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*Occasional  
Papers*

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REMARKS

by

**Charlotte Mabrey**

*2001 Distinguished Professor*

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## Distinguished Professor Lecture: 2001-2002

### Charlotte Mabrey

#### *2001 Distinguished Professor*

Well, I wanted to start my speech with: Welcome everyone to the UNF Music Department's new home!!! But that was before the convocation was moved from the new recital hall into Robinson Theater. And while I have spent many hours performing on this stage, I am thrilled that the Music Department finally moved into our new home this August.



I know I am not supposed to say that, as the new building is really a university space, but I cannot help myself. It is such a glorious space, especially when I remember back only a few months. The Music Department was housed in building two, a space we had indeed outgrown. And now we are in a new, beautiful facility.

Some of you are probably asking, "who is this person and why is she speaking?" These are very good questions. While I have something of a handle on the first question, I am still grappling with the second one. I am quite sure that I was the most surprised person at UNF when I was told that I had been selected the 2001 Distinguished Professor.

And UNF has a funny way of communicating these things. I first was told I had been nominated anonymously. Well, that sent shock waves through my hectic week, as I had to update my vita. I did so with dragging feet and a less than sunny disposition.

Well, one day I came to my sad little office in building two and saw a letter had been slipped under the door. I opened it and the way the letter was folded was quite unusual. The text of the letter, all four lines, was facing me and I could not see to whom it was actually addressed. The letter said, "Congratulations. You have been selected as one of two finalists for the Distinguished Professor Award..." Well, I stopped reading immediately and had the sinking feeling that I had made a terrible mistake. You see, in building two I was next door to Bunky Green..... *The* Bunky Green. He is the Director of Jazz Studies at UNF as well as a world famous saxophonist.

I knew the letter was intended for him and here I had opened it mistakenly. I put it back in the envelope and as I attempted to reseal it, saw that it was indeed addressed to me. Not only was I shocked, but I was able to enjoy the “surprise” all over again.

So here I am trying to deliver a speech that I have worried about for months and actually worked on for several hours. I worried about what to say. And for very good reason. There are some smart, articulate folks out there. People much smarter than me. Many of these people have served as role models for me and probably never knew it. I hope this is not too embarrassing, but I would like to mention a few.

My first two bosses, Dr. MJ Palmer and Dr. Lenard Bowie. They were always there for me and continue to support my activities as well as teach me how to interact with both students and fellow faculty.

Dr. Dale Clifford who really set the bar for me when it came to teaching, being informed, being fair, being gentle yet direct, and still being effective. I could never do all of those things, but it is inspiring to see them in action.

Jack Funkhouser who literally sat down with me over 15 years ago and helped construct my first syllabus.

And thanks to Lois Scott and Chellie Jones-Harris. Without these two women, I could not do my job. They really look after me and do things above and beyond the call of duty.

I never really wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be a player, a performer. And when I first came to Jacksonville it was to take the job as Principal Percussionist with the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. I thought that teaching would take too much energy away from my pursuits.

That was not only a naive way to think, but really snotty as well. And in 1981, I was hired by the University of North Florida. But I must tell you that early on when I first had both jobs, I was quite selective in telling certain folks what I did for a living.

To all of my musician friends I told them I was the Principal Percussionist with the JSO. But when the Bank Loan Officer asked me my occupation, I immediately told her I taught at UNE. It was an instinctive reaction!! I was applying for a loan to buy my own marimba. See, when you leave college, the gear stays there and I needed an instrument. Well, as we completed the loan application she asked me what kind of boat a marimba was. When I told her it was a musical instrument.....a percussion instrument, she looked as if I had struck her with a 2 x 4. She ripped the application out of the

typewriter, (yes, it was in a typewriter), and we began again. I eventually received the loan and I am quite sure it was precisely because I taught at UNF that I acquired my own marimba.

My love of teaching was slow in coming. But now I cannot imagine my life without interacting with other percussionists, especially those wanting to learn.

My students are at once adorable and alarming. It is in their nature to constantly challenge me — a widely used cliché, but none the less true. These challenges are about any number of issues, both concerning music and others that touch on real life.

Steve Martin has been given credit for saying: “Talking about music is like dancing about architecture.” Whoever said it, I believe it. The challenge of talking about music lies in the ability to have something to say. And then locating just the right way to convey that thought or feeling. Some students learn by a simple explanation, others want a demonstration or fuller explanation. But to tell a student to “phrase all of these notes as if the lyrical nature of the music is the most pronounced” is usually a waste of time. So, I have had an adventure that has taught me about dissecting music, formulating a thought, identifying a feeling and then communicating each of these to the student. So, yet another cliché is true; they have taught me more that I have taught them.

Other issues always find their way into the lessons, those dealing with “real life.” We have discussed eating disorders, drug use, drinking problems, and broken hearts. The challenge for me is to listen, offer advice, listen some more and not judge them, even when they do not take my advice.

My students face so many hurdles on their way to becoming musicians. When I was in college, long, long ago, I did not worry about money. I was poor, but never gave it much thought. Somehow I knew that I would be involved in music. Through a series of events, I was indeed able to earn money and play music.

Students today worry all the time! I am asked by students and their parents, “How much money will I earn after I get my degree?” While many fields are uncertain, music is especially tricky. We do not have “entry level” position salaries. Orchestra jobs are nearly impossible to get. There will be 100 plus people show up at one audition for one job. Each one of the percussionists having paid their own way!!! And yet students show up and want to become professional musicians.

I see the courage it takes to persevere in the field. I hear them explain to parents and friends and even each other why they must stay in music. It continues to amaze me and it continues to remind me how lucky I am to play and teach music for a living. Most of my students will say to me, “I want to do what you get to do... play music and teach it.”

Last summer one of UNF’s finest students, Ken Valentine died. He was a saxophone student who entered the program when he was in his late thirties. I never saw Ken without a smile and a kind word for people. But what I will always remember was Ken coming to my office late in the afternoon or the evening and talking. He always said, “Aren’t we lucky to be in music.” And if I was feeling crabby or tired, his remarks brought me back to a grateful place.

Right before we moved into this new space, one of my students, Greg Isabelle, sneaked into the percussion area and walked around. He called me at home and said, “Char, I feel we must do important things in this new building. We must play great music and do it well.”

So, I am grateful to be a teacher. My life has changed so many times due to my percussion students. I have felt emotions I never dreamed existed, both high and low. I have watched students struggle until they weep and see them get up and struggle some more. All in pursuit of an intangible, unmeasurable entity..... music.

Once, long ago, during a Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra performance, my worlds of playing and teaching really collided. We were playing “Great Gate of Kiev.” The piece in itself is a gas for percussion; lots of it and plenty loud. And as the climactic moment was about to hit, I looked down the line of percussionists playing and realized that all of them had been or were students of mine. I guess what I experienced at that moment was pure joy. I was certain that a heavenly light was shining down on me from above. I was so grateful to be a part of the whole, a member of the cosmic team!! To be a part of something in which the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.

So again welcome to our new home. We all want to do important things in the building. We all want to play great music and do it well.

I would like to close my portion of the Fall Convocation with a short piece of music that continues to be meaningful to me.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you as the 2001 Distinguished Professor.

## 2001 Distinguished Professor

**Ms. Charlotte Mabrey** has been a faculty member at UNF since 1981 when she was hired as an assistant professor of music. She became a full professor in 1995. She holds a Master of Music and Bachelor of Music from the University of Illinois.

Ms. Mabrey's scholarship and research endeavors revolve around the UNF Percussion Ensemble. Over the years, she has developed the ensemble into a remarkable group of young percussionists, performing even the most advanced literature. The ensemble is extremely active both on and off campus, and has performed at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Orlando.

Each year, Ms. Mabrey presents an entertaining and eclectic recital at UNF titled "An Evening of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music." These programs include works for solo marimba, multiple percussion and chamber ensembles, presented in an original and collaborative way. In 1997, she established a scholarship program as a part of this event.

Since 1977, Charlotte Mabrey has been principal percussionist at the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. One of the few women in the world to hold the principal percussion position, she has performed frequently as a soloist with the orchestra.

In addition to her solo performances, Ms. Mabrey is frequently involved in chamber music concerts with area musicians. She has performed for a variety of Jacksonville venues and organizations, including the Jacksonville Women's Center, Theater Jacksonville, Vicar's Landing and the Jewish Community Alliance.

To continue her dynamic growth as a performer, Charlotte Mabrey studies with other world-class percussionists. These include Glen Velez, Allen Otte of the Cincinnati Percussion Group, Jack Bell, principal percussionist of the Atlanta Symphony, Mark Tate of the Louisville Symphony, and jazz vibraphone educator Jon Metzger.