The Kingma System Flute: Redesigning the 19th Century Flute for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT:

This project investigates the development and reception of the Kingma System flute. Commercially debuted in 1994, the Kingma System flute was designed by Dutch flutemaker Eva Kingma. For some time now, flutists have been honing creative techniques to provide imperfect approximations of what composers have specified, but the Kingma mechanism achieves the exact effects desired with ease. The Kingma flute is better suited for contemporary music than its predecessor in every way. Through her close work with composers and performers, Eva Kingma was able to create a mechanism that is comfortable to play, versatile in performance, and beautifully suited for the emerging repertoire. The Kingma flute is an invaluable tool for performers and an exciting new voice for composers, offering unprecedented musical possibilities and yet undiscovered expressive potential. The new mechanism developed by Kingma not only extends the harmonic and timbral vocabulary of the flute exponentially, but also addresses the most common difficulties encountered in the contemporary flute repertoire. Her modifications make the instrument fully quarter-tonal throughout its range and also allow for many additional microtones, multiphonics, glissandi, and other unique timbral effects.

The flute community finds itself in a very similar situation as it did in Boehm’s day: contemporary works are constantly pushing the boundaries of the standard flute in use. Considering the current compositional trends, the 170-year-old design of the Boehm flute is scarcely keeping pace with the demands of twenty-first century compositions. By examining current and past compositional trends and considering historical precedent for acceptance and rejection of designs, one can determine the likelihood of the following outcomes: that the Kingma flute will not keep its audience, waning in popularity; that the Kingma flute will find considerable acceptance, eventually being viewed in equal standing with the Boehm flute; or that the Kingma flute may, in the coming decades, slowly replace the Boehm flute as our standard instrument.

Despite being given a highly publicized debut and being produced in partnership with respected brands, the Kingma flute has yet to gain significant traction with the majority of the flute community. This has little to do with any specific quality of the instrument itself; rather, it likely results from general misinformation and limited composer involvement. This project explores how the presentation and promotion of the Kingma flute must be changed in order to dispel common misconceptions are addressed and marketing strategies are optimized.