

Gibson Plicatas Create Modern

My early strategy to create tall bearded reblooming iris was to cross like with like. My actions were mostly done out of necessity. Less than a dozen reliable cool season rebloomers resided in my garden. According to the late Dr. Raymond G. Smith, the odds were not in my favor to find viable seedlings. "It would seem logical, assuming like produces like, that the crossing of two reliable reblooming irises of the same chromosome pattern would produce rebloomers. In general this is true, but unfortunately the numbers that may be expected to result from such a cross is rather low."¹

Smith used statistical analysis to support this conclusion in his AIS *Bulletin* article entitled *Differences Among Rebloomers*. He compared using non-rebloomer 'Tiffany' (H.P. Sass, 1938) and reliable old rebloomer 'Martie Everest' (Kirk-McDade, 1935). After crunching the numbers, Dr. Smith concluded Martie Everest was the superior parent to find fall bloomers. He may have been forced to change his mind after introducing 'Purple Duet' (R.G. Smith, 1966) and 'Replicata' (R.G. Smith, 1966) with 'Tiffany' in each pedigree through 'Gibson Girl' (J. Gibson, 1949). (Photo by M. Unser on right)

After the *Bulletin* article was published, Raymond Smith was joined in Bloomington, Indiana by a graduate student, Lloyd Zurbrigg from Ontario, Canada. During his studies for a doctorate in music at Indiana University, Lloyd worked alongside Smith, and the pair shared tall bearded rebloom seedlings. After graduation, Zurbrigg accepted a professorship at Radford College in Virginia. The move would pay handsome dividends for his breeding program for reliable cool season rebloomers.

'Purple Duet' would figure in 'Amy' (Zurbrigg, 1975), 'Goliath's Mate' (Zurbrigg, 1971), 'Perfume Counter' (Zurbrigg, 1972), 'Violet Miracle' (Zurbrigg, 1979) and 'Violet Supreme' (Zurbrigg, 1971). 'Replicata' could be found in 'Grand Baroque' (Zurbrigg, 1969) and 'Da Capo' (Zurbrigg, 1969). Grand Baroque x Amy leads us

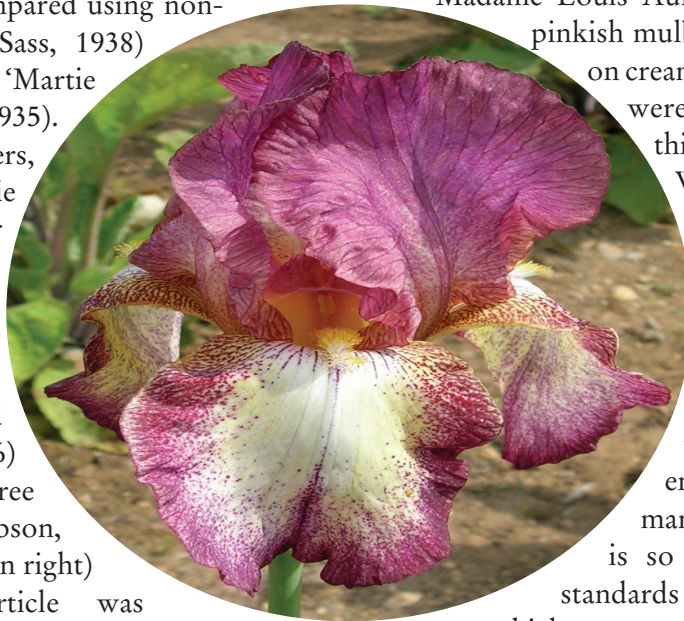
to 'I Do' (Zurbrigg, 1974). 'I Do' x 'English Cottage' gave us 'Immortality' (Zurbrigg, 1982). The impact of 'Gibson Girl' was an important one for rebloom.

The late Jim Gibson decided to dedicate his tall bearded iris hybridizing to improve the plicata pattern. According to Jim's recollections, early hybrid varieties sported, "straight hanging, narrow, almost irretrievably pinched falls, and narrow, sometimes gaping standards."² The late Professor Sidney Mitchell urged Gibson to develop his own line since there was ample room for progress. After a few years, the California breeder found a signature seedling to form a foundation for hybridizing.

'Gibson Girl' was a combination of 'Tiffany' and 'Madame Louis Aureau' (Cayeux, 1934) featuring pinkish mulberry with deep rose peppering on cream ground coloring. Both parents were plicatas. The definition for this flower type, according to Dr. William Shear in the *Gardeners Iris Book*, is "a white or light yellow ground color with darker markings of red, blue or violet applied around the edge of each petal. The markings often look like stitching since the color concentrates at the ends of the petal's veins. In many plicatas, the darker color is so generously supplied that the standards show little if any ground color, which appears only as a spot on the falls below the beard."³

Keith Keppel observed in *Some Notes on the Gibson Plicatas*, that 'Tiffany' with bronzy markings on a creamy yellow ground was hardy and vigorous. 'Madame Louis Aureau', French Dykes Medal winner in 1934, was a bearded iris ahead of its time. Well-formed flowers had a silvery white ground sanded and washed with rosy heliotrope. The only drawback was short bloom stalks. 'Gibson Girl' was surely a progenitor for future plicata breeding, but its parents' rebloom genes would consistently show up in future Gibson seedlings and named varieties.

How, you ask? The answer lies in Jim's breeding strategy based on further advice by Sidney Mitchell. "My breeding line should be used sparingly with any



Rebloomers

BY MIKE LOCKATELL, VIRGINIA



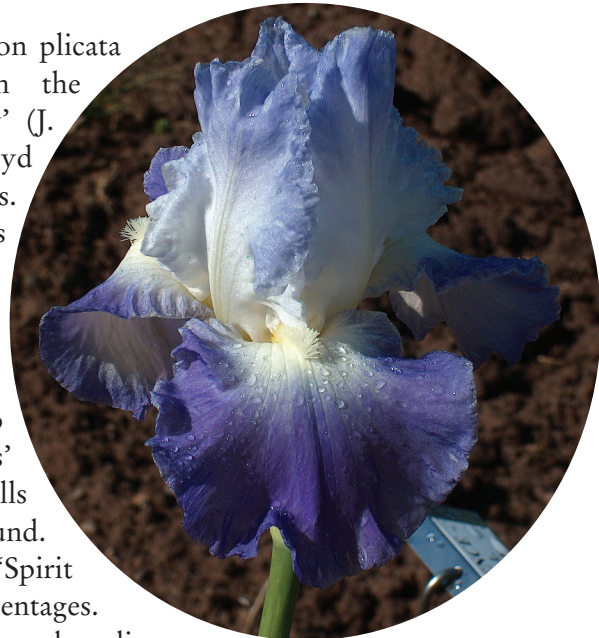
outcross since these attempts would most likely repeat or set more firmly those faults already in abundance in plicatas of the day.”⁴ ‘Kilt Lilt’s’ (J. Gibson, 1970) family tree illustrates this point. Keppel observes, “If all the branches of the tree were extended to the original irises used to start the line, you would find ‘Firecracker’ (Hall, 1943) at least eleven times, ‘Sacramento’ (Mohr-Mitchell, 1929) twenty-one times each, ‘Madame Louis Aureau’ fifty-two times, ‘Siegfried’ (H.P. Sass, 1936), twenty times and ‘Tiffany’ and ‘Orloff’ (H.P. Sass, 1937) (counting the times they appear behind ‘Firecracker’ also) sixty-two and thirty times respectively.”⁵ ‘Kilt Lilt’ won the Dykes Medal in 1976. (Photo by R. Probst on left)

The next chapter in the Gibson plicata rebloom story occurred with the introduction of ‘Halloween Party’ (J. Gibson, 1970) in Virginia by Lloyd Zurbrigg’s Avonbank Iris Gardens.

Jim’s tall bearded seedling somehow found its way to Radford for testing and breeding. Rebloom was grateful for this hybridizing exchange. Keppel recalled, “(At one time, when Cooley’s Gardens was introducing the earlier Gibson varieties) Rholin Cooley commented that off season bloom did not fit in well with commercial summer/fall shipments, so Jim made a conscious effort at that point to purge his seedlings of all those which rebloomed!”⁶ ‘Halloween Party’s’ ruffled flowers have rich yellow standards with light mahogany veins. Falls feature mahogany spots on the inside of a yellow rim with white ground. ‘Fiji Dancer’ (Zurbrigg, 1976), ‘Lightly Seasoned’ (Zurbrigg, 1979) and ‘Spirit of Memphis’ (Zurbrigg, 1976) had the Gibson guest seedling in their parentages.

‘April Melody’ (J. Gibson, 1968) was a major color break in the Gibson breeding program. A last chance cross after ten years and ten thousand seedlings resulted in a plicata with lavender pink ground with deeper lavender markings and an elusive tangerine beard. In a manuscript entitled *My Twenty Five Years with Iris*, Lloyd Zurbrigg mentions ‘April Melody’ in a list of once blooming tall bearded irises being used for rebloom breeding at Avonbank Iris Gardens. ‘Gibson Girl’ was in its heritage thirteen times. According to Keith Keppel’s count, ‘Mind Reader’ (Keppel, 1992) (Photo by R. Probst on right) has ‘April Melody’ in the pedigree a whopping thirty-eight times. Northern Virginia’s Dr. Donald Spoon would capitalize on the fall flowering genetics in this Salem, Oregon origination.

A debate raged in the AIS’ Region 4 about the flower description for ‘Clarence’ (Zurbrigg, 1991). (Photo by R. Probst above right). Zurbrigg felt the reliable cool season tall bearded rebloomer with unknown parentage was an amoena luminata plicata. Flowers had white standards tinted violet at the edges. Falls are light blue-violet with white center and a cream beard. Dr. Spoon saw the possibilities in a ‘Clarence’ x ‘Mind Reader’ combination. ‘Daughter of Stars’ (D. Spoon, 2001 TB) received the best traits from both parents. The purple luminata, a finalist for the Dykes Medal and a reliable rebloomer in Zones 5-9 was a major advance for modern hybridizing for fall bloom.



Dr. Lloyd Zurbrigg's last reliable cool season tall bearded introduction before his passing in 2005 was 'Gate of Heaven' (Zurbrigg, 2004). (Photo by M. Lockatell on right) Largely overlooked in cultivation and breeding, the medium blue's parentage is 'Clarence' x 'St. Petersburg' (Byers, 1990). After the release of 'Daughter of Stars', Lloyd felt breeding back to 'Clarence' seedlings would bear fruit. In spring 2005, a cross pollination featuring 'Gate of Heaven' x 'Daughter of Stars' was successful. One seedling made the grade with wide falls and ample ruffling. After years of testing, 'Metro Blue' (Lockatell, R. 2013) will be introduced this year. The moorish blue self has seen reliable fall flowering in California, Oregon, Indiana, Virginia and Maryland.

'April Melody's' impact is still being felt in my breeding for reliable tall bearded cool season rebloomers. Zurbrigg TB Re Sdlg. #NN2 or 'Clarence' x 'Matrix' (E. Hall by Zurbrigg, 2001) is a late fall performer with blocky white blooms." Light yellow is found on flower edges and at the base of the standards. Falls have light yellow shoulders and a slight hint of violet on all petals. The major downside was short bloom stalks. Lloyd's seedling was a perfect pollen parent with 'Vapor' (Ghio, 2001). The California tall bearded has white standards. Falls are white washed and lined violet with apricot shoulders. It had a solid Gibson plicata foundation with 'April Melody', 'Osage Buff' (J. Gibson, 1973) and 'Columbia the Gem' (J. Gibson, 1982) in the lineage through countless generations of Ghio and Keppel breeding. One of the two surviving seedlings has medium sized soft yellow flowers with pink shoulders and a tangerine beard. Lockatell TB Sdlg.#20565 does not rebloom. Lockatell TB Re Sdlg.#20734 or 'Gate of Heaven' x Zurbrigg TB Re Sdlg.#TT 109 is a two-toned yellow with consistent August flowering despite Virginia summer heat and dryness. Cross pollinations with these children both ways were successful. Maiden bloom is expected this spring. The numbers favor at least one interesting rebloom seedling.

My mentor and friend made his only fall visit to my Flatrock garden in Powhatan County, Virginia in 2004. Zurbrigg TB Re Sdlg.# VV 101 'Slate Blue' was in bloom. A space ager, its flounces caused the falls to tuck. Lloyd suggested a cross with 'Gate of Heaven' to correct the problem. One non-reblooming seedling from the combination was a short blue with a tangerine beard. Using 'Metro Blue' as a pollen parent with Lockatell TB Sldg.#20513, the combination produced a lavender- violet with a white area under a tangerine beard tipped white. Lockatell TB Re Sdlg.#21013A had mid-September blooms in 2013 and June flowers in 2014.



Even though he was encouraged to ignore rebloom during his fifty plus year breeding career, Jim Gibson irises through Ghio and Keppel plicata lines offer today's rebloom pollen daubers the rare occasion to improve flower form, colors and patterns in modern fall flowering bearded varieties. The opportunity still awaits us. ☘

Special thanks to Keith Keppel for his advice on Gibson plicata pedigrees.

Bibliography

1. Smith, Raymond G. "Differences Among Rebloomers," *Bulletin of the American Iris Society* January 1960, p. 79
2. Gibson, Jim "Plicata Patter," *Bulletin of the American Iris Society*, January 1971, p. 33
3. Shear, William. "The Gardener's Iris Book," p.27
4. Gibson, Jim "Plicata Patter," *Bulletin of the American Iris Society*, January 1971, p. 33
5. Keppel, Keith, "Some Notes on the Gibson Plicatas," *Bulletin of the American Iris Society*, January 1994, p.27
6. Ibid., p.26-27

Mike Lockatell is currently Eastern Director for the Reblooming Iris Society. His reports on rebloom results and breeding appear in the RIS Reblooming Iris Recorder. Mike has written feature stories on rebloom for the AIS Bulletin and for the HIPS newsletter ROOTS. He has public reblooming iris display beds at various locations in metro Richmond, Virginia. He was recently featured in a November 2014 story on reblooming irises for Distinction Magazine, a quarterly publication for the Virginian-Pilot Newspaper Group in Norfolk, Virginia and was a guest on the popular Richmond Public Broadcasting Station gardening show, Virginia Home Grown (WCVE TV) in late October 2014.