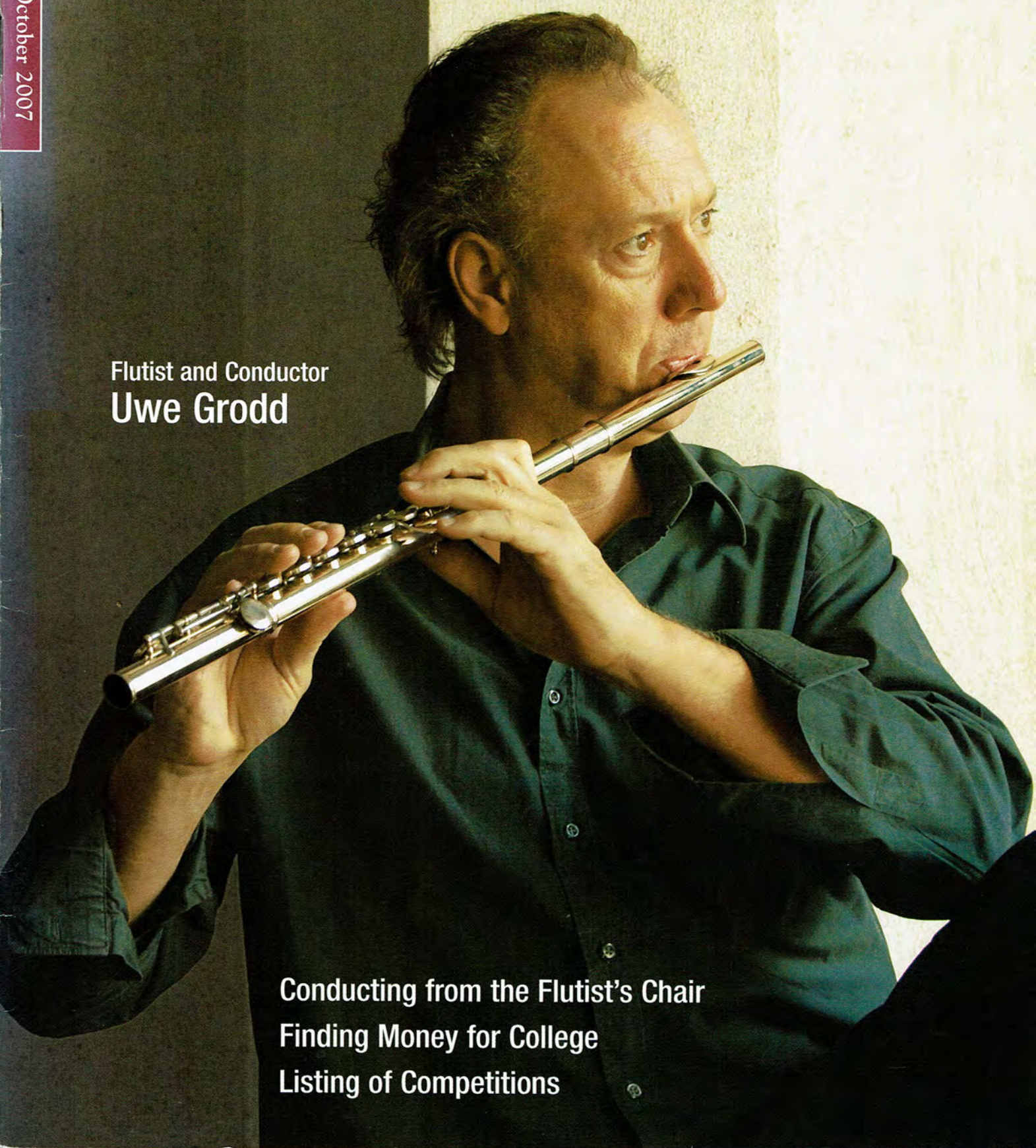


# *Flute Talk*

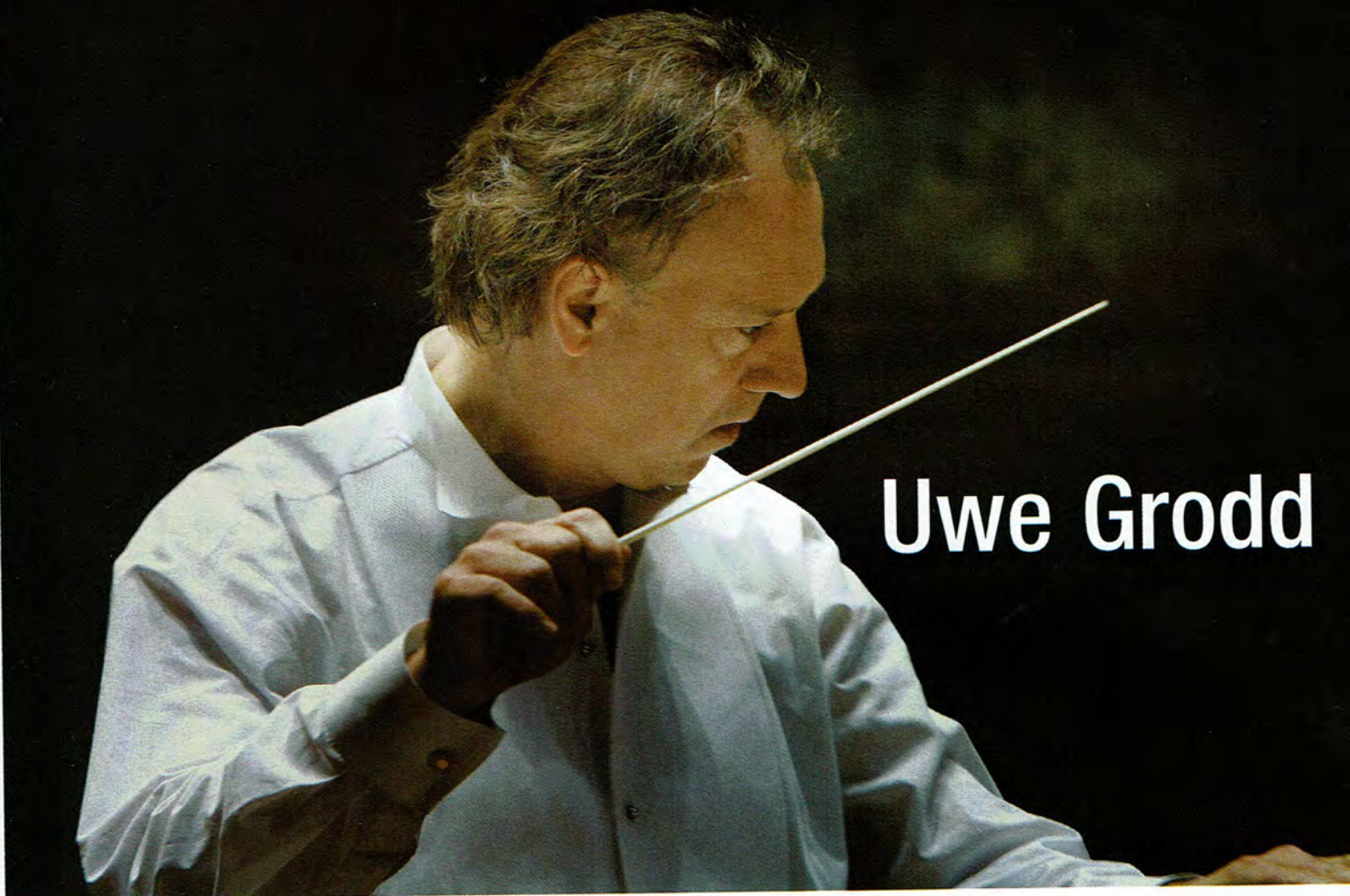
October 2007

Flutist and Conductor  
**Uwe Grodd**

Conducting from the Flutist's Chair  
Finding Money for College  
Listing of Competitions







# Uwe Grodd

## New Zealand's Conducting Flutist

By Julie Koidin

**U**we Grodd is the associate professor of flute at the University of Auckland, but he travels around the world to record, perform, and conduct. In one letter he described his winter holiday as “dinner in Tokyo, a stopover in Wiesbaden near Frankfurt,...then Vienna to prep for a recording and to dig in the library,...the Liverpool Philharmonic to record, back to London and Frankfurt, and two days in Hong Kong.” He is a combination of a modern-day Renaissance man and driven business executive. “My life is a mosaic, everything happening together. I am much like an 18th-century musician; the only difference is that I don’t have to make my own instrument or compose as they

did.” Grodd is not only a flutist and teacher, but also a conductor, recording artist, researcher, and editor of 18th and early-19th century music.

Born in Stuttgart, Germany in 1958, Grodd later moved with his family to Calw, a small town in the Black Forest. He was five or six when he started playing recorder. “I had absolutely no idea about music because my parents had no classical music in the house. In Germany you always learn two instruments when you grow up in a decent family, and if you are from a half-decent family, you learn one. My brother and I both learned an instrument.

“I believe recorder is a great start. It is a fun and enjoyable way of learning all of those black dots on

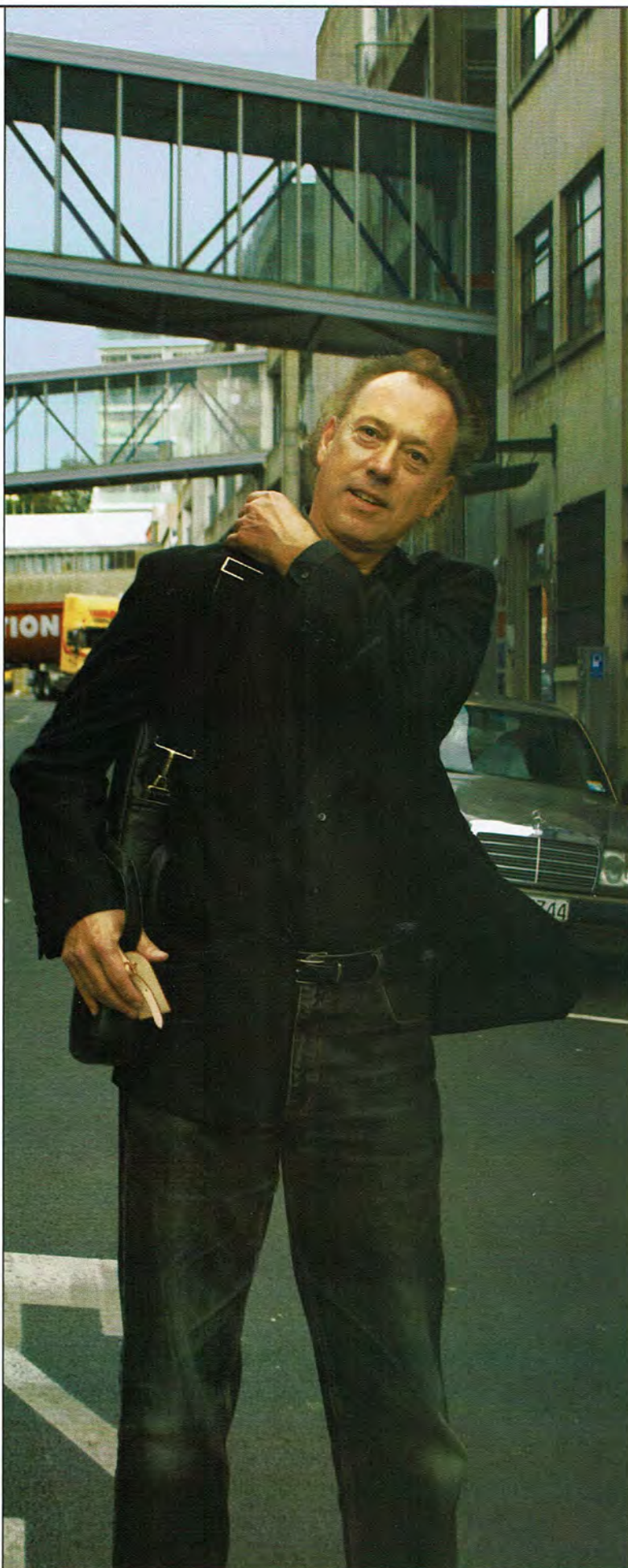


the page, which don't make any sense at the outset. Of course, recorder has an incredible tradition in Germany, where it is taken very seriously. It is a proper instrument, not an add-on or bad cousin of the flute. However, at about 10 or 11, I lost interest and started singing, which became more important to me than anything else. Calw had an active musical community and put on a Bach cantata every Saturday afternoon – a tradition that has gone on for 300 years. There was a rehearsal at three p.m. with a performance at six. Over the course of several years I sang with them from time to time and developed a love for singing. Although I didn't do so well in school, I always got an A+ in music because I could sing well. Eventually, I moved up in the choir and had the opportunity to sing the Bach *B-Minor Mass*. During its preparation, my voice broke and so did my heart. That was it for music; after that, there was nothing – just a void.”

About a year and a half later, Grodd heard a flute, and the void was filled. “I heard a lot of music at my girlfriend’s house. I will never forget Sunday afternoons there with cake and coffee, as we listened to recordings of pianist Dinu Lipati, who played Bach flute sonatas, Scarlatti sonatas, and the like. I always loved the Siciliano melody from Bach’s E<sup>b</sup> Sonata.

“Later, in one of those chance occurrences that influence your life, I heard the Siciliano played on a flute in an old Romanesque church. The performer was a genius and played like Pan. I don’t know his name or what happened to him, but he also performed Honegger’s *Danse de la Chevre* and *Syrinx*. Someone in the audience asked if he could make up something and suggested an imitation of the autumn leaves outside, which were flying around in circles. He picked up his flute and played. You would have sworn those leaves were flying around the middle of that little chapel. He radiated music from every pore of his body. From that moment, I knew I wanted to play the flute. I had found a new voice at 13, which is pretty late to start an instrument.

“Getting a flute was the tricky part. Nobody in my family had any concept of how much an instrument or private lessons cost. A private lesson was several







**Uwe Grodd (right) conducting Opus Chamber Orchestra with his former teacher Robert Aitken as flute soloist for the New Zealand premier of Joachim Andersen's *Konzertstück*, op. 3, in June of 2007.**

times the normal average hourly wage, so it made no sense to my family to support that kind of thing. I had to work at the grocery store, where my father was a manager. Later, I worked in the Black Forest as a forest worker and after that at the post office.

"Because I earned the money for lessons, each one really mattered to me. Unfortunately, my first teacher was a clarinetist, with no embouchure or knowledge of how to start a beginner. I was so keen, however, that it didn't matter. Three months later I played for a church service in front of about a thousand people. It was just a little Baroque tune with the organist, but I managed to do it. I quickly realized, however, that my teacher wasn't going to get me anywhere, so I left after about five or six months.

"I think that difficult beginning had an effect on my teaching philosophy because I make sure that beginners start properly. I love teaching beginners to this day. It is a joy to see them play tunes after only three or four lessons. When children start out with tricky fingerings, they absorb them without difficulty. Perhaps my unorthodox beginning made me a reasonably good teacher."

For his formative flute years, Grodd bounced from teacher to teacher, experiencing a variety of teaching styles. "I studied with the principal of a nearby symphony orchestra. I rode my little motorbike to his house, and told him I wanted to play but didn't know anything. He was an absolutely mad teacher, who

only let me play one note. He restructured my embouchure, and I could play with a beautiful sound at the end of my study with him.

"I found Mary Jaksch when I attended a concert and fell in love with her sound. She had studied with Moyse in Boswil. I was sitting in the first row when a photocopy fell off her music stand. I didn't know what to do. If I picked it up and put it back, it would make a big scene. If she didn't need it, then I would look stupid. I sat at the edge of my chair, and when she came to the end of the printed page, she proceeded to repeat the same bar over and over. I ran up and put the page on the stand. During the intermission, she asked to see me. She became my next teacher, and I studied with her in Ludwigsburg.

"At that time I had started to study conducting with Manfred Schreier, who was just at the beginning of his marvellous career. I wasn't good enough yet to study flute in a fancy conservatory, but I could study to become a school music teacher. The music program was divided into conducting, 20th-century music, and flute, which I studied with Mary Jaksch. This is how we got to know each other, but she didn't stay my teacher for long because eventually I married her!

"I wanted to be a conductor, so every week I listened to five operas, 20 symphonies, 20 chamber music pieces, and a minimum of five Bach cantatas. I spent 20 hours a week listening to music and mak-



ing notes on little pieces of paper – thousands of little scribbles with titles and comments. All day long I sat in front of the radio, which was always on in case something new was played. I borrowed recordings from the library and listened to whatever I could get my hands on. As the weeks went on, I began to recognize patterns and repetitions. I compared the pieces to gain an in-depth knowledge of the works.

“At times, Schreier took me to Radio Symphony Orchestra rehearsals, and I began to understand how an orchestra operated. In Germany it takes a long time for conducting students to get in front of an ensemble. Only at the end of a degree program does it happen, if at all. I was also fortunate enough to study with Sergiu Celibidache at Mainz for three summers. The biggest compliment I ever got from him was when he smacked me on the shoulder and said, ‘You’re not dumb.’ He was a very tough guy and took no nonsense from anyone. He didn’t believe in recording, which to him was like a photograph of a reality that cannot be photographed. He felt the creative moment, of one person making a sound and another hearing it, is a special occurrence that cannot be recreated on a stereo or computer.

“From Ludwigsburg I went to Mainz University, where I studied with Werner Peschke, flutist with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra. He was a difficult teacher to win over. He didn’t want to spend time trying to make a student play well; you had to do that

yourself. I quickly realized that if I studied all the pieces during the semester breaks, I could bring a new piece to him every week. By doing this, I gained his interest.

“Because Peschke taught on Fridays, I made sure that I was in a practice room opposite his studio every Friday at 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. so he would know that I was serious. Every time he arrived or left, there I was practicing. Sometimes he popped into my room to ask how I was doing and give me little tips. He knew a lot of flutists through the radio orchestra and put me in touch with them when they came through town. As a result, I went to many masterclasses. I still lacked the technique that most players learn earlier, but I was catching up.”

To acquire as much knowledge as possible and improve his technique, Grodd attended a wide selection of European masterclasses. “I spent two summers learning from André Jaunet in the Swiss Alps. I took masterclasses with Paul Meisen, Aurèle Nicolet, and Peter-Lukas Graf. Concurrently, I studied conducting every summer at the Bach Academy in Stuttgart and sat in on Helmut Rilling’s courses and rehearsals. He was a profound influence on me as a conductor.”

Grodd later worked with Robert Aitken, who also had studied with Jaunet, and became one of his most influential teachers. “I met him in my late 20s. He was a guiding light; he not only knew all the technical, physical, and scientific background



of the flute, but also many of the composers of the pieces I was playing. For someone as eager as I, hungry for continuity of learning, for answers, for information – he was perfect. I varied, of course, from his teaching methods, but not in terms of respect and enjoyment.”

### Off to New Zealand

Grodd arrived in New Zealand in 1983, after marrying flutist Mary Jaksch. “We got itchy feet to explore the world. We went to New Zealand to see what it was like and fell in love with it.” They settled in Nelson, on the South Island, where Grodd conducted the Radio Nelson Chamber Orchestra

### Teaching Philosophy

Grodd believes in presenting diverse approaches to students, but also feels strongly that consistency with the same teacher is important in the formative years. “We have about three or four visitors a year at Auckland University. The principal of the London Symphony Orchestra, Paul Edmund-Davies, was here; Felix Renggli from Freiburg and Basel also visited. Next year Fred Peter from Leipzig, Emily Beynon, and Robert Aitken will come. It is important to have visiting teachers, but it is equally important to have a guide on an ongoing basis, someone who knows you well. Nobody will ever get to know you as well as your undergraduate and post-graduate professor. From my experience, anything less than four years with a teacher is a bit rushed. In four years a student can learn how to play the flute, the repertoire, various styles, and start some sort of career.

“I developed my teaching philosophy 20 years ago, when I had to explain how to play to a young girl. Every flutist must have balance, stability, strength, continuity, and flexibility. There must be balance in every motion, and stability so the balance has a foundation. The strength provides the energy, continuity, which is the air, fingers, lungs, posture, and finally flexibility.

“Many teaching methods are confusing because they try to teach flexibility straight away – ‘Do this with your lips, your tongue, your chest, the abdominal muscles, stand like this, hold like this.’ Too much information! You can do it with only a few words because everybody needs good balance and stability. Strength is developed through exercises, and continuity comes through Moyse’s *De la Sonorité* and similar exercises. Later, much later, comes flexibility.”

In general Grodd’s approach to teaching falls into the less is more category. He has a knack for knowing

what to say and when to say it to produce impressive and immediate results. “There are times when we should just be quiet, times when we should be active, and definitely times when students are not ready to hear what we have to say. The more I teach, the more I realize that what I don’t say is extremely important.

“Sometimes I read about someone teaching the Prokofiev Sonata in a masterclass, and in the course of one paragraph the instructor gives two years worth of lessons – ‘Do this, do that, do this, do that.’ I think that this is a bad lesson; nobody can cope with that much information. Conducting has taught me that pacing is absolutely essential to good



**Conducting has taught me that pacing is absolutely essential to good teaching. It is important for students to focus on one thing. Then teachers can add one or two footnotes, but not 10.**

at the Nelson School of Music. Grodd soon landed a job teaching flute at the University of Auckland, which is located on the North Island. He commuted several times a month, not wanting to leave his conducting job. “There were only 10 concerts a year, but it was a real orchestra. I also had a choir and a youth orchestra to look after. I did all the repertoire I wanted and made all my mistakes, so it was a perfect apprenticeship.” He maintained his European connections by returning for masterclasses and entering various competitions, including the Lugano Masterplayers Conducting Competition in Switzerland.



teaching. What is important is that students focus on one thing. Then teachers can add one or two footnotes, but not 10. When you add 10 footnotes, the student walks out the door with nine of them confused. Leave those nine to yourself, and make one major point. Sometimes I say nothing because it is important for students to feel that they can just play.”

### Breathing

“One of my favorite sentences is: ‘The air we breathe in is the air we breathe out.’ This is fundamental. The way we go about it and where we store the air differs. Aitken’s concept is largely based on what Moyses referred to as the turtle shell exercise, where the chest and the abdominal area open bigger and bigger. You take more and more breath in so the outside becomes absolutely rock hard. The inside of the turtle shell, however, is responsive and at times soft. It is a system that works well for many people.

“I believe in Moyses’s example but in a different way. My approach is partly influenced by my second wife, who is an outstanding Feldenkreis teacher. I look for spaces in the body that react with each other to pump the air out. I think of the air as being like a continuous stream of water. If you push against it, it continues to flow in the same speed and volume. That continuity eventually provides the flexibility to move the air, which must stem from an actively supporting body: nothing is jarring.

“I don’t like to use the word support. I refer to it as air support, volume, speed, or air pressure and also talk about muscular tension and relaxation, and especially muscular interaction. The interactive body, rather than the held, static one, is what is important to me, and through that concept I can get students to play in a dynamic fashion. Even at a young age, they can develop a good sense of dynamics and colors. Of course you can’t have colors without a stable air column, which is the basis for color. Without it you just drop flat or go sharp.

“The way you stand, hold the flute, and blow, and where the breath comes from and how it is stored – all of these factors contribute to support, which is a misused and unclear term. To describe support in one sentence, you may say that it is the continuous upkeep of the air stream and air pressure in the chest, through continuous upkeep of a balanced muscle interaction in the abdominal, rib cage, and chest area – the whole torso. This is only one part of the definition. Support starts from the feet and goes up through the body.”

### Vibrato

Grodd teaches vibrato through guided self-discovery. “I don’t use the pulsing idea to teach vibrato because it is so pedantic. Imitation through listening is much better. Every student has been able to vibrate within 10-15 minutes by

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imitating. Nobody plays as straight as a clarinet because we don't have a reed to blow against. There is always a slight variation or fluctuation of air pressure. I just draw a student's attention to the fluctuations, imitate them accordingly, and tell them, 'you've got a vibrato. Now let's hear a bit more of it.' They learn to amplify that tiny quivering. They only need to hear one wave and then they understand.

"Everyone naturally has vibrato in their voice. When there is an anxious or exciting moment, vibrato comes out. Because it is natural, I agree with Moyses that it does not need to be taught.

"Throat noises come from a lack of air control because there's too much air pressure against the throat. When the support mechanism is not in place, the throat gets involved. When I introduce vibrato for the first time, I refrain from drawing attention to the throat noises, but rather draw their attention to their feet, stance, and how they are breathing. Slowly they lose half of the throat noises. Later, when I do draw attention to it, students learn to eliminate all throat noise."

### Memorization

Grodd's students have won every competition in New Zealand, hold the three flute positions in the Auckland Philharmonic, and are successful abroad. To give students an edge in concerto

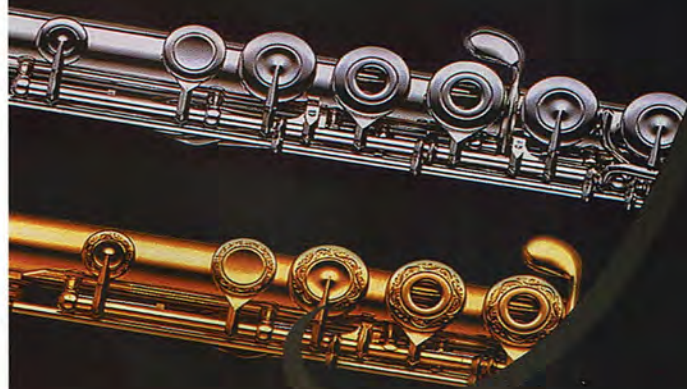
competitions, Grodd has developed a memorization system that he claims is 100% effective and involves committing the music to visual memory. Michel Debost previously wrote about Grodd's system in *Flute Talk* in 1992, when he expressed amazement that even young students could memorize the Rodrigo concerto. "Some people have no problem memorizing because they have a natural combination of muscular, melodic, and visual memory. However, when you rely solely on melodic memory after countless repetitions, you can easily get in trouble. With just one slip, one wrong interval in the melodic memory, you can lose your place. That is when visual memory should kick in.

"Visual memory can be taught. You read every part of the music – every crescendo, decrescendo, time signature, quarter note, etc. and say it out loud, similar to learning a poem or a play. Break the music up into cells, reciting each cell repeatedly until memorized. After finishing a cell, write it out consistent with its physical position in the original part, but only do this if you can see it and imagine every bit of it. For example, if it's the last two bars, you start writing at the bottom of the page. If you make a mistake, start again. When all the cells are done, put two cells together. It may take 20 minutes, but when you see it, you see it for the rest of your life.

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### Conducting

Grodd believes that much of his success in coaching students for concerto competitions and auditions comes from his conducting experience. "My students are successful because I teach them right through to the dress rehearsal. I make sure they know what is coming their way. For example, there are many ways to enter at the beginning of the third movement of Mozart's D-Major Concerto. Conductors are uncomfortable there because they have to take the cue from the soloist. When you've conducted concertos like Ibert, Chaminade, and Khachaturian and also performed them on flute, you teach them differently. As a conductor I know where there are tricky ensemble moments and balance problems.

Grodd has also conducted while performing as the flute soloist. "Orchestras like that because they only have to pay one fee. There is a different sense of communication with the players, especially in smaller orchestras. The soloist's back is to the orchestra, which means that I have to trust that the orchestra will do what they have to do. They react and get stronger, playing more independently. They actually follow better than when I am only conducting. The audience feels a difference as well because there is one less person on stage and no extra distraction.

"For me, both careers, flute and conducting, have always run parallel. Most conductors begin as instrumentalists and switch to conducting in their 40s or 50s. It has been fascinating to do both, but I have paid a huge price for it. When you do both, you can't pursue one thing intensely. I divide the year into playing weeks and conducting weeks."

### Recording

Grodd began recording for Naxos in 1996 and is actively involved in unearthing obscure 18th- and 19th-century European music. "The symphonic music we know from Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven's era is only 1% of the music that was composed at that time. We now know that there were more than 15,000 symphonies. What we know from those three masters is the peak of an incredible mountain, but we are not seeing the Alps. The impressive part about standing in front of a huge chain of mountains is the vastness of it, and how the highest peak stands out amongst all the others."

The music of Johann Baptist Vanhal, a Mozart contemporary and composer of

85 symphonies and 54 masses, is of particular interest to Grodd. He has conducted and recorded four of the symphonies with the Esterhazy Sinfonia and won the 2000 Cannes Prize for Best 18th-Century Orchestral Recording. Grodd also recorded two of his masses. Vanhal wrote several flute quartets (flute and string trio) that Grodd recorded in Toronto in 2006 with the Janaki Trio.

In 2000 Grodd researched and published various Vanhal manuscripts and 18th-century copy parts in Vienna, Augsburg, Paris, London, and Berlin. "My editions go hand and hand with the recordings. Because there were no previous editions the works were not played. The last time the quartets were played was in Augsburg around 1787." Currently Grodd is working on new editions of the Beethoven flute sonata and all flute and piano works by Ferdinand Ries.

Grodd questions whether students today have enough endurance and curiosity to succeed in the current professional music environment. "I used to drive 13 hours to the south of France to experience Aurèle Nicolet's masterclass teaching. I would arrive in time for a 10:00 a.m. class, stay for two or three days, and then drive all the way back home again. He was the teacher of the time, and it was important for me to be there.

"Now I have students who aren't motivated enough to bring an accompanist to the studio. Students expect to come with big open mouths and be spoon fed. Of course, that's not how it works. We drip feed students. By drip feeding exactly the right amount over a long period of time students develop in a certain direction. Too often today, the more we provide, the less active students become. When students expect the big spoon method and get the drip feed method, they become completely lost, lack motivation, self-drive, and dedication. They certainly have no discipline because the school system no longer instills that.

"As compared to 20 years ago, attention and memory spans have declined, and 20 years ago there was a decline from 40 years before that. In the 19th century an average concert lasted four hours. When I was in school, less information was available because computers didn't exist; nothing could be looked up at the click of a button. I went to the library for a book, and if it was unavailable, I had to write away for it. When it finally arrived, I read every word and remembered the con-

tent because the book had to be returned soon. Because the information in it was much harder to get, I treasured it.

"At the first lesson with a student I say, 'When you come through my studio door, you should have 'I am motivated' printed on your forehead. This is essential to my teaching method because without motivation and curiosity, I am not a very good teacher. I will still make them jump through those hoops, but without any real love and energy. I tell students to stay home if they don't have the motivation. I'm a little bit like Gaubert, not that I compare myself with him. He didn't have time for students to talk about their accompanist getting sick, or whatever. When students come to me, our time is precious. Lessons are a symbiotic partnership; we feed off each other. I am not just passing on knowledge but reacting to what I hear. The process of learning music is being endangered by bureaucrats making the length of study periods shorter and shorter.

"Curiosity formed a vital part in my development. I fear that in young people's minds the ideas of career and life steps are much more important than curiosity. Students say, 'Show me the next step to my career, and I will attain it by gaining one step and then another.' That leads to a big black hole. Eventually they flounder because nobody is holding their hand anymore. I would like to think that when my students leave, they have a sense of realism as well as practical and business skills. This comes from my conducting side. As a conductor you spend 75% of your time organizing and 25% of your time on the podium. I try to pass this on to my students. Wherever my students end up, they need that essential curiosity, that desire to find out more and then try to be better. This provides the motivation to get up in the morning and do another Taffanel and Gaubert scale."

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*Julie Koidin earned masters and doctorate degrees in flute performance from Northwestern University and is flute lecturer at Loyola University in Chicago. She will soon release her third C.D. Dois no Choro with guitarist and vocalist Paulinho Garcia. (www.juliekoidin.com)*

*Editor's Note: In 2006 Julie Koidin received a third Fulbright grant, this time to teach and perform in New Zealand at the Universities of Auckland and Waikato, both located on New Zealand's North Island. This interview took place at that time.*