

LFP 089 The Best Note to Tune a Flute To.

Date written: 9-26-18

Keyword: tune a flute

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Hey everyone it's time for another Learn Flute Podcast. This is episode number eighty nine! I'm Rebecca, your host and the expert at Learn Flute Online where I help you through all things related to learning how to play the flute - and do it really well. Let's get started today with another episode that will increase your abilities by discovering the best note to tune a flute to. Wahoo!

It's so great to be here with you today. You know, I really do enjoy these discussions, and I hope you do too. I actually popped online to see what others were saying about this subject, and it surprised me that there were a variety of answers. Haha, well, I, feel of course, that the information you'll receive from me today is good, solid advice. So with that let's bring up this subject which has to do with tuning your flute and what note we should be using to tune it.

So, before I go any further with this, let's define what we mean by using a note to tune to. So, after a player puts their flute together, it's common for them to choose a note and play it - then determine if they're on tune or not, which means does the pitch that comes out of your flute match what has been pre-set as the quote "proper pitch"?

Now if you've played flute for even a few weeks you may have wondered if the tones that you play are absolutely correct. Well, this is a good question especially if you intend to play with other musicians, whether that be live or simultaneously with a recording.

Essentially, this means that if you choose to play a note on your flute (let's choose an F for now) then you want it to match perfectly with someone else's F so that when you play together it sounds really good to your ear - harmonious and smooth. Perfectly together.

Now, the opposite of this would be if you played your F and someone else was playing what they thought was an F, then you might kind of sound like buzzing bees if you're not on tune. So, alright let's do a little demonstration here just so we are totally clear.

Here is a second octave F - I'm going to play this on my flute right now.

Now, let's pretend that my friend is sitting next to me and that they also play an F. But, their F sounds like this: -----

Do they sound the same? Well, maybe they do... depending on the level of training you have or for some people it's natural to detect these small differences in pitches, especially with education and time. But, if you're part of the normal population, it's pretty hard to hear that these notes were slightly different.

Now, I'm going to play them at the same time - with some magic of technology of course, hear..

What do you hear? Buzzing bees perhaps? Haha, yep these notes were not exactly the same once you layer them on top of each other. The correct musical terminology is that these two players were 'out of tune'.

They were both playing the F fingerings on their instruments though, both playing flutes, so why oh why, did they not sound the same?

Now this is the subject for today, but before we go any further let's hear an example of two pitches that ARE on tune with each other.

Here's that same F played on one flute: -----

And the other: -----

And at the same time: -----

Hmmmm, could you even tell that there were two flutes being played? The pitches were close, now if these pitches were on tune, they'd sound pretty much exactly the same. THIS is what we're striving for.

When two pitches are perfectly in tune with each other the sound waves move side by side without touching or bumping. It keeps it sounding so smoothly and without friction.

Now when the notes are out of tune, you hear bumping and friction within the tones. Listen carefully this time... see if you can hear a wahwahwahwah - Something like that. Now the faster the beating, (I call these beats the wahwah's) the more out of tune the notes are. So if it's going "wahwahwahwahwahwahwah" it's very out of tune. Or the slower wahwahwahwah is, the closer the pitches are to being the same.

Now I'm going to demonstrate two flutes playing at the same time, one of them starting out of tune, and then slowly coming into tune so that you can try to listen to those wahwah beats.

Now, whether you can hear the wahwah bumping or not, you can still learn how to play in tune.

So, without having a total lesson on how to play perfectly in tune today (which we do discover many times in progressive levels inside the lessons

here at Learn Flute Online). It takes time and consistent effort to get really good at it.

Now, there are many different notes on the flute- there are 38 to be exact - give or take depending on your level. How do we know which one, or onesz are the best for using during a tuning session?

Now, this is where you see and hear some conflicting advice. I've been around the block a time or two to give you a really good answer for today. And that is, tadah, this note is A, if I had to pick just one.

But the bands always tune to B flat you say? Maybe you already know this. Haha, well, yes this is true- most bands choose the note B flat to tune to. And this is because the principal clarinet player is oftentimes chosen to play the most absolutely on tune B flat for everyone to try to match to. Now, the clarinet is a good choice for this: their instrument is considered a B flat instrument, first of all, and the timbre of a clarinet cuts through the silence and a decent amount of noise which makes it even easier to hear. Good clarinetists can also hold a tone for a very long time which allows the other instrumentalists to hustle and find the same pitch before that clarinetist has to breathe and start the note again.

But, what if you're playing by yourself or with an orchestra and not a band?

These are both great questions. So let's explore each of them starting with the question of if you're going to be playing all by yourself. Why do you even have to worry about tuning then?

Well,,,,.... I'm glad you brought this up, I'd say haha. Music is awesome. And good music is even better. Good music is on tune with what the world has considered standard. For some reason it just sits well for us humans to be tuned to a certain pitch. And for flutes, that's if we are tuned to something called A440.

What does A440 mean?

Alright, I'm going to get "scientificy" on you for a second. Those of you who really like these kinds of fancy explanations are going to get a kick out of this.

So, A440 or A4 we could say (also known as the Stuttgart pitch), which has a frequency of **440** Hz, this **is the** musical note of A above middle C (if you play piano, you know that middle C, this is the A above that). And serves as a general tuning standard for musical pitch. Now, this means sound scientists (I guess that's what we'd call them) have determined that these notes have four hundred and forty sound beat cycles per second. And that's what hertz stands for. Now, I've never have to get this methodical about it, but this can help you understand why we want to set our musical tuner so it measures in what is called four forty pitch.

Now In the literature this is also called international standard pitch. The most common modern tuning standard nowadays uses [440 Hz](#) for A above [middle C](#) as a reference note, with other notes being set relative to it. I believe this was all determined and set in stone back in the eighteen hundreds, and, you may find that there is a slight variation in different countries.

So, this best tuning note is our first octave A on a flute. That's our low A.

I like to have my students start here in their musical life of tuning. -----
Even if they are going to play all by themselves because once we have our flute and body positioned to get this note correct, I feel like we stand a better chance at the rest... if we are learning to play with good skill. Now the next note would be to get the next octave up on the same note of A on tune. So, tuning a low A and then a higher A is where I like my students to start.

The note A seems to be the best, easiest note to get in tune.

So, what if you're going to be playing with an orchestra instead? Well, let's clarify the three cases we've mentioned here today: the first is with a Band which is common to tune to the principal clarinet's B flat. That's normal, you'll see it everywhere.

The next is if you're playing by yourself. Yes, you still want to tune. Tuning and learning how to tune each note is important to your ability and to the beauty of your sound. Now using the A's, the note A's (I guess you could say) is a great way to find your pitch to begin with.

Now the next is playing with an orchestra which is comprised of mostly string instruments, like violins. Well, unlike the band, they'll want you to use your A in orchestra. And then a D possibly. Strings are set up differently, and these are usually the best notes there.

So, what do we do with all of this knowledge? Well, we realize that it's important to know how to get our pitches as close to the tuning in A 440 as possible.

Using the mechanical tuner is the best way if you're not advanced enough to tell just by listening.

And yes, I teach you exactly how to use that tuner in the lessons in the module areas at Learn Flute Online.

So, turning on your tuner, the machine, isn't going to automatically put your flute in tune. You still have to do the work. You'll need to go through the different sets of ideas and trouble-shooting before finding the perfect pitch, and then couple that with good skill to find the rest of the notes.

These skills include pulling out or pushing in your head joint, checking your cork placement, blowing harder or a little softer, keeping good alignment of

the head joint in relation to the body. Sitting or standing up straight as well as a host of skills that happen inside your mouth and with the muscles in your face which is known as flute embouchure.

Another little tidbit to think about is that the flute will change pitch with the temperature. Oh my!

Well, let's leave these for another day.

Well, I hope you've enjoyed this little discussion today all about what is the best note to tune a flute to.

I appreciate you and your journey. I really do. Now I hope that you'll also come to the comment sections of these audios and let me know what you think. What's your experience? And what did you find interesting about this podcast subject?

I'm releasing these podcasts each month a couple of times at least, but will be pointing you flute learners at different discussions at different times by either linking in a module lesson or by sending it out via email.

So, if you haven't had time to get signed up for the membership here at Learn Flute Online where all of the lessons are and even more information that will help you learn how to play the flute really well- it's definitely time to do so! We want you to join us, and we know you'll thoroughly enjoy it.

See you soon!