

The Headjoint Specialist

Headjoint Buying Guide

Replacing a flute's headjoint is like giving it a new personality. For example, putting a gold headjoint on a silver flute makes it play similarly to an all gold instrument. It is generally acknowledged that many expensive flutes have headjoints that do not allow them to be played at their best. Indeed, by replacing the poor headjoint of an otherwise first-rate instrument, the player can realize its full potential. Another important need for a new headjoint is for the player who owns a moderately priced, mass-produced flute in good mechanical condition. The greatest improvement in its quality, with minimal investment can be the replacement of the headjoint. It is often far less expensive and more desirable to replace the headjoint of this class of instrument than to replace the entire flute with a more costly one. It is important to know that headjoint making is a special expertise apart from other areas of flute making. Unlike traditional makers whose expertise is divided among the many aspects of flute making, my company is exclusively devoted to the art and science of headjoint making.

I spend a great deal of time developing improved designs, as is evidenced by the issuance of the Drelinger **Optikut**[®] headjoint patents. This specialization is analogous to reed or mouthpiece making as an area of expertise, distinctly different from basic wind instrument making. More and more, flutists are recognizing this distinction and are buying the flute body from one maker and the headjoint from another. At first glance, the headjoint looks like the simplest part of the flute. In reality, it is acoustically the most complex. The headjoint incorporates a universe of details that demand great sensitivity on the part of the maker in order to match it with each individual player and flute body. I believe that the best results can be achieved by working personally with each flutist. My method of working is analogous to fitting eye glasses: you need a variety of lenses to find the combination that works best. When I have done my job, the headjoint responds like a musical lens, helping the flutist to clearly and easily express every nuance. Remember, even those who are satisfied with their present flute should simply try a different headjoint. It may very well give the best results ever.

Every flutist is unique. Each of us has a one-of-a-kind embouchure. To illustrate this point here are some photographs from Roger S. Stevens' book *Artistic Flute* (Highland/Etling Publishing Co., CA). Not seen is the inside of the mouth where differences also demonstrate individuality. Based on the fact that everyone plays differently, it stands to reason that a headjoint is a very personal choice. Finding the right headjoint can be very time consuming, but absolutely necessary, if you are to play at your best.



In order to understand what is needed, I work with each person on an individual basis, pointing out both the strengths and weaknesses of their original headjoint. Next, I make every effort to provide a new headjoint which corrects these weaknesses while maintaining the original's desirable characteristics. My work involves hearing through my customers' ears and sensitizing myself to what they perceive. When they try headjoints, I watch, as well as listen, to see if there is muscle tension around the area of the embouchure. When a headjoint is properly matched to the player, it seems to meld perfectly with the chin and lips, creating an almost relaxed appearance of the surrounding muscles. Remember, in order to play musically, a headjoint must feel good as well as be capable of producing beautiful sound.