

**Review****Greater Cleveland Flute Society:  
Robert Dick at The Music Settlement (October 6)**

by Daniel Hathaway



New York-based composer and virtuoso flutist Robert Dick was a busy man last weekend. He joined his former student Mary Kay Fink and high school classmate Joel Smirnoff to serenade the Women's Committee of the Cleveland Institute of Music, gave a master class for composers and a public forum at CIM and finished up at The Music Settlement on Sunday with a one-hour recital and master classes featuring flute students from Baldwin Wallace, Oberlin and the University of Akron — a full afternoon of activities sponsored by The Greater Cleveland Flute Society.

Dick has established a reputation both for his expert playing of flute classics and contemporary music using extended techniques, and for his original compositions, which often spring from popular music. He began his solo recital with six of his own works, quipping that “when you premiere a new piece, you usually get to hear it twice: for the first and the last time.”

Not true in the case of Dick's 1989 piece, *Lookout*, commissioned for a national high school flute competition, or for *Fish are Jumping* (1999) or for the four excerpts he played from *Flying Lessons*, a two-volume set of contemporary concert etudes, all of which have taken their place in the pedagogical or concert repertoire. Multiphonics, key percussion, bent pitches and internal conversations all came into play, enlivening works inspired by rock, Chicago Jump Blues, the first attempts at flight by baby swallows, rag-time, twelve-tone music and the exotic scales of India's flutists.

Dick's lively tone and controlled vibrato adorned two standard works, Telemann's second and fifth fantasias. His elegant playing took a more populist turn in the last Allegro, a suitably bibulous and jolly tavern tune.

Another now-standard piece, Edgard Varèse's *Density 21.5*, named for the density of the platinum in Georges Barrère's new flute (he commissioned the work in 1936), has been in Dick's repertoire for years and he's closely studied its subsequent revisions by the composer. His tone ranged from dark and purring to bright and penetrating in his masterful performance of a work that first introduced extended techniques to the flute repertoire.

Finally, Dick gave the audience a look at his third identity: he's also something of an inventor, having put his head together with some colleagues to come up with an innovation called the Glissando Headjoint®, a telescoping mouthpiece that allows a player to get the same effects from a flute that an electric guitarist can produce with a whammy bar.

Also something of a standup comedian, Dick joked that the gestation process for this invention proved that “through an evolutionary process, you can arrive at intelligent design.” He demonstrated its capabilities in his 2003 piece, *Sliding Life Blues*, a wild ride through stunning, often Middle Eastern-sounding dialogues and woozy musical gestures that brought the house down. Every progressive flutist will want one of these gadgets.

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