around on each other's instruments. Painter Henri Matisse once said, "Creative people are curious, flexible, persistent, and independent with a tremendous spirit of adventure and a love of play." I've found that this idea carries through to my studies as well. Music takes not only enormous discipline, but also a sense of fun, of humor, of playfulness. It is through this sense of joy

and play that we've created the intimacy and trust necessary to communicate and create complex art.

A few years ago a classmate of mine told me that "there are only five real jobs for oboists." He was alluding to the five Principal positions in what he considered to be the top most prestigious orchestras in the United States. While I could tell he was partly joking, his statement shared a lot about his mentality. At the time, I was shocked and didn't really know how to react. I laughed it off. But, this statement still makes me sad.

Music is not about status games—although it sometimes feels like it is. I remember as a freshman feeling the same anxiety and sense that there was only one way for me to be successful – Principal in an orchestra. If I didn't accomplish that, then what was I going to do? When I came to CU as a freshman, I lived in a dorm mostly filled with physical science majors. I was asked constantly, "What do you want to *be*? But what are you *really* going to do?" I was overwhelmed by those questions and, to avoid them, I started telling people that I was going to add a "real" major like engineering, or miniature poodle decorating. But the idea that some majors are more "real" than others is a joke. A dance major once told me that when people asked her what she "actually wants to be," she responded "I want to be myself. I want to be happy." When I finally stopped worrying about how "real" my major was, I found so many complexities and fascinating intersections in this discipline. The study of music is vast and we all know that a degree in music takes a great deal of work, skill, and commitment. I mean not everyone can get themselves to 8:00 am aural skills.

But, in all seriousness, I feel extremely privileged to be able to study music and be able to share my four years with all of you. I recognize that everyone's experience here has been different, and it is such a credit to the students, faculty, and community to be able to define and achieve such diverse paths to success. I have built confidence in being myself through my experiences here. I was worried for a long time that I was not on the "right" path. I was worried that if I didn't get into this festival or win that competition my whole career would be ruined. But, my teacher, Peter Cooper, has shared with me that big successes like winning orchestral jobs, teaching positions, and more are made by ten thousand small successes we make every day like making a reed vibrate for the first or hundredth time, practicing our long tones, studying the Mozart Concerto...again. It's okay taking one step at a time. And, even a big success like winning an orchestral position is just one of many ways to fulfill our true goal: to make and share music.

So whether we are making our way to further education, into a professional career, or along any other path, each of us will continue to grow and transform. We do not need to have everything figured out or worry if we are on the right path. Because if we work—and play—with confidence and integrity, we can connect with others and enjoy the journey, however it takes shape for each of us. Thank you!