

Kim Laskowski: On Practicing With a Structure, Developing an Expressive Sound, and Learning How to Truly Listen

Description

Have you ever gotten discouraged because it felt like you started something too late? Or that you were too “old?”

Like, maybe the voice in your head has been telling you that you are too “old” to win an orchestra job.

Or it says that you started taking piano lessons “too late,” so now you need to play catch-up and work twice as hard on everything from your technique to repertoire to sight-reading to theory, ear training, and all the things that every other pianist seems to have learned long ago?

Or maybe that voice tells you that you’re both too late *and* too old? And that it’s not possible at this point to learn how to double tongue, become local pickleball champion, or build a social media empire around your spoon playing talents?

That voice can get pretty loud sometimes. And it can be pretty convincing too.

So how do we get the voice to shush? And make room for the possibility that maybe we’re capable of more than we think?

Finding a different narrative

One way of building confidence involves editing the story we tell ourselves. And learning about others who have overcome the same mental barriers we are facing, can be a real help.

For instance, it was thought for many years that running a mile in under four minutes was impossible. And then Roger Bannister ran a 3:59:04 in May of 1954.

This seemed to unlock something in the track community, because his competitor John Landy ran a 3:57:09 the next month. And then 15 other runners proceeded to do so over the next three years.

I’ve certainly experienced the too late/too old narrative myself over the years, and it’s a fear that I hear pretty regularly from musicians of all ages and levels.

So I thought it might be helpful to chat with a musician whose career dispels the too late/too old narrative, and decidedly did *not* follow the typical path and timeline that one would expect of most orchestral musicians.

And who might that be?

Meet Kim Laskowski

Bassoonist Kim Laskowski has been associate principal bassoon of the New York Philharmonic since 2003 – winning her position at the age of 48. As a freelancer, Broadway musician, and member of the New York City Ballet Orchestra and Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra at various points in her career, she also has many TV, radio, and film score credits to her name, plus two platinum records for CD's she recorded with *10,000 Maniacs*.

Kim also serves on the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music and The Juilliard School.

In today's episode, we'll explore...

- 2:44 – Kim's initial inspiration, the bassoonist whose recording "captivated" her, and the journey that led her from freelancing to winning the NY Phil job at age 48.
- 11:28 – what did Kim's audition preparation look like?
- 15:17 – the most useful thing Kim's teacher ever said to her (even though it was difficult to accept at the time).
- 17:12 – the skill her French classmates had that she didn't, which she feels was the key to their ability to learn new music faster than she could.
- 20:38 – the thing that gave Kim a "big boost" of encouragement and kept her going in her preparation for the NY Phil audition.
- 21:40 – the question you should ask yourself when listening to a recording in order to get the most out of it.
- 24:52 – the number of repetitions Kim puts in that seems to work wonders for her playing.
- 30:39 – Playing fast didn't necessarily come naturally to Kim – so how did she figure out how to play fast?
- 32:10 – What is Kim listening for when she's practicing?
- 33:40 – The importance of telling a story or having a message in your orchestral audition.
- 35:17 – Kim explains why trying to do things in your orchestral audition that are "original" is a mistake. She also explains what you should do instead.
- 40:47 – What are some of the confidence-building strategies Kim used in the early part of her career at the NY Phil?

Notes

- 13:46 – the concept of variable practice comes up, which you can read more about [here](#).
- 14:38 – speaking of identifying weaknesses, this is something LA Phil principal trumpet player Tom Hooten speaks to in [his podcast episode](#) as well.
- 16:57 – Kim speaks to the value of solfège, and this is something that came up in trumpet player [Kristian Steenstrup's interview](#)

as well.

- 20:19 – Kim mentions the book [Performance Success, by Don Greene](#), whose work and sport psych class at Juilliard were my introduction to performance psychology as well.
- 24:51 – Kim alludes to the idea of 21 repetitions. This is indeed a popular number that we've all heard, but often can't remember quite where it came from. You can read a little more about the research in this area [here](#).
- 28:02 – Here's Christine Carter's article on random practice that Kim alludes to: [Why the Progress You Make in the Practice Room Seems to Disappear Overnight – PART 1](#)
- 34:14 – Here's the Bryan Cranston video on auditioning that I mentioned: [Inspiring advice from Bryan Cranston to aspiring actors](#)
- 37:58 – Kim mentions Blaise Déjardin's interview, which you can listen to here: [Blaise Déjardin: On Emotion, Technique, and the Kind of Practice That Facilitates Consistently Beautiful Performances](#)

More insights from Kim

You can read about Kim's experience performing in North Korea with the NY Phil in 2008:

- [Steps for Cultural Diplomacy](#)

Or listen to her interview on the [Double Reed Dish](#) podcast:

- [Episode 61 – Kim Laskowski](#)

Or check out what's in her case, via the NY Phil's *What's In My Case* series:

- [What's In My Case? Kim Laskowski](#)

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