

Investing in my Flute's Tonal Flexibility

Emily Hunter, Miller Arts Scholar (Music)

Project Proposal:

I am proposing to receive funding to upgrade my flute's head joint. The grant would allow me to invest in my future music career and surpass the limitations of my current instrument for my proposed DMP recital, where I will be performing expressive French flute repertoire.

Faculty Mentor: Kelly Sulick, kas6am@virginia.edu

Project Overview:

I have seen significant improvements in my flute technique since the start of my music program this semester in Vienna, Austria. However, my progress is slowing as I am reaching the limitations of my current instrument. When I bring these newly developed skills back to UVA, I want to continue that progress. **I am proposing to receive funding to upgrade my flute's head joint.** My flute repairman, Clifford Tretick, is an expert in making flutes and recommended these brands: Brannen, Mancke, Burkart, Sheridan, and Abell. I plan on working with my mentor and private teacher, Kelly Sulick to choose the right head joint for my performance goals. Kelly can help guide me through the process of upgrading my instrument because she has experience in contacting flute distributors. When I attended the UVA Flute Forum in 2018 and 2022, organized by Kelly Sulick, there was a flute vendor room filled with instruments. She would be able to guide me in the process of reaching out to flute distributors and picking out the head joint itself.

The process of choosing a new instrument or instrument part is highly individualistic and can be a lengthy process. Determining which styles work best for my playing in person is crucial before making a large investment. This investment would immediately improve my flute playing at UVA for my proposed DMP recital next Spring and extend into my professional music career. Upgrading my head joint would allow me to play at my highest level, without the limitations I currently face from my instrument.

There are many head joint varieties currently on the market. Flutemakers believe that “a good headjoint should have the flexibility to flourish in a wide range of performance situations¹.” I have looked into the recommended flutemakers and their head joint models. The Burkhardt M2 model has a rectangular-shaped embouchure hole while the S4 model has an oval-shape. The M2 model is great for lower-register notes while the S4 model's strengths lie in the upper register and slurred notes. The S4 also has a little more resistance, which can provide freedom to use a lot of air without the fear of cracking notes². However, this can also result in a narrower tone color range. Brannen head joints come in many more materials: Sterling silver tube and embouchure,

¹ <https://www.brannenflutes.com/headjoints>

² <https://www.burkart.com/flute-headjoints/>

Sterling silver tube and lip plate/14K Rose gold riser, Sterling silver tube and lip plate/Platinum riser, Sterling silver tube/14K Rose gold embouchure, 15/85 tube/Sterling silver lip plate with 14K Rose gold riser, 15/85 tube/14K Rose gold embouchure, 10K Rose gold tube/Sterling silver embouchure, 10K Rose gold tube/Sterling silver lip plate with 14K Rose gold riser, 10K Rose gold tube/14K Rose gold embouchure, 14K Rose gold tube/Sterling silver embouchure, 14K Rose gold tube/Sterling silver lip plate with 14K Rose gold riser, 14K Rose gold tube/14K Rose gold embouchure, 19.5K Rose gold tube/14K Rose gold crown and embouchure, Platinum tube/Sterling silver embouchure, Platinum tube and riser/Sterling silver lip plate, and Platinum tube/14K Rose gold embouchure³. Mancke head joints have similar options for the material in comparison with Brannen head joints. Brannen-Cooper head joints come in three different styles: Epoch (most projecting, responsive, less resistant), Modern Cooper (projecting, responsive, able to play a large range of tone colors), and the Modified Cooper (flexible yet stable, slightly more resistance than the Modern Cooper, and produces a rich and full sound).

I personally know that I want a head joint that is not too restrictive, so I can play a wide range of tone colors in different musical settings. However, I am also searching for a head joint with a little more tonal stability since I noticed that while practicing *Le Merle Noir* by Olivier Messiaen for my proposed DMP recital, I am cracking notes despite rigorous practice.

My current flute has been pre-owned, dating it to roughly 16 years old. My current head joint is worth more than \$3,000, so I am proposing to use the entirety of these funds toward purchasing a new head joint. New head joints from The Flute Center of New York can cost from \$1,700 to \$14,780* depending on the craftsmanship and material. I am aiming to purchase a head joint toward the middle of that range. I would cover the remainder of the costs through selling my old head joint, and from my summer job's salary.

My outcome report would consist of a description of different flute head joints and how they influence the sound, as well as why I chose the chosen head joint. I will include video samples of testing out the different head joints to demonstrate the differences. If granted the opportunity, this purchase will make the greatest difference in my tone color and expressive flexibility, allowing me to reach my fullest potential in my future performances. I am working toward a DMP in music and hope to perform a fourth-year recital. In this DMP recital, I hope to perform French repertoire including: *Prelude et Scherzo* by Henri Busser, *Les folies d'espagna* by Marin Marais, *Fantasia* by Philippe Gaubert, and *Le Merle Noir* by Olivier Messiaen. This grant would allow me to use more tone colors with ample tonal stability, which are needed for the proposed repertoire, French solo pieces.

Portfolio Examples -

1. *Piece* by Jacques Ibert (2:12:58) - <https://youtu.be/3U0Tt9ATyxw>

I am unable to edit/trim this video because I do not own the original video since it was filmed for the Tea Time recital. This piece is written by a French composer and is highly expressive. Like in

³ <https://www.brannenflutes.com/headjoints>

the repertoire I hope to play for my DMP recital, this piece requires a wide range of tone colors to optimize musical expression.

2. *Concerto in G Major* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1:25 excerpt) -

<https://youtu.be/jQz9X-bKn6s>

This piece includes a lot of interval jumps that need to be played with a clear tone. A new head joint that is slightly more resistant will allow me to make these interval jumps more freely and without hesitation.

Budget

<u>Item</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Reasoning</u>
Flute head joint	\$3,000*- \$14,780	A new head joint will expand my musical expression. It would allow me to have greater tonal flexibility needed for the French repertoire I am preparing for my proposed DMP fourth-year recital. I do not plan on purchasing the highest-end flute head joint. My current flute is worth \$11,000-\$12,000 and the head joint is the most expensive part of the flute. I plan on upgrading my current head joint, but not purchasing the most expensive model.

*Costs are determined based on the current head joints available at

<https://flutecenter.com/collections/customfl-brannen-headjoints>. I used Brannen head joints as an example.

Timeline

Spring 2023 -

- Continue research:
 - Differences in head joint materials and structure, and their effect on tonal flexibility and timbre
- Contact The Flute Center of New York to express interest in buying a new flute head joint with the help of my mentor, Kelly Sulick who has experience in contacting flute distributors.