



# **Lindsay's Elements of Flute-playing**

**A Study in Performance Practice**

**Facsimile of the Edition of 1828–30**

**Edited, with an Introduction, by Ardal Powell**

**And a Commentary by Richard M. Wilson**

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inequality lends a personality to each note and a character to each scale.

Lindsay gives the range of the flute, in his fingering chart, as  $c'$  to  $c'''$ , chromatically. The notes  $a'''$  and  $b'''^b$  appear regularly in the symphonic repertoire of Lindsay's time, though the  $b'''^b$  is avoided in some contexts. Notes higher than that were the territory of the virtuosi. The  $b'''^b$ 's in Lindsay appear only near the end of Part II; there is only one  $b'''$ , at the top of a B major scale, and no  $c'''$  in the musical examples in the method.

### b. The simple system compared with the Boehm system.

Theobald Boehm (1794–1881) was a virtuoso flutist, a goldsmith, and an engineer who, in two major steps, in 1832 and 1847, created a new flute design. The latter model, with modifications in details, is the cylindrical Boehm flute, the modern flute used all over the world today. While Boehm incorporated many ideas in the air at the time, he was the only one with the courage to throw out the old system completely and the engineering know-how to make a flute on his new, “scientific” system that actually worked. (The simple-system flute is often referred to as the “pre-Boehm” flute, but this can be misleading, since this system remained common and was played by many professional players into the twentieth century, especially outside of Britain and France.)

At the time of his *Elements*, Lindsay could have had no idea of the new and controversial developments in flute design that would occur by mid-century. He could not have known that his elaborate and carefully thought out system of fingering, and much of his style, would be rendered moot by the Boehm flute and many systems designed in reaction to its introduction. In England, new systems would be introduced under the names of e.g. Siccamo, Carte, Ward, Clinton, Radcliff, and Pratten, starting in the 1840s. None of these, save some of the simple Pratten models, preserved the six unencumbered holes of the simple-system flute, or its subtle fingering. This is a fascinating period in this history of the flute in Britain, though Fitzgibbon gives 1850 as the start of a decline in popularity of the flute.<sup>8</sup>

Boehm opened a workshop in Munich in 1828 and at first manufactured simple-system flutes in association with Rudolph Greve (from 1829). His flutes featured easy high notes, and his early compositions before 1832, rather than showing any limitations of the early flute, prove just how capable the simple-system flute can be when in its element.

As the nineteenth century progressed, musical instruments tended to change so as to be louder and more tonally even. Boehm addressed these requirements by means of additional mechanization, but attempted to keep the system of keys as simple as possible subject to his other aims. He designed his flute for equal temperament and with the idea that each note should have basically only one fingering. He sought to equalize tone and make all scales equally easy (or equally difficult) with respect to fingering.

Volume was an important criterion for Boehm. When touring London in 1831, his tone was compared unfavor-

ably to that of Charles Nicholson, and in an oft-quoted excerpt from a letter to W. S. Broadwood dated 1871, Boehm explains that “...I could not match Nicholson in power of tone, wherefore I set to work to remodel my flute. Had I not heard him, probably the Boehm flute would never have been made.”

The Boehm flute, with its large holes, has, in general, more potential power than the simple-system flute. The highest notes in the third octave can be more easily produced, and more trill fingerings are available for these high notes. It has a large tonal and dynamic flexibility, and an approximately uniform timbre over its range.

Now that the Boehm flute is widespread and celebrated, certain misunderstandings persist about the simple-system flute.

Its tone has been compared unfavorably to that of the Boehm flute in some modern books and articles. The simple-system flute can be and was criticized for many reasons, but those who knew both the old flute and the Boehm flute, as played by masters of their respective instruments, never denigrated the overall tone or sound of the earlier design. For example, Fitzgibbon, in 1914, the author of a book extolling the Boehm flute and its inventor, would say in a section where he describes and praises flute tone that “The old flute had undoubtedly more of this characteristic mellifluous sound than the modern Böhm.”<sup>9</sup>

One can also read that the pre-Boehm flute “clearly could not fulfill the requirements of the nineteenth century”. This is a modern conceit. The difficulty on the simple-system instrument of certain high passages in nineteenth-century music, for example, has been misjudged by some modern authors, who have misunderstood the fingerings (and alternate fingerings) of the old flute. R. S. Rockstro, who knew both the old and new systems intimately, could write in 1890 that “The old flute, with eight keys and upwards, possesses certain facilities in the fingering of the third octave which are not afforded by any flutes on the open-keyed system [e.g. the Boehm flute] ...”<sup>10</sup>

Most Boehm-flute players can exceed the loudness of simple-system players, especially in the highest notes, but the large-holed English flutes can be quite loud with the proper embouchure. We may imagine that Nicholson could play louder, on the whole, than most flutists today.

The simple system has great charm, much character, and a huge range of effects ... after it is mastered. However, there is no getting around the fact that the mature simple-system flute is very difficult to master, much more difficult than the modern Boehm flute—and much more difficult than the one-key flute—because its intonation is sometimes hard to control and its fingering technique is sometimes complex.

A barrier for potential simple-system players today is the difficulty in finding high quality historical instruments in working order—and they, as well as modern reproductions, can be expensive. The mass-produced simple-system instruments made circa 1900, often German exports, that are found in flea markets, estate sales, and for sale on the web today cannot give an accurate idea of the better flutes from Lindsay's time.