

A Bamboo Flute

From the Workshop of Brent M. Holl

This bamboo flute was made from a type of bamboo known as River Cane or Yellow Bamboo. It is one of thousands of types of bamboo found throughout the world. The patch of bamboo that produced this flute has flourished in my backyard in Bridgewater, Virginia, for almost 15 years.

Getting the sound. Start with your fingers *off* the holes. Rest your bottom lip on the edge of the mouth hole and blow it like a pop bottle. Make sure that the mouth hole is pointed directly upward and that your head is held straight up. Your bottom lip must be rested loosely on the edge – not pulled up, or curled under itself, or pressed down hard against the flute! Press your lips together at the corners, leaving a narrow opening at the front, centered above the mouth hole. Blow a solid stream of air directly at the opposite edge of the hole. Don't lift up your bottom lip as you blow! If you don't get a sound at first it's ok! You'll have to practice a bit to get the hang of it. Try varying the shape and pressure of your blowing or rotate the flute a little to change the angle of your breath. Don't worry about getting dizzy – you just aren't used to breathing so deeply!

Holding the Flute. Hold the flute with your left hand using the first three fingers to cover the holes nearest the mouth hole. Use your first, second, and fourth (pinkie) to play the bottom three holes. This leaves your ring finger (third) with nothing to do! It's OK!

Playing the Notes in the First Octave. Take all your fingers off the flute except those supporting it and blow a note. While you are doing it cover the first hole (the one nearest the mouth hole) with the fleshy face of your finger, not the extreme tip. When you get a good sound with the first hole covered, keep that finger down, and close the next hole in the same way and so on until you get all the holes covered. Continue to adjust your mouth shape, breath pressure and angle of blowing to get clear notes. These notes are known as the first octave.

Playing the second octave. Once you can play the first octave, you're ready to try the second. Cover all the holes, but narrow your lip opening and blow a little harder. The note you get will be much higher – the beginning of the second octave. To get the rest of the octave, take your fingers *off* one at a time, starting with the bottom hole. When you get to the top, you can go up one more note by covering all but the first hole again. This enables better tuning.

The fingerings just described will give you the basic diatonic scale in two octaves. The diatonic scale is the one you get by singing Do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do! Sharps and flats are possible by only covering the last half of the hole or by figuring out "cross fingerings" by experimentation.

It is possible to read music with your flute. Figure out where “Do” (the bottom note) is in the song you want to play and go from there. I personally think that flutes like these are more fun to play by ear. Choose simple melodies and pick out the notes on the flute.

This flute is guaranteed for life against cracking or splitting. Please return it to me for repair or a replacement if anything should ever happen.

May the music
fill your soul
with peace

-Brent M. Holl
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