

# A Review of the Play with a Pro, Emmanuel Pahud Series - Part 2 of 3: Masterclasses

By GPFS board member [Dr. Abigail Sperling](#)



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## Masterclasses

Picking up where we last left off, I would like to continue examining Emanuel Pahud’s “[Play with a Pro](#)” package. As a reminder, Pahud offers us more than eight hours of HD-quality instructional videos which cover all vital aspects of flute playing. Broken into three categories (with a few extras included!) this online resource is a priceless gem for students, teachers, or anyone curious about how he thinks about basics, masterworks, and orchestral excerpts.

1. Bach, Suite in B minor
2. Berio, Sequenza
3. Messiaen, Le Merle Noir
4. Nielsen, Concerto
5. Reinecke, Concerto
6. Sancan, Sonatine
7. Schubert, Trockne Blumen
8. Taffanel, Mignon’s Fantasie

From Bach to Taffanel, this series of masterclasses deals with some of the most treasured literature in the flute’s repertoire, and some of the most difficult. In the last issue, I looked at the Orchestral Studies part of this package. In this issue, I examine the masterclasses portion.

Again, subscribers can start with any masterclass from the list to the left. Sometimes Pahud jumps right into his own teaching (as in the Bach Suite), but at times there is a student performer that begins the session. The video sometimes cuts between student

performers, to Pahud describing an element (or two, or three!) of the piece. For example, in Schubert’s *Trockne Blumen* a student performer takes us through the theme and several variations before stopping, and the video cuts to another student performer with Pahud describing the character of each of the variations of this work. It would be nearly impossible to teach on an entire work like *Trockne Blumen* in a single lesson (many of us spent entire semesters learning these works!), by using student performers Pahud is able to focus in on common issues as they arise.

This is particularly effective in works like Messiaen's *Le Merle Noir*, a difficult work for flute and piano that even the best performers can easily misinterpret. Naturally, the student performers fall into some common traps and Pahud is able to quickly – and good-naturedly – dissuade them of their misguided notions. For example, the bird calls in this work are sometimes interpreted musically – question and answer phrases – instead of as the unequal and uneven squawks of a blackbird. Whether one has played this work or not, watching a student interpret this work one way only to be quickly corrected is effective teaching, especially for us as observers.

Another fine example is Berio's *Sequenza*, where we see a student performer play the complete work. Right away Pahud discusses which version to play (the original, not the new edition), and the whole concept of the piece as an Italian comedy (complete with characters) and other details which help us know the piece better. This is Pahud at his best: conveying knowledge that many of us do not know, never learned, but that we can immediately understand and even put into practice.

That being said, in the Orchestral Studies section of this package we saw Pahud alone, performing and teaching by himself. In this section, the use of student performers can be both a blessing and an irritant. While they certainly highlight common problems, it will inevitably be the case that some of the issues Pahud will talk about do not apply to everyone, and he is easily side-tracked (as all good teachers are, hem hem). Of course, this is fine. Who wouldn't want to watch Pahud teach anytime, anywhere? But his unvarnished directness in the Orchestral Studies section is somewhat missing here.

Of course, it is essential that one knows these works well before attempting these lessons; just like we might expect in a "normal" masterclass, where performers are fully prepared to play through the entire piece to the best of their abilities, I would recommend getting to know these works before striking out on this part of the package. But when learning, or perfecting, one of these difficult works, there is no question that Pahud's knowledge and interpretive suggestions are invaluable.

*In many ways, his classes presented this way may be more useful than watching him teach a lesson or masterclass to someone – where we might be bound by the player's approach or needs. Here we get Pahud at his most knowledgeable and musical. Sometimes he is practical ("breathe here, not there") but at other times he is suggestive, giving listeners more room for their own spin on something. There is truly something for every flute player in this series of videos.*

The length of the lessons varies between about 22 minutes (Bach *Suite*) to upwards of 45 (Taffanel's *Mignon's Fantasia*). Stopping, starting, and rewinding is all at the touch of a button, making this subsection easy to use.



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