

MCB Products and Services

Special Flutes by Michael Botha

Flutes provided by myself are known as 'special flutes'. The reason for this is due to the fact that all flutes which I sell, at whatever level, whether they are student flutes, professional or the most expensive handmade flutes; are hand-finished and enhanced. This means that they perform at a higher level and are more reliable than other flutes.

The best flutes have always come either from the independent makers such as Albert Cooper and Jack Moore, or from the specialist hand workshops which some major manufacturers maintain. The secret in these hand crafted flutes is not only meticulous design and construction, but hand-finishing to the highest level. This is where the performance and reliability originates.

I have been fortunate in a flute career spanning 35 years to work with leading figures in the industry such as Albert Cooper, David Straubinger and numerous others. From them I have learnt the secrets of hand-finishing to which I have added my own developments.

Most modern flutes are of a good design specification and modern manufacturing practices are such that instruments are built, in general terms, to a high standard. This is true from student through to handmade instruments. However, due to financial pressures, pricing and competition, flutes are to a greater or lesser extent finished to a budget. This is often the case with padding. This compromises the performance of the modern student and intermediate flute.

All flutes sold by myself are hand-finished including the following:

1. Headjoints are voiced to optimise timbre, response and dynamic range.
2. All surfaces are textured to control the boundary layer of the airflow, thus managing vortices, and enhancing tonal focus and the spectrum of tone colour.
3. All flutes are meticulously hand padded to the highest level.
 - At the intermediate, professional and handmade levels, flutes are padded with Straubinger pads.
 - Student level flutes are padded with my custom pad felt system.
4. All flutes are mechanically optimised. This means that the mechanism is aligned and then lubricated with lubricants of varying viscosities, dependent on the requirements of the flute. The final step is touch-balancing.

5. All flutes are under warranty for a period of two years during which time servicing is free.

Each flute which is bought from me is a 'special flute' and all flutes are subject to testing and approval by the player before any transactions are finalised. All flutes are set up to play at their best. In relation to individual players, effort is made to achieve harmonic balance in the flute, relative to the player.

Firstly a choice of headjoints is provided, and where appropriate, flutes are set up in different ways for different players. Thus for example, the player (bearing in mind individual taste) whose sound tends to be naturally bright, would be provided with a darker sounding flute, as this would balance the harmonics and create a flute for that player which has a centred sound, and which projects. Conversely a player with a naturally dark sound would be provided with a brighter flute, again to obtain a harmonically balanced sound which has all the appropriate overtones and fundamentals and thus projects.

What of my own flutes? I last built flutes in the 1990s; since then I have focused on developing advanced headjoints. There is a new flute design in the pipeline and I am tooling up to build it. This project is still in the developmental stage. It will be a real showpiece when launched.