



Above: Peter Swinkels (Adams European Flute Center), Sarah Merrow (Syrinx Flute Repair), Melanie Sever Jordan, and Tobias Mancke (Mancke Flutes) at the 2009 NFA Convention in New York City.

Headjoint Purgatory. "I've been in headjoint purgatory before and it is not any easier this time around," laments Los Angeles flutist Charles Andrews.¹ Andrews exemplifies the elusive dilemma; while looking for his ideal sound from a variety of headjoints, he wistfully remembers what in 20/20 hindsight seems to have been the perfect headjoint he let go years before. Whether you have searched for a new headjoint at some point, currently are in the midst of, or contemplating beginning the search for a new headjoint, you have most likely encountered your own dilemma. At some point in this search, which inevitably comes to all serious amateur and professional players, there is a time when one feels overwhelmed and confused. Perhaps you even realize some information you have been given by well-meaning advisors is not accurate.

Andrews continues, "My ideal flute sound would be the sound of a flawless early Louis Lot, made much bigger, more projected, but with the sweet, dense, complex quality the best Lots...can have."² Wow – not much to ask. This description is loaded with the sometimes directly opposing needs and desires of today's flutists – the need for more projection, the desire to feel louder, and the musical sensibility which drives both the need and desire to create a variety of colors.

Flute industry insider Sarah Merrow of Syrinx Flute Repair near Boston illuminates the complexity of searching for a headjoint. "It's not simply a question of what feels good or sounds good; there are lots of factors to consider – color, projection, flexibility of tone, stability of tone, homogeneity of tone, volume, resistance – all to be evaluated, along with the ease or difficulty of playing, compatibility with one's style of playing, professional requirements, and other physical needs."³ There is no magic formula to guide the process for choosing the best headjoint, however, there are elements of the

process which *can be* controlled. Knowledge is one of them.

Preparing for the Hunt. Artistic desires aside, it is vital to invest the time to become as informed as possible when considering the purchase of a new headjoint, because headjoints are expensive. Ranging from \$1500 USD for all silver to in excess of \$7500 USD for those containing gold and/or platinum, professional headjoints are a significant, and generally appreciating, investment.

From the artistic standpoint, the headjoint helps give an individual 'voice' to the flutist's sound. The right headjoint match for the performer's needs and preferences can contribute to a unique artistic identity that allows the performer to communicate fully with the audience, to blend flawlessly with his/her colleagues, and to be free to produce and to enhance the production of desired tone colors. It aids in allowing the music to flow unrestricted and undistracted.

The Headjoint Market. The market has seen an explosion of choices in specialized headjoints over the last twenty-five years. Since Albert Cooper's improvements to the traditional Boehm [1847] headjoint design in the 1960s, there has not been greatly significant variation in the design measurements. In fact, Cooper feels that embouchure hole design has not really changed since the Louis Lot flutes of the late nineteenth century.⁴ However, even slight variations can make big differences. These slight variations are wherein lay the infinitesimal differences between each and every headjoint.

Though patents exist for some new methods, Merrow points out that several Boston makers base their designs on those by Cooper. The current industry standards for risers originated from Cooper or Cooper-influenced design. His gauges were also on the market for the price of the tool and not patented still to this day. From discussions with Trevor Wye, Merrow also learned that Cooper was generous with his expertise, willing to share his ideas and techniques with those who sought him out. Flute makers Haynes and Powell, where many of the new Boston makers started their careers, based their work in the early twentieth century on the old French flutes until makers everywhere slowly adapted to the changes introduced by Cooper.⁵

Although flute makers generally acknowledge the significance of the headjoint, Merrow suggests that when it is heard from a maker that the majority of the sound comes from the headjoint, there is a likelihood that person makes *only* headjoints.⁶ It should be noted

that headjoints are a very lucrative business. Since Cooper, the headjoint market has become big business. Whereas a flute maker on a small scale can produce only a few flutes annually, the maker focused exclusively on headjoints can produce dozens if not hundreds. Cooper stated in a 1988 interview with Alexander Eppler, "...over the last ten years [1978-1988] I've only made headjoints. The headjoint market is so good, unbelievable!"⁷ Cooper observed that the majority of London flutists used a headjoint other than that which originally belonged to their instrument.⁸

Many people are very passionate about – and very loyal to – the headjoint maker with whom they are connected. "The relationship between the object [headjoint] and the art produced [tone and music] is very intimate," says Merrow. She points out that there is "something very evocative and desirable about the maker making something that passes into the hand of the artist...the connection between your music and their [art] (determines) how you place the value on it."

Today, the process of manufacturing a headjoint can range from fully machined, to partially machined and hand-finished, to an entirely all hand-made process from beginning to end. The question arises for each of us as to whether or not we place more value on a headjoint hand-made by one individual as opposed to one that has been partially or wholly machined.⁹ Is this a real or perceived value and does it make a difference which one it is? Knowing our own preferences can aid the process of selection, and ultimately increase our satisfaction with a headjoint. Whether drawn to the characteristic flute sound of a large-scale maker, or to the work of a smaller individual maker, it is helpful to know what it is about a headjoint that appeals to you. With this knowledge you can identify all the makers that may fulfill the same parameters and provide more options to try.

The flutes made by some of the largest flute makers such as Powell, Brannen Brothers, Inc., Muramatsu and others, will carry a certain set of characteristics that can be claimed to be that maker's sound. The efforts of the headjoint makers in the larger companies are intentionally focused to maintain a certain brand sound. In Powell's marketing literature for instance, they capitalize on what they call 'The Powell Sound' which they claim is characterized by "color, clarity, depth and projection."¹⁰ Elizabeth Watson, headjoint maker at Brannen Brothers, Inc., gives perspective to the exacting nature of the business when she points out that "as a headjoint maker you're not fighting to be different; you're fighting to be consistent."¹¹ In her

experience Merrow has observed that makers "...need to compromise between what they want to make, what they love about their 'best work', and what actually sells in the current marketplace."¹² Consistency within that balance of compromise gives each maker its own identity.

A specialized headjoint maker has somewhat more flexibility because he/she does not have to maintain a certain "brand sound" or build very large numbers of heads. Tobias Mancke of Mancke Flutes, a rapidly emerging German headjoint maker, asserts that the specialized maker is therefore able to work more closely with players to customize and potentially react more quickly to the demands of the market.¹³ The small makers will point out the advantages of working directly with them as flute maker Dana Sheridan elaborates:

One person making headjoints as opposed to a larger company offering heads brings the same perspective and goal with each head. All aspects of the work are accomplished by the same person and therefore have a consistency that may not be offered by a large company. A player must be drawn to a particular maker's work. If that maker is willing and able to work with the player to iron out small problems to get the best possible results in all aspects, then the player is best served.¹⁴

Influences on Headjoint Design. Sheridan points out that the one aspect of flutes that is universal is that the bodies are made to accept a head that has a length from the bottom edge of the tube to the center of the hole of 150mm.¹⁵ This allows players to choose from virtually any brand of head that otherwise fulfills the necessary criteria.¹⁶ This single aspect, more than any other, seems to be the factor that has set up the possibility for the headjoint market to exist as it does.

Sheridan has a unique perspective on the industry. Generally recognized by other flute makers as one of the foremost experts in the field, his career started with the major Boston flute makers in the early 1970s through to a transition with his own successful company and has spanned the period of time that has seen the greatest evolution in the modern headjoint market. He observes that:

From the eighties till now, the general trend in flute sound has been going darker... Particular players have become much more discerning, because of the variety of heads being offered. They have much more choice and, therefore, can continue to try other brands until they have found the perfect match for themselves. Players who truly know what they are looking for

can eliminate heads quickly that don't meet their needs.¹⁷

Mancke further comments:

Over the years it turned out that flute players want a more personal sound from their flutes [than] what the standard heads of their flutes give them. So we developed a wide variety of sound changing combinations of materials such as precious metals, different kinds of woods, crowns and cuts. In this way we are able to offer lots of combinations to deliver the widest variety of complex sound, articulation and colors. Players are looking for a complex, unique and personal sound. A comfortable and safe playing feeling consists of not only the color of the sound, but also articulation, projection, fine balanced resistance for personal taste and feel.¹⁸

Mancke stresses the importance of working closely with professional players from all over the world to keep aware of the trends and demands in playing needs. "The global flute world is always following certain players and teachers. Our close contact to them gives us the opportunity to react on certain trends and demands."¹⁹ There are also many examples of collaborations between major makers and high-profile professional players including Sir James Galway with Nagahara, Ransom Wilson and Paul Edmund-Davies with Powell Flutes as well as collaborations with innovative smaller makers such as Brannen Brothers, Inc. with headjoint makers Cooper and Lafin.²⁰

Although image surely plays a role in the market – you cannot deny there is certain status to owning and playing a gold flute – it is not the only driving force behind the popularity of the gold and platinum heads and flutes. Makers generally agree that gold and platinum provide heavier resistance and the potential for darker tone colors and larger sound from the flute. The desire for a bigger sound with greater projection within today's larger orchestras is also driving changes in headjoint (and flute body) style. Kanichi Nagahara of Nagahara Flutes comments:

[I] believe that there is a great difference which can be heard and felt when playing on Gold and Platinum versus Silver. Although I have no numbers or equations to prove the effects of Gold and Platinum in sound production, I have my experience of 30 years of hearing different flutists, and experimenting with different materials that lead me to this conclusion. The gold and platinum materials have louder and

richer resonance than silver (especially platinum being the most dense of them).

I believe makers went along with the evolution of the popular culture of classical flutists who have come to want a louder sound. Greater projection is required to play the more challenging concertos with 60+ piece orchestras. The flute is now competing for sound attention in larger ensembles. It is no longer the case that baroque music with smaller chamber ensembles are most common. As it is seen in America in most cases, bigger is better, so that reflects in the new found needs of flutists as well. Once upon a time it was wooden flutes that were popular until silver took over. Now is the era of Gold and Platinum.²¹

Nagahara explains that "the material of a headjoint can improve resonance and sound projection. For example, take a silver flute with a silver headjoint; if you were to place a gold headjoint w. platinum riser on this instrument, the body of the flute would resonate completely different...many might even say it sounds and feels like a completely different instrument. When you place a stronger material headjoint on a weaker material body, the body will resonate more and vibrate greater because the sound chamber (headjoint) is infusing the body with more sound."²²

However, Peter Swinkels, founder of Adams European Flute Center in Holland, which is one of the largest resellers of high-end flutes and headjoints in the world, points out that the bigger bore, heavier wall flute with larger tone holes requires a different headjoint to make it work the best. The body and the head are interdependent and the head should match the resonance the body carries. This goes both ways. Sometimes the headjoint can be too resistant for the body, causing the flute to lose its brilliance.²³

Some players specialize in performance areas such as chamber music or contemporary music and have needs for instruments that blend, project and respond differently than the orchestral players. And of course, many players perform in multiple settings: in an orchestra, as a soloist and as part of a chamber group possibly specializing in period music. These players may choose to have a separate headjoint that fits each of these needs. Most players, however, are looking for that one headjoint that will allow them the flexibility to play across all different demands.

Another potential pressure on the market comes from the increasing age of a large segment of active professional flutists. Merrow points out that fifteen years ago many of her clients were part of the young professional group of players who were looking for

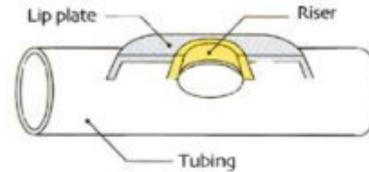
extraordinary sound however it could be had. Now this same group has changing priorities. Some are looking for something that gets the job done just as well, but that doesn't require as much effort to play well. The need and desire for a headjoint that makes this possible will have an effect on what the makers choose to market to this growing demographic of players.²⁴

Projection vs. Loudness. As one of the great modern innovators in headjoint design, Albert Cooper observed throughout all his years working with headjoints and players, that the louder a headjoint plays, the more the flutist likes it.²⁵ Both Andrews and Merrow use the terms "projection" and "loudness" in the comments above, and as you speak with colleagues, makers, and dealers, these terms will no doubt have part in every conversation about headjoints. It seems, however, that they are sometimes confused as part of the same aspect. Merrow comments, "If there is one thing I would like people to know it is that there is a difference between loudness and projection. [A] *pianissimo* [dynamic] can project and it doesn't have to sound loud around your head."²⁶

Swinkels observes that the aspect of loudness is more easily felt by the player than the aspect of projection. He perceives that because flutists hear the sound close to their heads, like you hear your own voice, there is this extreme interest in finding a sound that appeals specifically to each person. Just as your voice sounds different to you than to others because of the uniqueness of your individual resonators [mouth, nasal cavities, etc...] and unique perception of sound, so does the flute sound. There is, therefore, potential for as many different 'favorite' sounds as there are people. Interestingly, he has observed through his extensive experience, the differences in sound diminish to such a degree (due to the acoustics of the environment) that a very good player can achieve nearly the same the sound on wood, silver or gold to the listener only a few meters away. However, he points out, that is not to say there are no differences in the headjoints, but that the perception of differences is perhaps greater to the individual player than to the listener. When asking for opinions from others while trying various headjoints, this is something to consider.²⁷

Tuning, Color, and Responsiveness. There is no question as to the importance of the headjoint to the flute, the player, and the listener. The headjoint is an acoustically active body which has an effect on the total performance of the flute. Although it is mechanically simple, it has the

potential to enhance or limit tuning and response of the flute.²⁸ Headjoints on our modern Boehm system flutes consist of only four main parts: 1) the tube; 2) the lip plate assembly; 3) the stopper; and 4) the crown. The lip plate assembly consists of the lip plate and the wall, also called the chimney or riser.



The traditional stopper is also an assembly of the cork, a threaded rod, nut and metal disk – also referred to as a cork plate. See the section entitled "Innovations and Modifications" for other types of stoppers.



- 1 -Tube
- 2 -Threaded rod, nut and cork plate
- 3 -Lip plate
- 4 -Cork
- 5 -Crown

In relation to the headjoint's potential effect on a flute, flute maker James Phelan points out a well known principal of acoustics, "The closer anything is to the source of vibration, the more important it is." He describes how the headjoint determines subtleties of both sound and playing characteristics. Because the headjoint is where the sound is initiated it determines the flute's responsiveness and flexibility. It also strongly influences the mix of harmonics in the sound and most importantly it affects the tuning of the flute.²⁹

Tuning. Through his experience, Cooper noted that some headjoints worked better with his improved Cooper Scale than did others.³⁰ According to Sheridan:

The form of the headjoint tube plays an extremely important role in the intonation. Without this taper the flute could not be played in tune. This shape varies among makers and can cause problems for certain combinations of flutes and headjoints because the flute scale (meaning the placement of tone holes along the body) was conceived for a particular type of taper...A headjoint can help the intonation of a flute not only by the shape of the tube, but also if the head responds well, the player has more flexibility with

the embouchure and air stream to make necessary changes in pitch.³¹

Sanford Drelinger of Drelinger Headjoint Co. elaborates on this:

My experience has shown that both traditional and modern scale flutes can be optimized with the right choice of headjoint. In my opinion, the right headjoint is, in part, one that allows the flute to be played both more in tune with itself and other instruments in a natural and unstrained manner...I often advise people with high quality, traditional scale, standard pitch flutes not to change to another scale without first trying a wide variety of headjoints with their present instrument. More often than not, the selection of a new headjoint eliminates the desire to seek an entirely new instrument.³²

Nagahara suggests also that the headjoint affects intonation in this way:

Intonation can be improved with a well cut headjoint because it provides better embouchure control for the player. Although the intonation of an instrument is defined by the body's scale, the embouchure is responsible for probably half of the intonation control. If you have better control, response, articulation, and projection on your headjoint, it will reflect on the overall performance of the instrument.³³

Tonal Color. The most obvious effect of the headjoint is to give different strengths and tonal widths in various parts of the octaves. There are a number of reasons for the different headjoint characteristics. Manufacturers use different parabolic curves for the headjoint tube as well as varying embouchure hole sizes, angles and depths. Different materials can also be used for each piece of the headjoint.³⁴ Merrow describes these technical aspects of headjoint making and how they affect tone and response in her excellent article "Headjoints: Mystery vs. Mastery."³⁵ A maker will have identifying sets of these characteristics that give the headjoint a particular overall character, although each and every headjoint is still unique.

In a discussion of the characteristic of tonal color, Merrow shared that in fine tuning headjoint choices, great players will play a gentle melody *pianissimo*. She says, "If you can play *pianissimo* with color, you can play anything." But you cannot seem to have both color range and a headjoint that is immediately easy to play. It is important to keep in mind that the

color potential of a headjoint decreases with an unbalanced cut for loudness. The headjoint with more color potential also makes a player work harder to use that potential. Players have come to expect a homogenous sound throughout the registers where they can sing high and belt low, but much color, warmth and flexibility has been lost with trying to provide the 'wow' factor. She suggests that when considering a fine headjoint with great color potential, a player needs to take it home for a week and get used to it to see what it has for them. In consultations with her professional customers, Merrow finds that some want homogeneity of tone and consistency of technique. Others prefer to work with what she calls a 'meatier, more complicated' instrument. Because of her varied background in the industry, she can appreciate these differences, and, as she points out, "(it) works out in the market place because there is something for everyone out there."³⁶

Responsiveness. A player will advance more quickly and to a higher standard if an appropriately responsive headjoint is used. The more resistant a headjoint, the more color potential possible. More advanced players usually look for this characteristic which, although it takes more flexibility and skill, also produces more interesting results. In the headjoint making industry, headjoints are referred to as traditional cut, modern cut, or some combination in between. Generally speaking, the modern cut provides a louder and quickly responsive headjoint. It feels flexible and efficient, requiring less overall effort to play. The traditional cut has more resistance and in return, a larger variety of tone color. It is flexible yet stable with a rich full sound and requires effort (*finesse*) from the player to bring out its qualities.³⁷

Responsiveness of the headjoint as relates to ease and clarity of articulation, flexibility and dynamics is another characteristic that affects the overall playing of the flute. As discussed in the following section on materials, articulation and flexibility may generally improve with the addition of platinum in the riser or cork plate. However, a perceived improvement can be found in response with any number of combinations of materials.

An interesting story from Merrow points to what seems at first to be an improbable effect of the headjoint on the aspect of mechanical response of the flute. A long time professional client of hers ventured to describe an unexpected response she had while trying two headjoints. She noticed that her flute actually responded better mechanically with one of these headjoints than the other. Although at first it seems as if there could be no connection between the headjoint and the mechanics, it caused Merrow to

speculate as to whether air pressure travelling through the flute may be related to necessary finger pressure so that different headjoints may affect the experience and feel of the mechanism. When I asked others for opinions of this phenomenon, some interesting postulations were presented ranging from perceived effort versus resistance of the headjoint to vibration delays across certain materials or resistance quotients. Kanichi Nagahara suggested, "...part of the technical part of the instrument's performance comes from the articulation and embouchure control. A headjoint that enables a player to articulate better will in fact aid the player to synchronize both tongue and fingers more accurately, thus creating the notion of improved technique."³⁸ But currently it seems that there is no definitive answer to explain it. This certainly bears further research.

Materials Used in Making Headjoints. Headjoints initially were constructed entirely of like materials, i.e., all wood, all silver or all gold. But as makers and players tried new combinations, it was found that desirable differences in tonal quality or color could be obtained by using differing materials for various parts of the headjoint. Today, more varieties of materials are being used to make headjoints than ever before. Headjoints can be found with varying combinations of silver, gold, platinum, metal alloys, and different hard woods.

Beginning with the riser, or chimney, makers began using different materials such as gold or platinum at the striking edge. The gold offered a generally warmer/darker sound and the platinum offered cleaner articulation coupled with greater projection when compared to the all silver riser. Many makers now offer a variety of combinations such as all gold embouchure plates, wooden plates on metal headjoints, wooden headjoints with various metal risers, and even (as in the case of some Mancke headjoints) a metal tube with wooden lip plate and metal riser. Even the cork plate and crown can consist of differing materials.

However, as Drelinger is careful to point out, while changing the material of the riser or lip plate does impart certain discernable characteristics, the presence of a gold lip plate or riser does not give the total sound of a gold headjoint. The characteristic timbre comes overall from the material of the tube.³⁹ Traditional silver heads also vary in wall thickness from the thinnest of .014, to the most common of .016 and finally the thickest of .018. Thicker tubing darkens the tone color and increases the resistance of the flute as do other materials.⁴⁰ Mancke sheds light on the use of various materials:

Based on the ... characteristics of a silver headjoint, adding other materials brings the following average changes and/or enrichments:

Gold – warmth, comfortable resistance, depth, complexity.

Platinum – more precise and faster articulation, projection, wideness. Best used in combination with gold.

Wood – warm intimacy, darker sound.

All these characteristics, however, are highly influenced by the way of manufacturing. It is very important to keep and honor the specific sound of the material in a way that the player can use them to his own specific demand. Further it is influenced of course by the way of playing and the combination [with] the body of the flute. For example, a platinum riser gives the headjoint more wideness, safe and comfortable articulation and good projection. A wooden lip plate on a metal headjoint mixes the quick response and projection of the metal with the warm and intimate depth of the wood. The use of a gold or platinum crown and cork plate enriches the presence, volume and projection as well as improves playing comfort.⁴¹

Innovations and Modifications: Crown and Stopper Assemblies. In addition to using different materials for the lip plate assembly and tubing of headjoints, makers have also applied them to the crowns and stopper assemblies. You will find many headjoint makers offering traditional crowns of heavier materials such as gold and platinum. There are even jeweled crowns offered by some specialty shops. The cork plate and screw can also be made of different materials. Mancke observes that there has been increasing "demand [for] gold screws and platinum risers. People are willing to pay more to get a better sound."⁴² Some makers have even invented new types of stoppers and crowns. Examples include the Nagahara Locking Crown, the Bigio stoppers and crowns, the Dyna® Flute System by Michael de Bruin, and the Performance Flute Plug by Bob Ogren. Each have specific effects on the sound and response.⁴³

Both Kanichi Nagahara and Robert Bigio have found dramatic changes to the resonance and response of headjoints with their crowns. Nagahara discusses the locking crown as follows:

The locking crown was created mainly after a request from Sir James Galway to make a crown

that would not come loose. With that idea I created a two piece crown consisting of a base and a top section. On the base we placed additional weight making the entire headjoint more dense. The additional density makes the headjoint vibrate quicker. Although I have no scientific proof of the effects of the locking crown, we have done several experiments with different flutists and the general consent is that it provides better focused projection, an ease in articulation (cleaner/clearer), great soft attacks in the 3rd octave, and more core or depth in the sound. My belief is that the extra weight makes the headjoint density thicker and the sound waves respond quicker making the headjoint vibrate and respond faster which in turn makes the flute resonate and sound quicker -no delay.⁴⁴

The aspect of greater mass enhancing the resonance also works with the standard crowns made of the heavier metals of gold, platinum, and other materials. Mass however is not the only factor enhancing resonance. Michael de Bruin spent thousands of dollars trying to find out why the Dyna® Flute System, which is not heavier than a traditional stopper and crown, enhances the sound. While no scientifically definitive answer was discovered, when using the system, a significant increase in the strength of the middle and lower harmonics in the tone was measured. He speculates that it has something to do with the regulation of the vibration from plate to crown.⁴⁵ The mass factor may also work because of this effect. As for Bob Ogren's use of two O-rings on a Delrin plastic cork, he says, "The change in the sound it made... was like turning a lightbulb on. The difference was fairly dramatic...It still sounds like a flute. It's just got more power, and clarity and response."⁴⁶

Risers. As mentioned above, risers are often made of different materials such as gold and platinum, which give additional characteristics and advantages to the sounds and response of the flute. The traditional riser is one which consists of full ring of the same material which fits inside the lip plate. Nagahara has created a more economical implementation of these precious metals as he explains:

The extended riser was created to give flutists an economical option that did not require a whole lip plate made of a higher cost material. With the extended riser a flutist can have similar effects to that of an all-gold or an all-platinum riser. The front section of the riser (which is where the blowing edge is) is extended over the lip plate so that the air reed blows under and over the riser material. This allows

for better control of the sound. Also, having a more dense material once again adds more density on headjoint. I created the front wall of the lip plate (the blowing edge) thicker than the surrounding walls so that the [densest] area is where the air hits directly. Because the material is heavier, or harder, it vibrates quicker and makes the metals around it vibrate quicker too, creating better resonance. I believe that the riser should be of stronger density and the rest of the flute towards the foot joint of lesser density so that the sound waves can be transported throughout the instrument and then the flute can vibrate evenly with the same force because the material won't slow down the vibrations.⁴⁷

Ergonomics. There are also headjoints that attempt to address the ergonomic challenges of the flute in general for people who can no longer hold the flute transversely because of physical limitations or use injuries. Two versions of an innovative headjoint design which allows the flute to be played vertically are made by Sandy Drelinger and Maarten Visser.⁴⁸

Where to Go From Here. As you can see, hunting for headjoints can be exciting, interesting and ...daunting. This article has only scratched the surface of where the hunt for a new headjoint will take you. A process that begins with good information and resources will lead to more satisfaction with your ultimate headjoint selection. The marketing of headjoints has become so intense and aggressive that it is vitally important to find out for yourself what the claims being made actually mean to you and your style of playing. Take the time and opportunity to try as many different makes as possible and keep track of what you have tried and what does or does not appeal to you. Also, an invaluable aid is to enlist the help of someone whose ear you trust to give you consistent feedback throughout the process.

A thorough knowledge of headjoints can help you understand what you like and why. Understanding the industry also helps to see past the marketing hype. Knowing your needs as a player can guide your selection process towards makers whose headjoint characteristics fulfill those needs. If you play strictly chamber music you will probably decide that your needs differ from that of a flutist in a large orchestra. Determining the characteristics that best align with your preferences will allow you to ask more useful questions along your search. Observing market trends and the demands of professional players can guide your sense for the best and most reliable products.

If you are interested in pursuing more information on headjoints, the following steps may be useful:

- 1) Go directly to the source. Flute and headjoint makers love to share information about what they know best. Take the opportunity at conventions and regional flute fairs to speak with as many makers as possible and to try as many different headjoints as you can. How do you find headjoint makers?
 - a. See the ads in flute related publications (print and online) such as the *Flutists Quarterly*, *Flute Talk*, *Pan-The Flute Magazine*, and *Flute Focus* as well as newsletters from many regional flute clubs.
 - b. Visit the exhibitor booths at annual large conventions such as those sponsored by the National Flute Association and British Flute Society. Even smaller flute fairs sponsored by regional flute clubs will generally have dealers and some makers exhibiting with a wide array of flutes, related products, and most importantly, good information.
- 2) Talk to other experts in the field. Resellers and repair people often have insight into the broader market without being tied to a particular brand.
- 3) Read. Any of the sources in the bibliography of this article, as well as the sources listed within those, is a good place to find information.
- 4) Search the Internet. Nearly every flute maker, flute organization and many other knowledgeable professionals in the field have very extensive websites. There is a wealth of information at the click of a mouse. Be careful to verify the source of the information and stick to well-known makers and well-respected professionals.
- 5) Join a forum dedicated to the discussion of flute making such as the Flutemakers group at www.flutemakers.org.

After arming yourself with this knowledge, how do you go about the actual process of trying new headjoints? For more information on the process of trying new headjoints you can refer to many makers' websites which have great sections how to test new headjoints.⁴⁹ I have observed that every flutist starts with an idea of what they already do sound like or what they want to sound like and will actually make every effort to make a new headjoint sound that way at first before allowing the characteristics of the headjoint to come through. Flutist and music educator Roland Stycos suggests that you should, "trust your ear rather than choosing a particular metal

or manufacturer... Because the new headjoint may be more resistant than the previous one...be patient and allow several days ... [to] learn to conform to the specific characteristics of the headjoint."⁵⁰ In addition, when trying headjoints with any of the small or large makers, they will do their best to assist you in finding the most suitable headjoint for you. From his extensive experience in working with flutists through the years, Nagahara has this advice to give:

Don't be afraid to take a risk when choosing a new headjoint and do not choose a headjoint which you find easy to play right away. This means that you have nothing to work towards. Although at the beginning a Gold or Platinum headjoint might seem heavier to play (compared to the silver), if you stick with it and practice with it, you will improve as a player as it makes you exercise your breath and embouchure control.

Also, give a headjoint some time before you decide against it because initially nothing will feel 100% comfortable, but once you take time to get used to it, you will have a better idea and you might find that the gold/platinum headjoint will open up paths for greater musicality and artistic expression.⁵¹

I have found that most makers are truly interested in matching the player and headjoint appropriately. No maker will insist that the most expensive headjoint is the best option for you if it truly isn't. The best advertisement is, after all, a satisfied customer.

It should be recognized that at some point, after analyzing the technical aspects and narrowing down the choices based on objective needs, a significant aspect of choosing a headjoint is still a subjective process. As a result, the 'perfect' headjoint that is all things to all people will probably never be made. The website of flute maker Trevor James sums this up, "What can be said for certainty is that everybody's face, jaw, lips and breathing are individual to themselves. The only way to see which headjoint is suitable is to try them."⁵² Merrow adds that you get the most if you are willing to trust your own ears.⁵³ This advice was echoed by every maker and industry expert who contributed to this article.

After all of this groundwork, the fundamental importance of the player's own preparation cannot be overlooked. Flute maker Alton McCannless ponders "Why, with all the infinitesimal parameters definable in headjoints ... (t)here can be a heavy layer of crud in [the embouchure hole] and the owner still sounds

just as terrific as when the hole is clean?"⁵⁴ This comment from McCannless highlights the importance of the player's capability. Swinkels underscores what is perhaps ultimately most essential in this hunt. After arming yourself with the best knowledge he states, "in the end, or most importantly the beginning, there is no replacement for good ears and embouchure. It rarely works to find a headjoint that will do something you cannot. The headjoint can help compensate and make things better but cannot make something happen that isn't there to begin with."⁵⁵

Even after finding the 'perfect' headjoint, we may all benefit from keeping in mind these insightful words from the French master, Marcel Moyse, "I do not ask you where you bought your instrument, I ask you, where can I buy your leaps (lips)?"⁵⁶

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Photo by B. Henson Photography.

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² Ibid.

³ Sarah Merrow, email to author, April 19, 2009.

⁴ Albert Cooper, *The Flute*, 2nd ed. (London: Albert Cooper, 1984), 29.

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⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Alexander Eppler, "An Interview with British Flutemaker Albert Cooper," August 10, 1988, Eppler Flute Company, <http://www.epplerflutes.com/interview.html> (accessed April 10, 2009).

⁸ Cooper, *The Flute*, 29.

⁹ Merrow, interview.

¹⁰ Verne Q. Powell Flutes, "Powell: The Flute," 2007 *Product Brochure*, www.vqpdealers.com, <http://Downloads/Powell%20Brochure%20Fall%20202007.pdf> (accessed April 10, 2009).

¹¹ Sarah Merrow, "Headjoints: Mystery vs. Mastery," *The Flutist Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2007), 63.

¹² Merrow, email.

¹³ Tobias Mancke, email interview by author, April 19, 2009.

¹⁴ Dana Sheridan, email interview by author, April 19, 2009.

¹⁵ This is universal in nearly all major makes of flute with the exception of the Nagahara Full Concert model flute, a full explanation of which may be found at

<http://www.nagaharaflutes.com/flutes/fullconcert.html>.

¹⁶ Sheridan, interview.

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<http://powellflutes.com>.

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²³ Peter Swinkels, online interview by author, March 4, 2009.

²⁴ Merrow, interview.

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³⁰ Cooper, *The Flute*, 29.

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³⁵ Merrow, 63-64. This article can be found on Ms. Merrow's website at www.syrinxflute.com.

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³⁷ Trevor James, website.

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⁴³ For further information on these crown and stopper assemblies see

<http://www.nagaharaflutes.com/headjoints/crown.html>, <http://www.bigio.com/stoppersandcrowns.html>, <http://dynaflutessystem.com>,

⁴⁴ Nagahara, interview.

⁴⁵ Michael de Bruin, interview by author, NFA Convention, New York, NY, August 13, 2009.

⁴⁶ Richard Mial, "Love of Music Leads to Lifetime of Instrument Repair", *California Chronicle* (August 10, 2009)

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⁴⁷ Nagahara, interview.

⁴⁸ Descriptions of these vertical playing headjoints can be found at www.drelinger.com and www.flutelab.com.

⁴⁹ Makers such as www.trevorjames.com and www.drelinger.com/suggest.htm have extensive question and answer sections which suggest a non-biased approach to testing headjoints.

⁵⁰ Stycos, 15.

⁵¹ Nagahara, interview.

⁵² Trevor James, website.

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⁵⁴ Alton McCannless, email to *Flute List* mailing list (December 10, 1996), Flute@LISTSERV.SYR.EDU (accessed May 10, 2009).

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