

A LOOK AT *LAELIA ANCEPS* AND ITS MODERN HYBRIDS

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MANY HYBRIDIZERS HISTORICALLY have searched for innovative parent stock in their quest for the latest breakthrough in cattleya breeding. Others have renewed their interest in proven stud plants that continue to demonstrate a specific dominance. There will always be clones that have given rise to superb progeny when mated correctly. Because a proven breeding plant is many decades old is not a valid reason for discontinuing its use. A good example is *Cattleya Horace* 'Maxima' HCC/AOS (4n), registered in 1938 and still very useful in lending wide petal overlap to its progeny.

Enter *Laelia anceps*, the hardy, long-stemmed, and colorful species whose popular history dates back much further than most of the modern wide-petaled cattleyas that dominate our award system today. The first *Laelia anceps* hybrid, registered in 1894 as *L. Amoena*, is still of interest and available as a remake blue form with the parentage of (*L. anceps* x *L. pumila* f. *coerulea*). *Laelia Finckeniana* (*L. albida* x *L. anceps*) is listed also, but undated, and as a natural hybrid. It has become a good modern parent used primarily in making pink hybrids.

When the question arises, "What is the finest *L. anceps* hybrid you've ever seen?" the answer most often given is *Lc. Puppy Love* 'True Beauty' HCC/AOS (*C. Dubiosa* x *L. anceps*), made in 1979 by my own orchid mentor, Ernest Hetherington, at Stewart Orchids. It certainly has had the widest distribution, seen and enjoyed by many thousands of people worldwide. In reviewing the *L. anceps* hybrids registered since 2000, I was encouraged to find a total of 37 new grexes. It is interesting to note that *Lc. Puppy Love* has been used in breeding a total of 48 times according to Wildcatt orchids database; this possibly is due to its popularity and exposure through wide catalog distribution.

My interest in *L. anceps* hybrids first came about when I saw a listing for a peloric *L. anceps* f. *roeblingiana* in a Santa Barbara Orchid Estates summer sale auction list. It caught my eye because it had a published minimum bid of \$500. I recalled that I had previously read a sales offering by a young man who had purchased some of the remaining inventory of the Beall Orchid Company when it went out of business. A telephone inquiry resulted in the purchase of the surviving four clones. One turned out to be the now famous *L. anceps* 'Feathered Flame' which received a CHM/AOS award of eighty points in January of 1989.

Our experimental breeding with that unusually marked clone began in 1976 when I crossed *L. anceps* 'Feathered Flame' with *Blc. Fantasy Factor* 'White Gold' (*Blc. Color Equation* x *Lc. Sun Mist*). *Blc. Color Equation* is (*Lc. Colorama* x *Blc. Iliad*), and *Lc. Sun Mist* is (*Lc. Orange Ann* x *Lc. Pacific Sun*). The unique *Blc. Fan-*

tasy Factor clone used for this cross resembled a fine large white, *C. Bow Bells*, with a yellow band on the central mid-ribs of the wide petals. We registered the cross *Blc. Precursor*; it was awarded when the first blooms opened. What I expected from the cross were wider petals that were lavender with darker splashes on the petal tips, and improved lip form. What I actually observed were four-inch blooms with overlapping, dark purple, very round petals that were enhanced by a bright band of yellow on the flat mid-rib section of both petals. The erect sepals were a slightly lighter shade of lavender. The lips resembled full, slightly ruffled regular cattleya lips with a band of darker purple at their base extending upward at their edges; throats were ablaze in yellow, matching the petal flares.

Another 'Feathered Flame' hybrid that has created much pleasure involves the white splashed petal hybrid *Lc. Hawaiian Fantasy* 'Dora' HCC/AOS (*C. Summer Snow* x *Lc. Wayndora*) as the other parent. We registered this hybrid as *Lc. Preface* and have been delighted with its high percentage of about five inch overlapping wide petals and three to five inch blooms on strong stems. Colors range from white to cream, with a few pink-lavender, all with varying pastel petal bands and petal tip flares. The clone 'Colorific' has striking creamy-white sepals and wide, flat, overlapping dark purple petals with one-half inch wide contrasting white bands running from the lip lobes to petal tips. Several clones produced very strong vertical spikes of superior *L. anceps*-like blooms in lavender, but with large lips resembling those of standard cattleyas.

Possibly the most unlikely hybrid made with 'Feathered Flame' was the mating of the bright orange *Slc. Hazel Boyd* 'Polynesian Sunset' to make *Slc. Fresh Start* 'Surprise'. Floral spikes were shortened to 12-14 inches, producing three 4 to 5-inch white blooms with purple petal tips. Petals are 1.75 inches wide and overlapping, with heavy substance. The overall plant height in a 7-inch pot averages 9 inches, and plants bloom twice per year.

While we have not experimented with cold and heat tolerance with these hybrids, it is my prediction that *L. anceps*, when bred with *Cattleya*, *Laeliocattleya*, *Sophranitis* or *Potinara* hybrids, will produce progeny that possess both heat and cold tolerance beyond the individual tolerances of the ancestors.

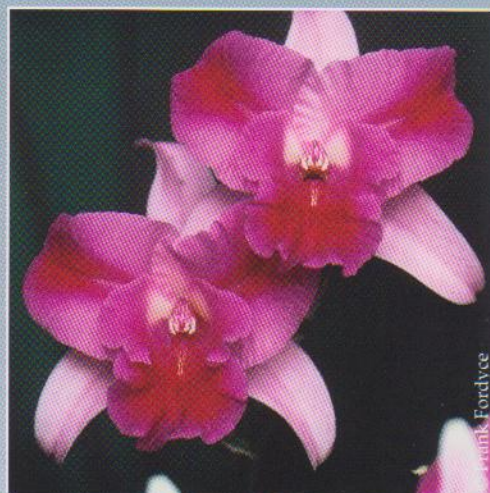
One of the finest *L. anceps* hybrids I have seen was made by the Rod McLellan Company and named in honor of a customer, Clar Hancock. It is without peer, the largest I have seen, a full 6 inches in diameter, held vertically aloft on very sturdy stems, bearing up to four snow-white blooms, one above another, each lasting a full month. The parentage is (*L. anceps* f. *alba* x *Lc. Ethel Merman*). Parents of *Lc. Ethel Merman* are (*Lc. Jane*



Lc. Preface 'Colorific'



Lc. Preface 'Fantastic'



Lc. Preface 'Pilgrims Progress'



L. anceps f. *roeblingiana*
'Feathered Flame' CHM/AOS

Dane x *Lc. Canhamiana*). Obviously, the very large size and lasting qualities of *Lc. Clar Hancock* come from the species *L. purpurata*, found in *Lc. Canhamiana*.

When *L. anceps* 'Feathered Flame' is combined with *Lc. Clar Hancock*, the very large flower size and clear, semi-alba coloring are retained. We originally submitted that cross for registration as *Lc. Portrait*, but, to our chagrin, the Royal Horticulture Society returned our forms and declined our request, stating that another person had already used the name *Lc. Portrait*. We have since renamed our hybrid, and it is registered as *Lc. Higher Ground*.

Some years ago, my heart and my good sense were captured by a gorgeous clear yellow with splashed petals named *Blc. Horizon Flight 'Happy Landing' JC/AOS* (*C. intermedia* var. *aquinii* x *Blc. Buttercup*). It had never been used in hybridizing, had received no awards, and was not well known, but in this instance, reason was not my long suit. Following numerous failed attempts at hybridizing, I finally concluded my best bet was to breed simple...cross it with a known diploid *C. aurantiaca*. The cross produced only 48 viable seedlings, but it was hopefully a beginning. Upon blooming, we named the hybrid *Blc. Fordyce Fantasy*, a very vigorous, strong grower producing up to eight three-inch blooms per strong stems, yellow with splashed, round petals. Since the chromosome number of *Blc. Horizon Flight* is not known, and because it grows slowly with very heavy, corrugated leaves, I can only assume it may be of unique ploidy. When I first began to hybridize with this plant, I experimented with a variety of crosses, from *Sl. Psyche* to *Slc. California Apricot*, and received only a mere trace



Lc. Clar Hancock 'Snow Plume' HCC/AOS

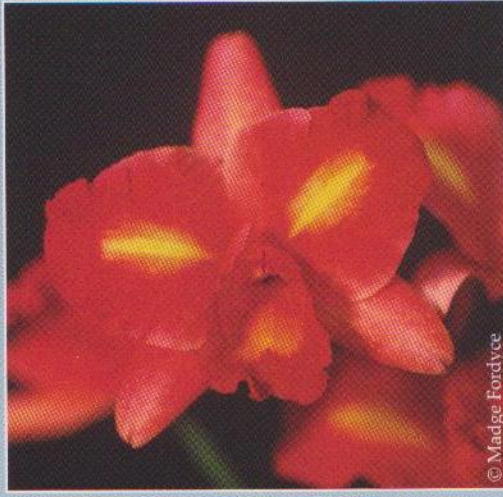


Lc. Puppy Love 'True Beauty'



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Blc. Fantasy Factor 'White Gold'



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Blc. Precursor 'Revised Edition'

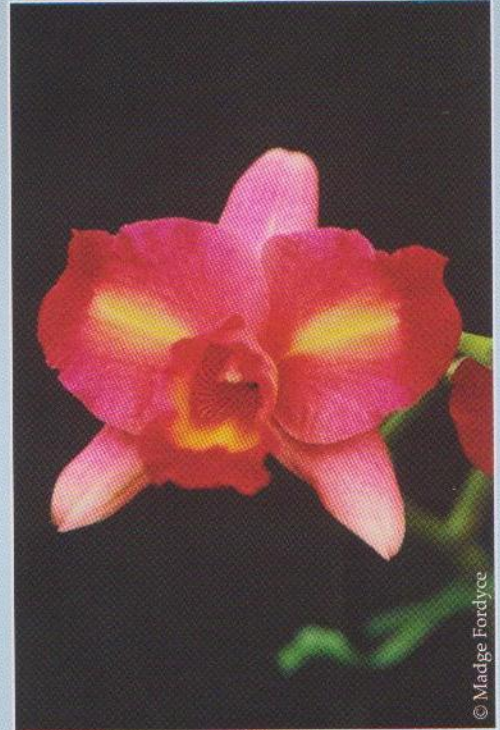


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Blc. Precursor 'Fantasyland'

of viable seed, regardless of whether I used diploid or tetraploid pollen. I would have ceased breeding with *Blc.* Horizon Flight but for the fact I have never bloomed an inferior bloom from any of my combinations. With those results, I did what any red-blooded hybridizer would do...I tried another cross. This time I put an average *L. anceps* f. *roeblingiana* onto it, and true to its history, I received only a trace of seed. After receiving the few flasks from the laboratory, I potted them and forgot about the cross. Time passed, and I received a telephone call from Fred Clarke, who said "Congratulations, I just got an AM/AOS on a cross I purchased in flask from you. It is a first-bloom seedling in a 3/-inch pot of (*Blc.* Horizon Flight 'Happy Landing' x *L. anceps* 'Splish Splash'). Can I name it?" I stuttered, "An AM in a 3/-inch pot? Certainly you can name it!" His answer was *Blc.* Picotee Passion. Since then, we've bloomed two more and another received an AM/AOS. These surpass most of the "usual" cattleya hybrids in form and substance, so I began a search for the balance of seedlings. So far, I've turned up fifteen. Some things can't be explained rationally.

I have championed red color in cattleya hybrids, so it is only natural that I would endeavor to breed red into *L. anceps* as well. I attempted that with our proven tetraploid breeder, *Slc.* California Apricot 'Orange Circle' HCC/AOS, (*Lc.* Pacific Sun 'Lemon' x *Soph.* *coccinea*). Since it is tetraploid and has been used successfully in the transference of red into regular cattleya hybrids, I bred it with *L. anceps* 'Feathered Flame' CHM/AOS. The results were as expected;



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Blc. Precursor 'Revised Edition'



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Lc. Higher Ground



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Lc. Higher Ground 'Hardy Heritage'



Slc. Fresh Start 'Surprise'



Blc. Horizon Flight 'Happy Landing' JC/AOS



Blc. Picotee Passion 'Catalyst' AM/AOS



Blc. Picotee Passion 'Fordyce Climax'



Blc. Picotee Passion 'Sun Seeker'

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most hybrids were primarily orange, a couple were yellows, a few were reds of average color, and one was an intense red of fair form, *Slc.* Sizzler 'Cardinal'. Several other hybridizers have experienced productive breeding when using *L. anceps* f. *alba* crossed with reds and have successful red progeny.

It is time hybridizers began to look seriously at *L. anceps* as a parent to produce both cold and heat tolerant "cattleya form" hybrids to grow out of doors. High phalaenopsis sales are creating much interest in growing orchids indoors, but many ask about growing outside. If we can successfully produce both heat and cold tolerant *Laelia* hybrids, we've created a vast new market to both orchid hobbyists and novices alike. It's time cattleya hybridizers step up to the plate and put new research in this direction.*



Slc. Sizzler 'Cardinal'

About the Author

The author, an orchid grower for over 59 years, waxes enthusiastic about *Cattleya* hybridizing. His main focus is on breeding with what he believes to be the finest hybrid of its type: *Slc.* Circle of Life. Of the 60 seedlings produced so far, each one has been a beauty, he says; he has

begun breeding with tetraploid cultivars, and expects to see more interesting results there as well.



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