

Took her “breath away,” says talented teen

By **JEANNIE BOTTERI**
Observer staff

Annie Berry, a senior at Woodbridge Senior High School (WSHS), is graduating from high school having achieved what some people dream of achieving their entire lives. On Feb. 20, she performed in the Flutopia Wind Ensemble at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

Founded in 2000 by the late Judith Lapple, Flutopia is an exclusive group of talented young musicians from the Washington, D.C. area. Auditions are highly competitive. An accomplished oboist, Berry performed with the group on one of the world's most famous stages.

“It’s hard to put into words, it took my breath away,” revealed Berry of how she felt before the notable performance. “I couldn’t have gone to Carnegie Hall with a better group of people. They are the best of the best,” commended the young musician.

The fresh-faced teen has been playing the wind instrument for six years, since the age of 12. When asked why she chose the oboe of all instruments, she replied, “I played the piano and flute. My mother found that I would get more scholarship opportunities playing the oboe, so that’s what I got under the Christmas tree. I fell in love with it, and here I am.”

Under direction of her private teacher, Ron Sipes, Berry practices the oboe multiple times a day, seven days a week. “Mr. Sipes is a calm force in my life. He has taught me



Jeannie Botteri/the Old Bridge Observer

Oboist Annie Berry spends many hours among her school's musical instruments.

so much, and his dedication inspires me every day,” said Berry.

Her schedule is full of upcoming events, performances and auditions. Berry happily spends hours perfecting her musical talent, and it is clear that this is something she truly enjoys. “Even if I have a bad day or audition or concert, I learn from that. People have instilled this in me from day one,” said Berry emphatically.

She also greatly admires Jenny Lapple, the current director of the elite ensemble. Flutopia’s founder passed away in August 2010, and Lapple stepped up to fill her mother’s shoes as director.

“It is amazing to be around Jenny, and to pick up her passion and influence. She is one of the most passionate people I know,” explained Berry.

Berry is enrolled in WSHS’s Center for the Fine and Performing Arts Program. She is a four-year member of the Woodbridge Symphonic Band, was in the marching band for 2 years and has played with the orchestra and choir.

The oboist made All County Band three years, All County Orchestra three years, All District Band three years, and made All State Band last year. Mark Carder, WSHS band director, encouraged Berry to stick with the oboe. As a freshman, Berry’s interest in the instrument waned. “But he believed in me,” Berry said.

Berry plans to attend college in the fall and major in music performance. She hopes to one day teach music. “I found something that I love to do. I’m lucky,” she reflected candidly. The senior credits her family for providing support and motivation throughout her musical career.

“I couldn’t have done this without them, especially my sister, Emma,” noted Berry.

Offering up some advice to aspiring musicians, Berry said with a smile, “Practice, practice, practice. Set a goal and go for it. It’s amazing what can happen when you set your mind to it. Every experience is a learning one.”