

Symphony Snippets - Fabulous Flutes
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If you thought you knew what a flute looks like, think again. Flutes come in an amazing variety of types, shapes and sizes, and may be made of silver, gold, platinum, silver-plated brass, nickel or wood. They may be open-ended or closed-end, or open on both ends. They produce an amazing range of sound based on each flute's individual construction and yet they all still sound like a flute.

The flutes most typically used in an orchestra are transverse flutes, where the air is blown across a mouthpiece hole. These include the concert flute, the piccolo and the alto and bass flutes. The Indian Bansuri and the fife, a flute often used by early American militaries, are also transverse flutes.

The modern concert flute is constructed of three pieces: a head joint, main body and foot. Each piece may be constructed of a different material, depending on the sound desired by the musician. For example, one of our Symphony musicians uses a concert flute with a gold body and foot and a platinum head joint. She prefers this combination because the gold metal produces a more mellow sound than that of a silver flute, and the platinum head joint produces more color variation and projection in the sound.

The recorder is also part of the flute family, but is an end-blown flute. Many of the first flutes were this type. The Ocarina, the kaval, the shakuhachi, the organ pipe, police whistle and nose flute all fall into this category. The Ocarina, also a closed-pipe flute, is special in that the hole placement and tube length don't matter at all in the sound produced. Only the size of the holes and which holes are open determine the sound. It has been in use for around 12,000 years.