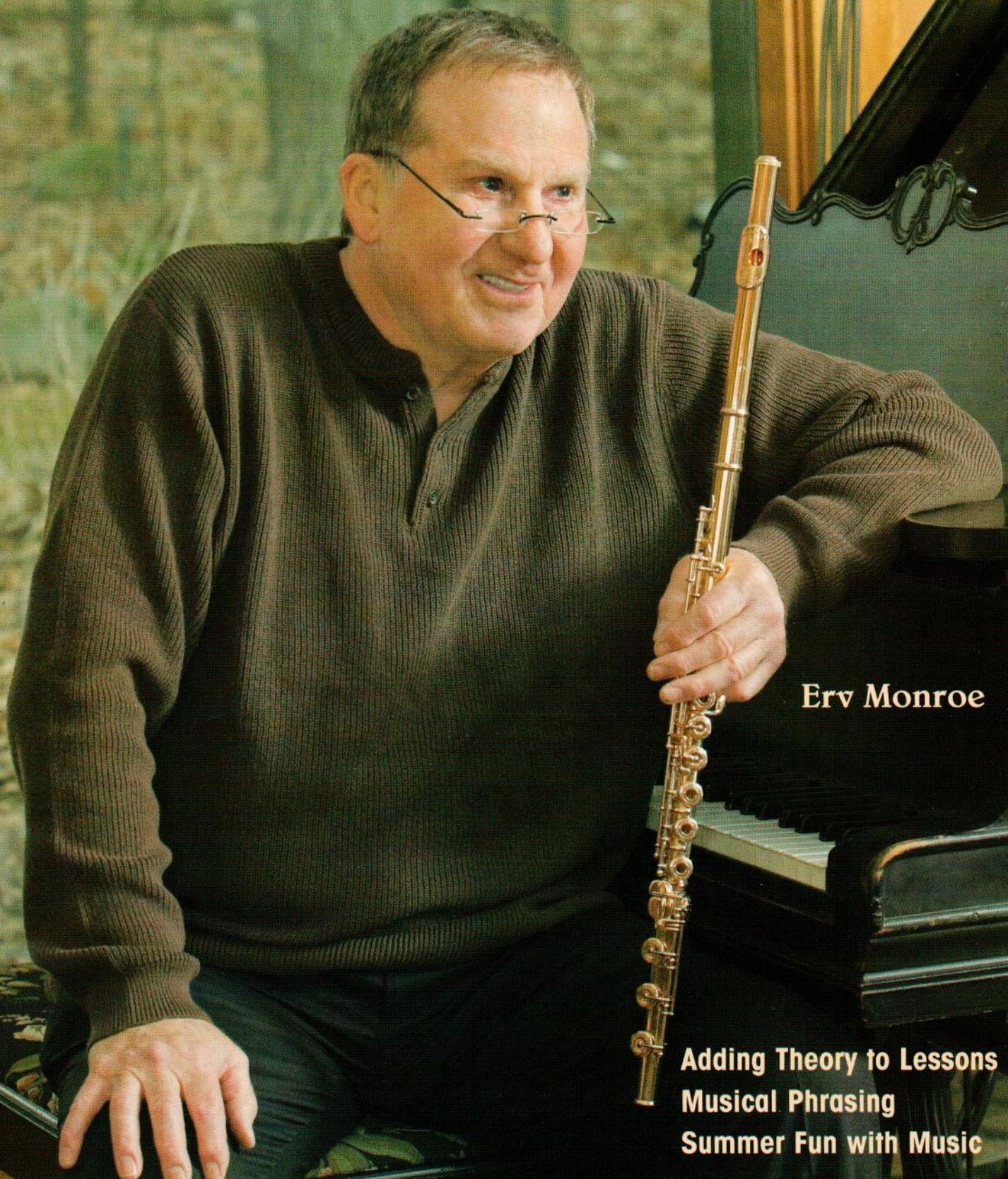


Flute Talk

May 2008



Erv Monroe

**Adding Theory to Lessons
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The Flute Music of Howard J. Buss

By Kim McCormick

Entrepreneur, performer, arranger and composer Howard Buss is well-known to flutists for his many recordings and performances of his prize-winning compositions at N.F.A. conventions. In 2004, *Prelude and Dance* for solo flute and alto flute accompanied by flute quartet won the Newly Published Music competition and was performed at the N.F.A. convention in Nashville, Tennessee.

During that convention, a hurricane hit his home state of Florida, which inspired his solo flute piece, *Hurricane*. (The first line of *Hurricane* is shown above.) *Pipe Dream*, also for solo flute, was a finalist in the 1993 N.F.A. Newly Published competition. In addition to these flute awards, his brass quintet *Concorde* won the International Eric Satie award in 1991, and for 17 consecutive years he has received the A.S.C.A.P. award for music in non-commercial media. A copy of his patri-



Kim and Robert McCormick, Ann Collins, and Buss, after the premier of *Two Caprices* in 2007.

otic composition *Fanfares* is even included in the Ronald Reagan Presidential Collection. He has written over 100 compositions and continues to write new works.

While in high school, Buss began arranging jazz pieces and taking formal arranging lessons, which sparked his passion for composition. He also began playing with the Tijuana Brass, an ensemble started by Herb Alpert and Jack Parr, a group that performed on the *Tonight Show* and the *Mike Douglas Show* numerous times.

He continued working with them while majoring in trombone at West Chester University. The school was close to New York City so he could attend school and perform professionally. The offer of an R.C.A. recording contract for the Tijuana Brass led Buss toward a music career, although he had initially planned to become a nuclear engineer. He later earned master's degrees at Michigan State University in trombone and composition and a doctorate in composition from the University of Illinois.

Some of his flute compositions reflect his early interest in jazz, particularly *Romance and Caprice* for two flutes and piano and *Night Flight* for piccolo, clarinet and piano, which was

commissioned by the N.F.A. Buss describes it as a musical depiction of the flight of a jetliner.

His pieces appeal to both performers and audiences. He says, "The function of my work is to challenge listeners with subtlety after reeling them in with the beauty of the music." He describes his music as "bold, imaginative, modern compositions with rich color schemes and intriguing rhythms. The melodies, frequently ornate, are predominately lyrical in quality. My music is characterized by detailed technical proficiency with a good measure of firmness – a directness of concept intended to entice listeners. The compositions are constructed to be thought provoking. I call upon the listener's imagination, interpretation, and emotional and spiritual experiences."

Those who have been involved with a composer during the writing process know what a rewarding experience it can be. Buss has written several works for me. One of them is *Mysterious Exit* for flute doubling on piccolo with percussion ensemble, which has a programmatic association with the a visit to Arizona, the Hopi Indians, and their social dances, folk songs, and ritual chants.

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Recordings of Buss' Music

Night Flight was recorded by Lois Bliss Herbine on *Take Wing* (Crystal Records).

Mysterious Exit was recorded on the HoneyRock label.

Scenes from the Holy Land for flute and one percussionist is on the album *Modern Times* (Capstone Records).

Wave Train was recorded on *Premiers Plus One* by the McCormick Flute/Percussion Duo (HoneyRock).

Pipe Dream was recorded on *Twilight Remembered* (Capstone).

Buss publishes his own music, as well as that of several other composers, in the Brixton catalog.

Mysterious Exit has a 12-tone row as the foundation for much of its melodic material. Although not perceptible to the listener, Buss cleverly combines two hexachords to create a lyrical pitch sequence rather than the more dissonant, disjunct pitch sequences often associated with 12-tone rows.

Another colorful work is *Scenes from the Holy Land* for flute and one percussionist. *Gramophone*, a leading English audiophile magazine, called the work "effective and colorful with deftly varied music. The piece makes its effects with point and economy."

Buss considers the composition *Modern Times* to be among his most significant works. Scored for flute doubling on piccolo and alto flute, narrator, and multiple percussion ensemble, the piece is a commentary on today's society. The alto flute movement, "The Asphalt Blanket," is available separately and is often performed that way.

Wave Train for flute with marimba or guitar or piano is another significant work that is on several state solo and ensemble contest lists, and has been widely performed.

Many of these works have colorful, descriptive titles that suggest their character and help listeners relate to the music. The solo work *Pipe Dream*, a welcome addition to any recital program, is six minutes long and was described by *Gramophone* as "sultry and Debussian" in character. Performers will enjoy the way it showcases both the flute and the performer by contrasting slow lyrical passages requiring a mastery of tone colors with other passage work requiring technical agility.

Buss has received several important commissions and grants. One of these was for *Into Each Life*, which was commissioned by the Florida Flute Association and funded by a grant from the Brannen-Cooper fund. Written in memory of flutist Albert Tipton, it is scored for flute, cello, piano and percussion. Buss was also named the 1987 recipient of the Florida Composer of the Year Award from the Florida Music Teachers Association. This resulted in the commission of *Florida Tableau* for clarinet, trombone and piano.

Kim McCormick is the associate professor of flute at the University of South Florida and performs with the McCormick flute/percussion duo and Opera Tampa. She earned a doctorate from the University of North Texas. Dr. McCormick is a Yamaha International Performing Artist.

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