Russell King was born in Sydney in 1922. He began playing a school fife at the age of five under the guidance of his father, William King, who had been a Band Boy in London at the Duke of York’s Royal Military School in Kings Road, Chelsea (this Military School is now located in Dover). At the age of eleven, Russell became a student of Victor McMahon, one of Sydney’s most respected flute teachers for many years. Russell played on a thick wooden closed G# Böhm System flute made by the famous English flute maker, Rudall, Carte & Co., Ltd. The young Russell went to North Sydney Junior High School, and then to the Conservatorium High School. He won a shield at the Sydney Eisteddfod. Charles Mackerras (later Sir) was a fellow student; he started on the flute, later changing to the oboe. He was principal oboe in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra before becoming well-known as a conductor. At about this time, Russell King was invited to teach at the Sydney Conservatorium for 6 months while Victor McMahon was absent.

In 1942, Russell King joined the Air Force and received his training in Ballarat. He was stationed in Darwin, and joined a Concert Party, performing with Phillip Hargrave, a well-known pianist from Adelaide. After living for 4 years north of the 14°, Russell King went to London, where he studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Gareth Morris. The lessons took place in Dinley Hall, located opposite the Royal Academy of Music in Marylebone High Street. Gareth Morris was appointed to the Royal Academy of Music in 1945. He gave the first performance in England of Poulenc’s Sonata in 1958, with the composer at the piano. Morris had acquired the wooden Rudall Carte flute that had belonged to his teacher, the famous Robert Murchie, who had died in 1949. This flute had become worn out after many years of constant use, so Morris had it rebuilt by Rudall Carte. Robert Murchie was born in Greenock, Scotland, in 1884, and was considered to be one of England’s finest flute soloists, broadcasting regularly for the B.B.C. He had been principal flute in the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra in the 1930s, and flute professor at the Royal Military School of Music, Kneller Hall, Twickenham, the Trinity College of Music and the Royal College of Music.

The Hallé Orchestra is based in Manchester, and was established in 1858. It has been served over the years by many well-known flautists, including Edward de Jong, Jean Firmin Brossa, Vincent Needham, Edward Stanley Redfern and Joseph Lingard. In 1914, Joseph Lingard became the Hallé Orchestra’s piccolo player. He was then aged 34 years, and became principal flute in 1921. Critics praised Lingard for ‘his beautiful precision, taste and mastery of his instrument’. From 1924 onwards, Joseph Lingard made regular broadcasts as a soloist and chamber musician for the B.B.C. He left the orchestra in 1934 to work as a soloist, and was succeeded by his pupil, the distinguished English flautist, Geoffrey Gilbert.

Geoffrey Gilbert was born in Liverpool in 1914; his first teacher was Vincent Needham. In 1928, Gilbert entered the Royal Manchester College of Music, and two years later, at the age
of 16, he joined the Hallé Orchestra, where he played alongside his teacher, Joseph Lingard, under the direction of Hamilton Harty. Four years later, Geoffrey Gilbert became principal flute of the Hallé Orchestra, but remained for only one season, being lured away by Sir Thomas Beecham to join the London Philharmonic Orchestra, where he remained until 1939. He served in the Coldstream Guards during World War II, and founded the Wigmore Ensemble in 1945. In 1948, Gilbert became principal flute in the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra. During the 1930s, Geoffrey Gilbert had noticed that there was a prejudice against the British style of flute playing, which was typically a straight sound with no vibrato, and that French flautists, such as Marcel Moyse, René le Roy and André Jaunet were being engaged in England for concerto work and solo recordings. Some French flautists had emigrated to America in the early 1900s, most notably Georges Barèrre in 1905, and as a result, the French playing style was well established in America by the 1930s. Gilbert realised that British flautists wouldn’t survive internationally if they didn’t change their style of playing and the instruments that they were using (wooden flutes were in general use at this time and a tight embouchure was used to play them). He became the first British flautist from a major orchestra to use a silver flute and studied the French style of playing with René le Roy. His strong influence moved the direction of British flute playing towards France and the French School, ‘with the emphasis on expression and clarity of articulation’. By the late 1960s, the French style of flute playing had become dominant in Britain.

Arliss Marriott, one of Robert Murchie’s students, became principal flute of the Hallé Orchestra in 1943, with the 15 year old Oliver Bannister, a pupil of Joseph Lingard, as second flute. Marriott left the orchestra in 1945 to become a freelance player and Oliver Bannister became the Hallé Orchestra’s youngest ever principal flute at the age of 17. Joseph Lingard had returned to the Hallé Orchestra in 1937. Russell King auditioned for a position with the Hallé Orchestra in 1946 and joined as piccolo and deputy principal flute, replacing Joseph Lingard. He was now using a silver Haynes flute. At this time, the orchestra was conducted by John Barbirolli (later Sir) and the other members of the flute section were Oliver Bannister and William Barlow.

On May 15th, 1948, Russell King performed with Ena Mitchell (Mezzo-Soprano) and the Riddick String Orchestra, conducted by Bernard Rose, in Pastoral (‘Lie Strewn the White Flocks’) by Arthur Bliss for the Ecclesfield Music Society at the Oxford Music Festival in the Hall of the Queen’s College. The programme also included Benjamin Britten’s Serenade with Richard Lewis (Tenor) and the celebrated French Horn player, Dennis Brain, and Purcell’s Birthday Ode for Queen Mary with Ena Mitchell, Alfred Deller (Counter Tenor), Duncan Thomson and Thomas Hensley.

After two seasons in Manchester, Russell King returned to London in 1950, where he auditioned for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, which was conducted by Sir Adrian Boult. Russell joined the London Philharmonic Orchestra as piccolo and deputy principal flute. The other flute section members were Tony Moroney and David Sandeman. It was time to move on again, and in 1952, Russell King joined the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent (later Sir, and often referred to as ‘Flash Harry’) where he was associated with Geoffrey Gilbert and fellow Australian flautist Douglas Whittaker. Douglas Whittaker had studied in Melbourne with Leslie Barklamb and arrived in London in 1950 after a year as...
principal flute with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra. Victor McMahon and Leslie Barklamb were the two leading Australian flute teachers of their day. They had both studied with John Amadio, the celebrated Australasian flautist. In June 1969, Douglas Whittaker toured Australia for the Australian Broadcasting Commission. He was offered a position as Lecturer in Flute at the Canberra School of Music in 1973, and died from a heart attack on January 10th, 1974, only a short time after his arrival in Canberra. Douglas Whittaker’s 14 carat gold flute was one of only three made by the famed English flute maker, Albert Cooper (James Galway owns the other two).

Geoffrey Gilbert had established a reputation as an outstanding teacher and was appointed Professor of Flute at Trinity College of Music in 1947 and the Guildhall School of Music in 1948. He became Professor of Flute at the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1957, and in 1969 accepted a position at Stetson University in Daytona, Florida. After retiring, he maintained a flute studio at his home in De Land. Geoffrey Gilbert died in 1989. Three of his best known students are James Galway, William Bennett and Trevor Wye. Geoffrey Gilbert offered his open hole B-foot silver Vérémy Tibouville-Lamy flute, which was made in Paris, to Russell King in 1952 for £25. Russell still owns this beautiful flute. Gilbert had sometimes used the silver headjoint from this instrument when playing his platinum flute, which had silver keys.

Russell King played at a concert for the Australian Music Association in Australia House on March 21st, 1957. His fellow artists included Margaret Nesbitt, soprano, John Weaving, baritone and Richard Bonynge, piano. Russell King’s items included the Fauré Sicilienne and Fantasy and the Sonatine by Claude Arrieu. After 9 seasons with the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra, Russell King left to become a freelance player, and performed with all of the major London orchestras. He also played in the Royal Opera House orchestra at Covent Garden (this included some operas by Wagner) and the orchestra at Sadler’s Wells. He also did some teaching at the London College of Music. In 1963, Russell King joined the Philharmonia Orchestra’s tour to South America, and visited Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Buenos Aires. He returned to London and then toured North America as co-principal flute with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

After returning to London again, he came to Adelaide for the 1964 Festival of Arts. Not long after this, he joined the South Australian Symphony Orchestra (as the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra was then known) as principal flute. David Cubbin, who had been the principal flute since 1954, had left the South Australian Symphony Orchestra to take up a full-time position at the Elder Conservatorium. The other members of the flute section at this time were Stephen Carter and Joseph Brunovsky. In 1971, Russell King had open-heart surgery to replace his aorta with a plastic valve. After this, his orchestral colleagues called him nicknames such as ‘the robot’ and ‘bionic flute player’. Russell King often appeared as a soloist with the orchestra. In 1978, he teamed up with Rosemary St. John, harp, to play Mozart’s Flute and Harp Concerto. Joseph Brunovsky died in September 1973, and Elizabeth Koch joined the flute section in 1974. She says that at this time, orchestral playing was very new to her, and that Russell King was a tower of strength, always supportive and willing to share his interpretations of certain orchestral passages.

The Flute Society of South Australia’s first meeting in July 1972 included ‘An Evening of Various Examination Works’. Leading Adelaide flautists including Alison Rosser, Helen
Hairhall, Russell King, Judith Cooper, Stephen Carter and David Cubbin performed and discussed works from the A.M.E.B. repertoire. In early 1973, Russell King was elected a Vice-President of the Flute Society of South Australia. He joined Stephen Carter to give a recital for two flutes for the Flute Society in the S.A.I.T. Hall on March 7th, 1973. They were joined by colleagues Audrey White, piano, and Rosemary St. John, harp. The programme included music by Loeillet, Mozart, Beethoven, Berlioz, Hindemith and Doppler. Ken Carroll, who in the mid 1970s was the only surviving member of the Adelaide Flute Quartette, gave Russell King permission to use this title. The Adelaide Flute Quartette ‘rose again from the ashes’, and its members, Russell King, Stephen Carter, Elizabeth Koch and Sue Hackett, gave a performance for the Flute Society in Edmund Wright on February 28th, 1977. Russell King gave an advanced masterclass during the Flute Society’s Day Camp at Seymour College in August 1977.

Russell King retired as principal flute of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (as it had become by then) in 1979, but he stayed on as Assistant Orchestral Manager for 2 years. He was also a fixer for Michael Edgley, and booked musicians for orchestras, including those for the Leningrad, Bolshoi and Sadler’s Wells Ballet companies, and for productions such as the Three Penny Opera. Russell King lives at Grange, and for recreation he has enjoyed swimming and fishing on the Henley Jetty. Peter Cassidy, the former principal double bass of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, was a frequent fishing companion.

**Bibliography**


