



Breathing New Life into

Music

Composer, screenwriter, flautist and collector of wind instruments, Ron Korb turns inspiration into exultation.

By Patricia M. Fernberg

Photos by Jade Yeh





BREATHING NEW LIFE

The first time **Ron Korb** heard the flute played, he was a small boy watching a television program. “I just loved the sound of it,” he says, and that love has carried him through to an international career as a recording artist, solo performer, session musician (with Olivia Newton-John, Jim McCarty and Mychael Danna), composer, screenwriter, teacher and collector of woodwinds. His signature style spans and melds jazz, pop, classical and indigenous music strengthened and shaped by years of formal training, practice and curiosity about the lexicon of his chosen instrument.

His first contact with the flute was playing the recorder in grade six, graduating to the transverse flute in his teens and continuing his studies in flute at the Royal Conservatory of Music and York University in his native Toronto. He won a scholarship to study music performance at the University of Toronto, from which he graduated with honors.

“I can remember what it’s like to not be able to play, when music was a total mystery,” he says. “I like to keep that sense of wonder alive in the music I create. As I write, I discover different things, new things to add to my vocabulary.”

Ron is as much a storyteller as a musician. His **30-album discography** ranges from Bach to live concert recordings, and concept albums featuring compositions flavored with Asian, Latin, Australian and Celtic themes, and featuring the unique tonal qualities of indigenous woodwinds.

He actively seeks inspiration and says he’s always composing, yet his goal in composition and in playing is simplicity. “I’m conscious of composing the way non-musicians hear things. Does the music convey something? Does it move people? What images does it evoke?” Ron explains. He often tries new material when he performs, and says, “Audiences definitely let you see the strengths and weak-

Ron Korb

Discography

2005

- Rainforest Flute (Ron Korb and Ken Davis)
- Seasons: Christmas Carols (Ron Korb and Donald Quan)
- Ron Korb Live (Singapore)

2004

- Ron Korb Live (DVD and CD)
- Celtic Quest

2003

- Romancing the Dragon — The Best of Ron Korb
- World of Ron Korb

2002

- Taming the Dragon

2001

- Behind the Mask

2000

- Celtic Heartland
- Celtic Quest
- Rencontre en Provence

1999

- Tapestries — Titanic Odyssey
- Mada Minu Tomo e
- Taming the Dragon

1998

- Celtic Skye
- Natural Friends





BREATHING NEW LIFE



nesses in the music that you don't see yourself." In addition, he notes that live interaction with his bandmates often adds new, unanticipated shadings to familiar pieces, changing the experience of listening and performing. That, he says with some amusement, is how "The Tale of Genji" from his *Japanese Mysteries* album picked up a Latin rhythm when performed live.

But life experiences also temper the way he hears his compositions. Of "The Day I Lost My Love" about the fictitious loss of a loved one, Ron notes that the piece gradually blossoms into a sense of hopefulness. "But now, two years after my mother's death, it has a whole new meaning. Now I know what loss really feels like," he reflects.

Ron describes the writing process for his current release, *Europa*, this way: "Ideas are jotted in the notebook he carries with him, and he reviews the notes for ideas that can work together as he com-

poses. Inspiration can be a fickle writing partner, he acknowledges, and admits that he frequently works on several songs and even projects concurrently as ideas gradually form cohesive units. The best songs, Ron says simply, "have no gaps, nothing uninspired. 'Beckett's Whisper' is one such composition: I was testing a new Irish flute and I came up with the melody and then sat at the piano and finished it all in one sitting."

Nowhere is Ron's quest for something more, something different than in his collection of flutes: more than 250 from around the world. And, yes, he has played every one. It started, he says, when he became intrigued by Asian bamboo flutes and moved to Japan to study traditional court music. There Ron, who is part Japanese, learned to play the shinobue and ryūteki flutes. The training was challenging because playing techniques differ markedly from classical Western technique, he





BREATHING NEW LIFE

says, and he continued to purchase and learn to play instruments as he traveled and toured. Many of his flutes will be displayed in the soon-to-be opened online flute museum later this year.

What draws him to a particular instrument? “I’m attracted by its tonal quality and the way it looks when it’s played in a live performance,” Ron says, but adds that although many instruments look different, they are similar in tone. He’s always on the hunt for a sound he’s never before heard.

From the Chinese dizi to Irish whistles and from a Chilean ocarina to an ox-horn wind instrument from Cambodia, Ron has collected and played all of them on albums and in performance. His experiences in finding, studying, and mastering the art of flutes from around the world have been a journey, he says: “It’s exciting to push both your technique and the instrument, to apply other techniques that take you beyond traditional music to something more.”

His journey continues, taking him to Taiwan, Singapore, and mainland China this summer, then into the studio to work on recordings flavored with Chinese, Latin and Afro-Cuban themes. Wherever Ron’s odyssey leads, he’s certain to find inspiration. **AGL**



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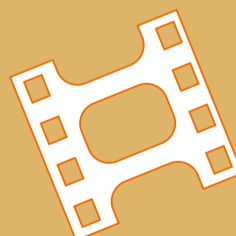
FOR MORE on Ron:



**TOURS AND
CONCERTS**



MUSIC



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PHOTOS



WATCH: Concert highlights from Ron’s 2012 live concert in Poland.

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