

NY CULTURE | March 20, 2013, 8:47 p.m. ET

A Face Lift for the Flute

By TAD HENDRICKSON

The flute has always had an uneasy relationship with popular culture. A staple of middle-school orchestras and flower-power bands of the 1960s, it can be a punch line—perhaps never more directly than as Will Farrell's "yazz flute" solo in "Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy." But a young Brooklyn-based duo is taking steps to slow that tide.

The aptly named Flutronix features not one but two young Brooklyn flutists, Nathalie Joachim and Allison Loggins-Hull, who are attempting to redefine the instrument with a unique blend of classical music, hip-hop, electronic programming and soulful vocals reminiscent of neo-R&B stars like Erykah Badu.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal

Nathalie Joachim and Allison Loggins-Hull of Flutronix in Williamsburg this week.

contemporary sounds and beats."

Like the flute itself, classical crossovers are often met with blank stares, but recent entries, from Christopher O'Riley's solo piano versions of Radiohead songs to Yo-Yo Ma's Grammy-winning Goat Rodeo bluegrass collaboration—the field isn't just the lite-pop with strings it once was. Even still, the urban influence and twin flute attack of Flutronix stand apart.

"We've been trying to figure out what to call what we've been doing and we came up with 'urban art pop,'" said Ms. Loggins-Hull. "Our rhythm is driving and high energy. [It is] technically demanding, coming from a classical place. With the pop we are utilizing

The group's vision will be on display Thursday in the Brooklyn Museum's Great Hall, where Flutronix will share a bill with the a violin-based classical crossover duo Charly & Margaux.



Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal

Allison Loggins-Hull and Nathalie Joachim of Flutronix will perform at the Brooklyn Museum on Thursday.

"They are just as passionate, and have just as much energy as any rock band that comes in here," said producer Tony Maimone, who is working with the duo on their upcoming second album, "2.0." "The only difference is that they may bring their own lunch, or Nathalie may work on her knitting as I work on a beat she created."

Ms. Joachim grew up in West Orange, N.J., and Ms. Loggins-Hull in Poughkeepsie, but the two musicians seemed destined to find each other. The tri-state area's classical-music scene, and the flute community specifically, is tightly knit, and the two settled in the

same Brooklyn neighborhood of Crown Heights.

"We found each other on Myspace back when Myspace was something people were using," laughed Ms. Joachim, 29, who does the duo's singing. "It was sort of surprising that we hadn't run into each other before that."

It was a case where parallel paths crossed: Ms. Joachim has a bachelor of music degree in flute from Juilliard and a masters in Sound Studies from the New School, while Ms. Loggins-Hull has a bachelor's in flute performance from SUNY-Purchase and a masters in composition from NYU. After that initial 2008 meeting, Flutronix self-released a debut album in 2010.

Ms. Joachim and Ms. Loggins-Hull cite jazz flutist Hubert Laws as a major non-classical influence, but influences range from Steve Reich and Radiohead to A Tribe Called Quest and Kanye West. That flexibility has led them into collaborations with electronic musician Dan Deacon, hip-hop producer Ski Beatz, the classical group International Contemporary Ensemble, and others.

"We don't have to worry about what we do as dying out because part of what we are doing is staying current and being in the moment," Ms. Joachim said. "I lucked out doing this rather than trying to work in a crumbling landscape that is tricky to navigate."

Part of staying current means revitalizing the flute for even younger players, so Ms. Joachim and Ms. Loggins-Hull lead workshops for students around New York, with titles like "Pop Flute," "Creative Collaboration" and "Beyond the Orchestra." The outreach also widens the duo's fanbase in the flute community, which comprises professional and amateur players, enthusiasts as well as societies and clubs. In the city, the scene is anchored at the Flute Center of New York, a retail showroom and de facto clubhouse near Lincoln Center that sponsors the duo.

"There's definitely a subculture of flute enthusiasts," Ms. Loggins-Hull said. "It's a beautiful instrument for a lot of people. What's great is that there is a range of players in terms of level—amateur, professional. It's one thing that people come together for."

The community support has manifested itself in successful online fundraising campaigns for both Flutronix albums, with the second garnering more than \$20,000 by the end of 2012.

The winter and early spring have also yielded a busy performance schedule, including an ongoing residency at Pianos on Ludlow Street, which continues April 13. Decidedly not a hub for flute, the club is known for presenting emerging rock bands, DJs and singer-songwriters. On a recent Saturday night in the upstairs lounge, Flutronix performed with drummer Joe Blaxx and a laptop on a stool next to the microphone stand. But the two-flute lineup fit right in as they performed originals and a re-worked version of the Eurhythmics' "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" for the young crowd.

"This is excellent role-modeling for all of our flute community," noted flutist and educator Carol Wincenc of Juilliard via email. "First and foremost, Nathalie and Allison are excellent players, never compromising their flutistic and musical standards of playing, and have the gumption to march to the beat of their own drum."