

chapter 6: holding and blowing the flute

Throughout this chapter and the rest of this book, when I use the word “flute” I am referring to the Irish, or simple-system flute. If you are uncertain as to what I mean by this, please refer to Chapter 3.

A PHYSICAL RELATIONSHIP, AND MUCH MORE

The flute and the tin whistle have a great deal in common. If you have not yet read Chapter 5: *Holding and Blowing the Tin Whistle*, please turn to p. 63 and read the first section, entitled *A Physical Relationship, and Much More*. This information is very important for both flute and tin whistle players.

A BRIEF NOTE ON POSTURE

As a flute player, your starting point for a relaxed body and the optimal use of your energy is an upright spine. This is central to allowing the free movement of your diaphragm and the relaxation of your air passages, shoulders, arms, neck, and head. Whether you play sitting or standing, make sure to keep both feet flat on the floor. If you are seated, sit near the edge of the chair. Most right-handed players find it helpful to place the left foot somewhat forward of the right foot when standing, the opposite being true for left-handed players. There is more about posture as it relates to breathing later in the chapter.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

When playing the tin whistle, it is easy to keep one’s spine completely straight. Not so, unfortunately, with the flute. Since the instrument extends out to one side, the player’s upper body is extended and twisted somewhat in that direction. This necessarily stresses the spine. Since this is a given of flute playing, and since we sometimes play for hours on end, it is smart to avoid making the situation even worse by dropping the foot of the flute too far down or stooping over. It’s a good idea to stop playing every now and then to move about, loosen up and give your spine a rest. Remember that playing the flute is an athletic activity that subjects your body to some peculiar stresses and asymmetrical postures. Holding unnecessary muscle tension or assuming and holding uncomfortable positions can lead to physical pain and problems. *Always listen to your body.*

PUTTING YOUR FLUTE TOGETHER



Figure 6-1. A flute disassembled. In the top row, left to right, are the barrel and headjoint. In the bottom row, left to right, are the footjoint, the bottom hand’s joint, and the top hand’s joint.