



The Man Behind the Music by Amy Lidster

Music. Figure Skating would not be the sport or source of entertainment it is without it. Good choreography would be lost without the right music. All programs begin with music selection. From there, memorable performances become legendary programs. These facts are common knowledge to skating fans. What is often not known are the people behind the music. Some pieces are composed specifically for a particular skater. Others are well-known pieces, carefully edited to highlight the elements skated in a four minute program.

In the first of two part series, B.B.E. Publications presents two such individuals. Karl Hugo is a composer and accomplished musician. The opening and closing group ensemble numbers of *Dreams on Ice* are the efforts of Hugo, featured in this issue.

At the age of 14, Montreal based composer and musician Karl Hugo stood at a crossroads. Already an accomplished musician, composer and performer, this energetic soccer player realized that to prevent a crippling injury inherent to his chosen sport he needed to give up soccer. "One passion lost, one passion left," reflects Hugo.

But true passion never dies – it merely transforms. Hugo has been able to metamorphose his passion for soccer and successfully blend it with his all consuming passion for music. By creating music for sport, such as figure skating, gymnastics and synchronized swimming. Karl is now able to fully realize both the athletic and artistic aspects of his nature.

Since this time, Hugo has been composing and performing the overtures and finales for *Dream on Ice*. His latest CD *Freestyle* is a remixed compilation of these works and others. (...) A tour to support this CD is in the planning stages.

The majority of this music for the CD was written and performed for skating programs. Three exceptions are *Au revoir Isabelle* and *Broadway*, previously released on *Momentum*, Hugo's first CD and *Pas de deux*. The latter is an original creation for the wedding of Canadian pairs skating champion Isabelle Brasseur to U.S. pairs champion Rocky Marval.

Au revoir Isabelle is a hunting tribute to a friend of Karl's who tragically lost her life in an accident. Without the benefit of lyrics, this piece captures the duality of happy memories and the loss thereof. It was never Hugo's intention that this piece be publicly performed. At the entreaty of his mother, Karl relented and included it on *Momentum*. Canadian Ice Dance champions Shae-Lyn Bourne and Viktor Kraatz gracefully skated to this piece.

While passion is the fuel that drives Hugo's music, it has not engulfed him. Karl is enriched by varied life experience. This is evidence by his divergent circle of friends, interests and of course his widely varied musical interests and influences. Hugo's music is an eclectic blend of classical, pop and jazz. "It's very hard for me to describe my music because I don't have the distance to judge it," admits Karl.

Hugo experiences similar difficulties drawing parallels between his music and the music of other composers. "I like every kind of music and I like every composer because I think that each one has his own style," he says. Along with this, Hugo cites David Foster as an example of music he enjoys. Of Beethoven, Bach, the Beatles and Elvis Presley he says, "We can't ignore them they are legends."

Hugo's talents are not limited to creating music for artistic sports. A gifted musician, conductor and consummate pianist, Karl also plays violin and bassoon. Classically trained in vocals, Hugo is able to sing in six languages besides his native French. The age of 12 marks Hugo's stage debut interpreting his concerto at the venerable Claude-Champagne Hall at the University of Montreal.

In synergy with the release of the CD, Hugo is eager to begin a tour. "It's obvious you need a tour," observes Hugo. A dynamic performer, Karl channels his physical energy into performance. Composing and producing music is largely a solitary pursuit for Hugo. In contrast to this, *La grande fête* arrives when he has the opportunity to perform and work with other musicians. "Stage is a passion, but it's also an experience-when you have passion and experience, it's the perfect blend," says Karl.

Modern technology and artistic gifts blend when Karl uses his MIDI instruments. Working with the MIDI, Hugo is able to compose music for specific instruments and achieve the sound and touch of a classical orchestra. At times, he does engage musicians for specific

solos. "You have your own reflex when you play. When you compose for other musicians you have to adjust your reflex and accept other musicians. It's a great enrichment for me," says Karl.

Karl overcame his parents Hugo and Annick's initial skepticism by applying himself to the piano 2-3 hours a day. "Because I was very active boy, I think my parents did not expect that I would be able to stay in front of a piano." His parents were wrong. Beginning his piano lessons age 7 under the watchful eye of Sister Lucille Brassard, Karl quickly progressed to composition. Brassard was instrumental in shaping the pianist Hugo is today. "She was important in my life because she gave me my whole piano technique, my classical touch," says Hugo.

Hugo likens the development of serious music students to the life of top athletes in training. "I understand skaters because I had the same life," Karl recalls. The discipline infuses in him can through his training, education and inner passion. Always an ardent student, Karl's early athletic training now gives him a symbiotic relationship with the athlete's for which he creates music. "When a skater jumps, I can feel it, (to) put this in motion, this dynamic motion in music is easy for me now," says Hugo.

Hugo has also experienced the pressure of competition. Karl dislikes the practice of musical contests. He firmly believes musicians need to focus on their vision, rather than on comparisons to others. "You have to be yourself, it's difficult enough," says Hugo.

Hugo's approach to composing can only be described as adaptable. He composes equally well on his MIDI electronic instruments, piano and often directly to paper. *Le touché pianistique*, the touch of a piano, the way it is touched and the way it feels comprise the cornerstone of Karl's musicality. "My best time is when I'm at the piano because it's physical. 'When you work with your instrument, you have to be just one,'" says Hugo.

This adaptability also enables Hugo to work days or nights as needed. Like many musicians, Karl is a night owl. "I can work anytime, but I prefer in the night because I like silence of the night," Karl explains. Hugo possesses the uncanny ability to use both sides of his brain equally well. His intelligence works with his artistic ability to create. As a composer, producer and performer, he is able compose and produce music on demand as well as to satisfy an inner compulsion. "I'm inspired when I want to be," remarks Hugo.

Not all gifts are what they seem. The musical gift given to Karl Hugo is not his gift alone. Rather, it is a gift that is shared with all the people who are fortunate enough to have listened to, competed to and have otherwise been lifted up by the music of Karl Hugo.