

Tuning, Tone, and Technique for Low Flutes

April 2024 – International Low Flutes Festival - Virginia

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Air management: finding the best air speed and angle

- While the upper octaves are the strongest and loudest for the concert flute, they are the weakest octaves for the larger flutes.
- Use slightly slower airspeed, and higher angle of air, especially for notes in the second and third octaves; these notes will overblow to a higher note if airspeed is too fast.
- Larger flutes require more air and wider aperture because of larger embouchure holes.

Consistent Alignment of Big Flutes is Important!

Bass flute & curved head alto set-up:

- Horizontal alignment vs. Vertical alignment; **mark correct alignment with a sharpie.**
- Tipping the curve slightly back toward the player distributes some of the weight of the instrument to the chin, instead of having all the weight on the hands.
- Keep embouchure hole facing up (pointing toward ceiling) and keys parallel to the floor
- Keep chin level with head balanced on spine (eyes looking straight ahead)
- Think about comfort and balance in hands, and distribution of weight of instrument
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Contrabass Headjoint adjustment

- Straight head is perpendicular to the center joints
- Embouchure hole facing ceiling, or slightly angled toward the player
- Mark the position of headjoint pieces on both sections (with Sharpie)
- Adjust height properly—can tip instrument toward you
- Make sure to adjust the head joint segments so that the instrument is well-balanced, otherwise it may tend to twist to one side, making it uncomfortable to play. I use a sharpie pen to mark alignment marks to match on the headjoint sections.



Allow for key clearance with curved head instruments

- Check that LH1 finger can operate without interference
- Footjoint should be adjusted so RH pinky can reach footjoint keys. Make sure the adjustment still allows the keys to work properly (so they don't hit a post) and don't interfere with the operation of any of the right-hand keys.

Straight head altos and c-flutes

- Align center of embouchure hole to the center of the F, E, and D keys

Getting to know your big flute: [or your regular flute]

Warm up on a few long tones on sequential notes in the middle of the range. (I usually like to play D2 for my first note.) Play scales in octaves, and chromatic scale in octaves from C1 to G3 to learn proper angle and speed of air.

- Check intonation with tuner and identify pitch tendencies
- If necessary, explore alternate fingerings for better pitch (Chris Potter's low flute books)
- Listen, listen, listen

Developing good tone (ideas from Patricia George)

- Need fast air stream
 - Tonguing is key – try “spit rice” tonguing to start each tongued note
 - Harmonics (more resistance)
- Smooth note connections when slurring
 - Like a dot-to-dot puzzle—make sure the air goes all the way from each note to the next
 - Practice slurred intervals—octaves are particularly good (use a tuner!)
- Relax the vocal folds in the throat to open up the sound
 - Practice scales with HAH articulation (sort of a throat staccato)
 - Use HAHs for vibrato practice (HAH HAH HAH, then HAH-AH-AH)
 - Play technical passages, scales or anything in 1 inch chunks followed by 1 beat rest. The repeated blow, breathe, blow, breathe, etc. helps relax the vocal folds and improve your tone. It will also help your technique. (from Patricia George)
- Develop and practice vibrato
 - Practice 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 vibrato cycles per beat (counted vibrato)
 - Also helps subdivide the music rhythmically
 - Gives you control over the speed of the vibrato

Develop good intonation

- After warming up, make sure your flute is in tune (remember to use fast air)
 - Tune D2, A2, A1 – pull out the headjoint so all three notes are in tune and/or
 - Play C1, then overblow to the octave (using same fingering, i.e. play the harmonic) – check the pitch against the regular fingering for C2.
 - Repeat with C#1 and D1
 - Pull out the headjoint enough so that the low note and the harmonic are in tune.
 - Make sure you pull out the headjoint enough. When you get the tuning notes above in tune, most of your notes will be pretty closely in tune. Then, **mark your headjoint** (I use a sharpie pen), so you can pull out your headjoint consistently

every time. I also like to put alignment marks between the headjoint and the receiver to make setting up my flute(s) quicker and more consistent

- Make sure your headjoint and your flute are aligned properly and consistently. Most people align the center of the embouchure hole with the center of the F, E, and D keys. Make sure the embouchure hole and the keys of the flute are facing the ceiling. (if your flute tips back toward you, your pitch will be flat)
- Make sure the flute is balanced in your hands
- Practice regularly with a tuner—practice scales, intervals, arpeggios
 - Think about what the next note should sound like, play it, THEN check the tuner. This will help develop your ears.
- Learn to play C1&2, C#1&2, and D3 in tune. Think about how it should sound first. Learn to aim the air for those notes.
- If your F3 is sharp, use the alternate fingering (add your F# finger), other alternate fingerings that help pitch
 - If E3 is sharp, lift your RH pinky (D# key)
 - If Ab3 is sharp, add RH2&3
- Blend with others in your ensemble—if your sound is sticking out, you're playing too loud or are out of tune, or both. ;-)

List of Low Flute Solos (also can be played with c-flutes), and Low Flute Ensembles written or arranged by Phyllis Avidan Louke:

<https://www.phyllislouke.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Low-Flute-Repertoire-composed-by-Phyllis-Avidan-Louke.pdf>

Fanfare and Celebration for Low Flute Choir by Phyllis Avidan Louke was premiered at the opening concert and is published and is now available from ALRY Publications. Instrumentation is c-flute, 3 alto flutes, 2 bass flutes, contra (opt)

New Music for Low Flute Ensemble by Phyllis Avidan Louke:

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