

ART

John Lunn Flutes

BY *Brian A. Canning*PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Paul Howe*

John Lunn is many things: a flutist, a flute craftsman, a silversmith and a writer with two published children's books. From a workshop in his Newport, N.H., home, Lunn crafts the culmination of these disparate talents: he makes flutes that tell stories.

An apprentice

Raised in Toronto, as a young man Lunn was offered an apprenticeship with a local flute maker while he was studying music. At first it

was simply a means to make a living and he had no intention of staying in the industry.

"I quit it permanently three times, at least," he says with a chuckle.

Lunn's true aspirations were in writing and music, but he kept coming back to flute making. Eventually he relocated to Boston, then the hub of United States flute making, where he spent 10 years at the esteemed Powell Flute Co., perfecting the

mechanics of his craft. When he left Powell, he decided it was time to go into business for himself.

Silversmith techniques

It was around this time that Lunn discovered two silver smithing techniques: chasing and repoussé. These are the laborious techniques of hand hammering three-dimensional shapes out of flat silver stock with small shaped punches. Repoussé is the process of hammering from the



Paul Lunn in his Newport workshop



back of the material, creating the initial three-dimensional shape. Chasing, inversely, occurs on the front of the material.

Combining these two techniques, Lunn is able to create forms with astounding detail, texture and depth that would be impossible to attain with the more common technique of casting. “Why would I just want to make the same old flute,” says Lunn, “when there are so many out on the market?”

After his initial experiments with this new medium, Lunn began to realize its full potential. He can add ornamentation to flutes — flowers, vines, animals, symbols — and create a story on the cups and keys of the instrument. “I want to create some kind of an emotional response to the work that I do,” says Lunn. “There’s a relationship between the music, the metalwork and the storytelling, because there are three art forms combined into one thing.”

His unique flute building style also saved him from his most dreaded chore: being a salesman. “I never thought that being creative meant you had to be a salesman, but you do now,” says Lunn. “I don’t like selling things. I can’t sell flutes, so I let them sell themselves.” By elevating flute construction into an art form, the instruments’ value is self-evident, freeing Lunn from the need for sales and marketing to make his living.

Adding ergonomics

The design for the flute — with its precise and tightly clustered straight lines and right angles — is about 150 years old. Little noticeable change has occurred to the instrument over the years. But Lunn believes that the instrument has a lot of room for functional improvement, and he has been developing ways to make the mechanisms of the instrument more ergonomic and comfortable to play.

One of his greatest pleasures lies in re-engineering instruments for players with hand injuries. One customer fell in the shower and shattered her pinky finger beyond repair. Lunn was able to move the keys played by that finger to other positions so her other fingers could compensate for the injury. His most impressive and ambitious project is a one handed flute for a man who suffered a stroke and lost complete use of one of his hands. >>>>



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For any flute maker operating within the conventional aesthetic, these adaptations would be a nightmare. The mechanism on a flute is dense and complicated, with many overlapping parts that barely fit the footprint of the instrument. Moving the keys and mechanism around while retaining the instrument's straight lines is nearly impossible. Lunn, however, with his curvy lines and organic patterns, doesn't have the same issue.



"I found there was a way to make the flute more comfortable right away. Because I didn't have to sit within the aesthetic that said right angles or else, I'm free to make mechanical decisions that nobody else can consider because it doesn't occur to them, because it's outside that box," he says.

In 2013, Lunn's flute entitled "The Dryad's Kiss" won the Saul Bell Design Award for the Best in Holloware. After years of building these magnificent flutes, he is beginning to receive critical acclaim and national attention for his unique work. He is excited to receive the recognition, but it is the stories that continue to propel him in his work, and he has many left to tell.

Learn more at www.lunnflutes.com **KM**

Paul Howe is a professional photographer based in Sunapee. See his work at www.paulhowe-photography.com

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