

If you frequently use the bottom pinky to operate one or more keys, you may prefer this approach. Though the bottom pinky is no longer supplying a force opposing T1, some players who use this hold still touch the pinky to the flute for further stabilization.

A FURTHER COMMENT ON THE PIPER'S HOLD

I mentioned earlier that I deem the normal hold to be more comfortable for the top hand than the piper's hold. With the normal hold, the weight and pressure that come to bear on the base of T1 are naturally transferred into and distributed throughout the rest of the hand, wrist, and forearm. It seems to me that with the piper's hold this weight and pressure are born much more by the top thumb alone, which is often put into an abnormally extended position. After playing for long periods of time with the piper's hold, I found that my thumb often became sore.

Uilleann pipers do use a hold similar to this, that is with the fingers of the top hand fairly flat, covering the finger holes with the fleshy pads of the fingers. But for them, the top thumb is not bearing weight and pressure. In fact, it is left free to cover and uncover the thumb hole on the back of the chanter. The tin whistle is held vertically like the chanter of the uilleann pipes, and its hold, which is very similar to that of the uilleann pipe chanter, also places no significant weight or stress on the top thumb. This piper's type of hold is natural for the tin whistle but is unnatural for the flute in my opinion.

RESTING THE FLUTE ON THE SHOULDER—A PAINFUL POSTURE

Some Irish flutists rest the end of the headjoint on their shoulder. This position causes them to keep their left shoulder unnaturally raised and their neck twisted and tilted severely to the left. It contorts their spine and constricts their air passages. I suppose it is one way, though a poor one, to compensate for not having found a suitable way to establish the T1 anchor point, for the weight of the flute is instead born by the left shoulder, which also provides opposing force to the lower jaw.

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR FLUTE

It can take some time to get used to holding a flute. For many, it feels quite unnatural at first. If the anchor points are not working for you yet and you feel some apprehension, even in the back of your mind, that you might drop your flute, you may unconsciously start to compensate by gripping the flute in one way or another. Gripping has no part in a good flute hold. Relaxation is key. Try very hard to prevent gripping from creeping in.

Stay aware of the sensations in your body and be on the lookout for tightness and tension. If you are tight, tense, or sore try to understand why. Go through the exercise, *Discovering Your Normal Hold* again (see pp. 89-91), proceeding slowly step by step, and notice where problems arise. Experiment with the offset of the embouchure hole in relation to the finger holes (see *Alignment of the Finger Holes and Embouchure Hole* on p. 83). Try offsetting the upper and/or lower three finger holes if your flute offers that capability. You can also try turning your head slightly to the left, letting your shoulders follow its lead. This is a position that most people adopt unconsciously but perhaps you have not done so. When you turn in this way, your shoulders are rotated somewhat to the left in relation to your pelvis.

A surprisingly large amount of our nervous system is devoted to *proprioception*, or body-position memory. In addition to nerves that tell our muscles what to do and nerves sending sensations to the spine and brain, there are huge bundles of nerves monitoring body position. These systems can be taught, which is why repeating a motion works. The more often you achieve your natural flute hold, and tell yourself that you have found it, the easier it will be to find it the next time. Fortunately, right ways to hold the flute feel better than wrong ways.

If troubles persist, consult with an experienced flute player or teacher. The hold is somewhat different for the modern flute, but the same principles apply on the whole.