

## Embouchure

Embouchure is probably the hardest thing for the non-specialist to understand. Here are a few basic guidelines:-

a) Tone is made by the constant pressure of air on the inner 'chimney' wall of the blow hole, NOT by blowing across the edge. In the low register particularly, very little draught should be felt in front of the blow hole.

b) Condensation on the lip plate can be a useful guide to check that the air stream is exactly in line with the blow hole.

c) As with all other wind instruments, the mouth and head cavities need to be shaped in sympathy with the notes being produced. Humming, singing and whistling can help get this message across.

d) Higher registers need relatively smaller mouth holes and slightly reduced gaps between mouth hole and 'chimney wall'. However, these are achieved by mouth movements rather than flute rolling.

e) Strong sounds are produced with a relatively larger, but nevertheless well focused, mouth hole, and gentle tones require a smaller mouth hole. Pressure (= air speed) remains constant during dynamic changes on one note, so that the diaphragm moves faster for forte and slower for piano. This means that the player's instinct to blow harder for forte and softer for piano must be trained very carefully or the often heard sharpness in forte and flatness in piano will always be with you.

f) In general, to go sharper, push the chin out with head up and little pressure of flute on lip. Maintain air speed. This will raise the air stream and open the flute blow hole a little. To go flatter, draw chin in with looser bottom lip and no tight smiley lips. This will lower the air stream and cover the blow hole slightly more.

## Troublesome notes

Beginners tend to play all 'short tube' notes sharp and all 'long tube' notes flat, so always encourage some pulling out of the headjoint. This will flatten short tube notes more than long tube notes, and encourage firmer breath support.

3rd space C sharp is notoriously sharp because the small vent hole produces a small sound and encourages overblowing. Suggest blowing into the flute more and no overblowing.

Low and middle E can be flat because the right hand little finger should always be depressed for these notes.

Middle D and E flat can be flat and 'hoarse' if the left hand index finger is not raised.

F sharp will be flat if played with the right hand middle finger instead of the next one.

Most notes above top D tend to be played sharp because of poor high note production technique. Discourage overblowing and tight bottom lip and mouth corners. Top A and particularly top B flat can be relatively flat.

Top E flat is the 'all fingers down' note. This includes both left hand little and index fingers.

Top A flat/G sharp must have left hand index finger raised.

Top B flat must have both left hand index finger and right little finger raised.

## The Piccolo

Much of the above applies, especially on breathing and tone production, but the intonation characteristics of individual notes are very different due to the conical bore design. In general the beginner piccolo player is one of your more sophisticated flautists, and must therefore learn some strange new tricks. Notes that needed sharpening on the flute now need flattening and vice-versa! The best advice I can offer you is to encourage your piccolo player to 'go for it' and then adapt as necessary. Give him/her loads of confidence, and once the blowing is free and full, get him/her playing in a corner with

## The Flute in the School Ensemble

by Peter White

notes to remind of the most likely direction of intonation correction. You should not try to hide a piccolo! Weak blowing will never get good results. If awarding the band piccolo to a new player, go for the extrovert and smile with delight when the first ear splitting sounds are produced. It is not nicknamed the 'shrieking twig' lightly!

I do recommend the use of a tuning machine to ensure that the basic tuning note given to the group is always accurate and consistent, and when pitching becomes confused, e.g. in the upper register of the piccolo, it can be very helpful. Always tune your flutes and piccolos with their middle register notes. Tuning to bottom register with youngsters leads them to push in too far and makes the top register extra sharp.

Good warm up exercises should be designed to all of the above in musical context. Simple hymn tune are ideal for focusing on tone quality, balance and intonation, but again, do encourage your flautists to play the melodies in their middle and higher registers. For flutes in particular, any games involving the alternation of adjacent players from f to p are excellent to highlight and improve intonation. Always encourage great projection of low register and discreet management of top register where possible!

Robin Soldan's pictorial technique book would make excellent further reading.

your best flautist to learn where to put the new set of notes. Give him/her playing in a corner in octaves with your best flautist to learn where to put the new set of notes. There must be no stigma attached to the practice of writing arrows over individual

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