BUILDING THE FLUTE TONE FROM THE BOTTOM UP

A GUIDE TO LIP FLEXIBILITY

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C. L. BARNHOUSE COMPANY
Music Publishers, P.O. Box 680, 205 Cowan Avenue
Oskaloosa, Iowa 52577, U.S.A.

Published by
C.L. Barnhouse Co.
P.O. Box 680
Oskaloosa, IA 52577

Manufactured in U.S.A.

To Leslie, Sarah, and Katie Jo

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

In order for a flute student to have a rich, resonant upper register, he should first establish a very rich and resonant lower register.

To build a good flute tone on the exercises that follow, the reader must subscribe to two theories of flute tone production. First, that once the flutist establishes a good resonant low B or C, the embouchure for all notes from fourth space Eb down does not change. That is to say that the same embouchure or lip position needed to obtain a good low C or B is the same lip position needed to obtain a good, resonant fourth space Eb. In the material that follows there are specific exercises that are designed to check whether or not the embouchure of the performer is the same for both octaves. These are exercises 18, 19, 23 and 24.

Second, the reader must subscribe to the theory that for all notes fourth space E natural and above, the lips (jaw) move forward and together. The function of the reed on other woodwinds is served on the flute by a thin air jet or "reed" of air. The player causes this air jet to be impinged on the sharp edge of the embouchure hole. The higher up the scale the player wishes to go, the faster the speed of the air jet. As the player ascends in range the closer together and more forward the lips must be, which in turn increases the velocity of the air jet from the player's lips. To produce the upper octaves (fourth space E and above) the player is not blowing harder, but is simply increasing the speed of the air by making the aperture of the lips smaller. The diaphragmatic support of the air column of course is always maintained. In addition the jaw aids this lip movement by moving forward and dropping to a small degree.

A garden hose is a good example of this principle of physics. When the garden hose is not long enough and the water pressure not strong enough to reach a plant or tree, the thumb is placed over the end of the hose to make the aperture smaller. The water reaches the plant not by changing the basic pressure of water in the hose, but by forcing the water through a smaller hole and increasing its speed. For the upper notes of the flute, you should not blow harder, but increase the speed of the air by forcing it through a smaller hole.

The use of a soda straw is very helpful in seeing how the position of the lips function as the flutist ascends the scale. Shape a soda straw opening from a circle to an oval, then place the straw on the back side of the embouchure hole. When a low note is sounded, move the straw forward across the hole until a high note speaks. After both notes are sounded, move the straw back and forth to demonstrate that the lips not only move forward to produce the second octave, but also, and this is where the lips are superior, make the aperture of the lips smaller.

When playing an ascending scale the change in the aperture and lip position is very gradual and hardly perceptible. When playing octave skips and producing the overtone series, the movement of the lips is quite distinct. (Exercises 34 on.) The student's first attempts at producing octaves and harmonics should be marked with an exaggerated lip movement. Practicing in front of a mirror to observe the lip movement can be helpful at this stage.

As in any wind instrument, good breath support is the most essential factor in tone production. Since the following exercises are based on the importance of lip flexibility and lip placement, nothing should be construed as to make the reader believe that the role of breath support is insignificant. The exercises that follow are made with the presumption that the student is aware of the need and purpose of good breath support.

A review of breathing exercises will be briefly given here. First, posture must be correct. Natural posture rather than correct would probably be a better term as people tend to think of good posture in terms of a military stance rather than in terms of a natural, relaxing bearing. The chest is high, but not artificially. The spine follows its normal curve and should be the same in both the standing and sitting positions. The neck is erect so as to allow the performer as much resonance as possible from an open and relaxed throat.

One exercise that is recommended to reinforce the memory of proper diaphragmatic breathing is to lie on the floor and place a ten pound weight on your abdomen. When you inhale, the weight should be pushed upward by the abdomen, and when you exhale, the weight should be allowed to descend slowly. Krell recommends that the flutist do this exercise ten times, with a rest after each group of ten, until forty are completed each day in order to establish the habit of proper diaphragmatic breathing. When this breathing exercise is done over a period of time, the proper breathing habit is established freed of the thought process so the performer can concentrate on the music.

Along with the control of the breath, the student needs to know about the resonance that is created or enhanced in his body. The greatest control of resonance is not in the body of the performer, however, as much as it is in his ear. Unless the flutist hears mentally what sound he or she wants to produce, all of the talk of what part of the body acts as a resonator is to no avail. The ear must tell the body how to respond. The first physical resonator is located above the vocal lips by the epiglottis and the aryepiglottic folds. The second physical resonator is a combination of the mouth and throat areas and is controlled by the way we shape our vowels. For now, suffice to say that what makes a good "ah" in terms of mouth and tongue shape will help us achieve the best resonance from this cavity.

To train the student's ear the teacher needs to be able to demonstrate good tone production on the flute. If the teacher is not an exceptional flutist or not a flutist at all, the use of recordings of professionals should be available to the student.

HOW TO USE THIS METHOD

All sections of this method are considered important. In Section A the profusion of exercises in the lower octave were designed to give the student a variety of experiences for perfecting the tone and embouchure necessary to work on Section B. When all sections of this book are mastered, it is recommended that the performer use one section, C, D, E, or F, alternately on a daily basis as a warm up for daily practice.

SECTION A

The first task is to establish a solid, resonant low C or B. Repeat the following exercises many times until the low C or B speaks easily. If you do not have a low B on your flute, stop on low C.

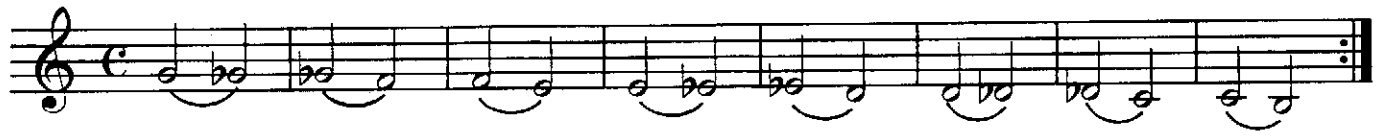
Keep the tone even as you go down the scale in the following exercises. In this octave, the position of the lips remains the same. The formation of the lips for low C - B should be the same as for second line G.

It is also recommended that you practice these exercises in front of a mirror in order to watch the shape of the aperture. The aperture should be shaped similar to that of a cigar. Do not allow the aperture to be longer than the embouchure hole on the flute. Practice the following exercises without vibrato.

1

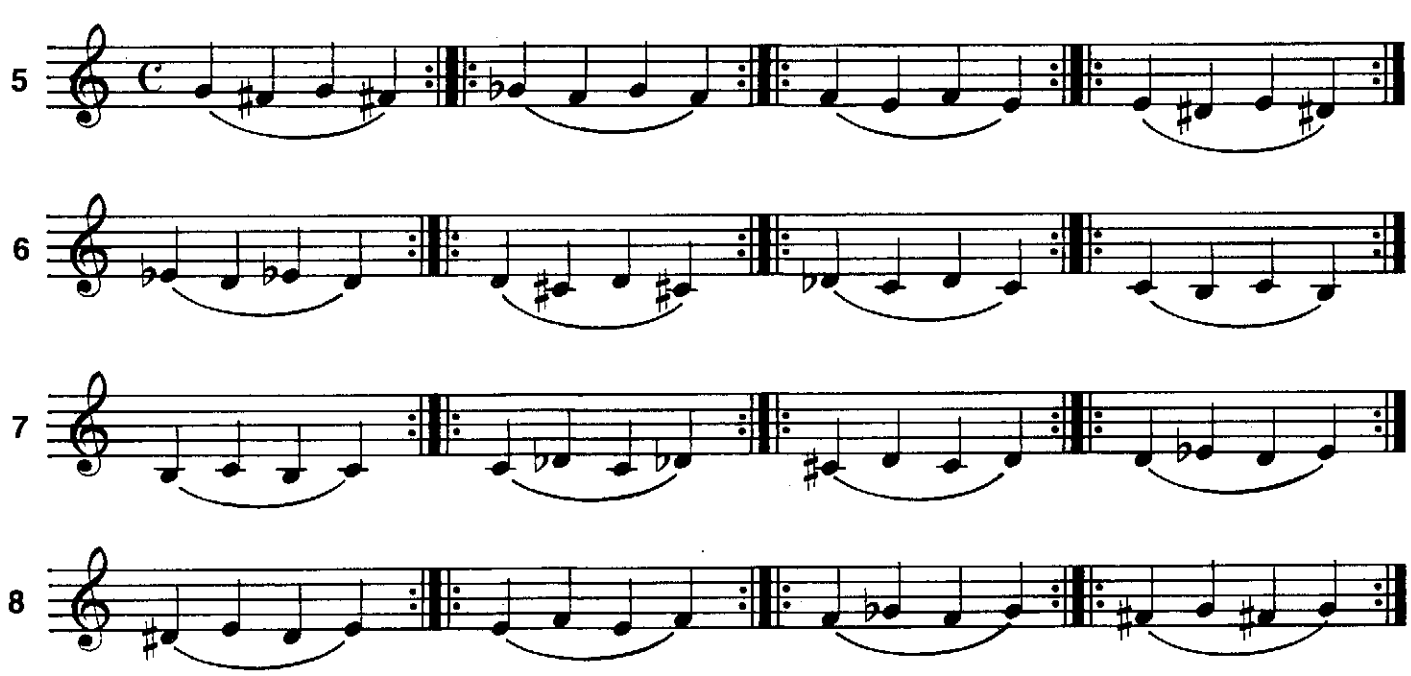
2

3



4

If you discover a difference in tone quality between two notes, repeat the notes in question, reversing the order. If after repeated attempts there is still a major difference in tone quality between two notes, check the flute for any keys that may leak air.



Keep the tone even as you move to low C - B. **Don't break the slur!** The tone must go through the interval and the larger the interval, the more care must be taken.