

# ALTERNATIVE FINGERINGS FOR THE FLUTE FAQ

*by Nestor Herszbaum & Tiffany Campbell*

## What made you decide to write this book?

The idea of the book started originally about 8 years ago as a way to organize all the fingerings that I had found and that I had learned from my teachers and other colleagues. Later the book evolved into a reference book, sort of a dictionary for fingerings in which I included such diverse material as: fingerings to improve intonation problems, trills, tremolos, harmonics and general information.

I decided to put all the fingerings in a graphic form so that anyone could read them easily.

The book developed in different stages. I started with the main part of the book which contains fingerings for all 4 octaves and trills. Then I added the 'Quick Reference' section for the basic, piano, forte fingerings and trills. Later I added tremolos and some other information of interest which includes a reference to numbered fingering systems widely used in contemporary music.

## How long have you been interested in this topic?

I've been interested in alternative fingerings since I started playing the flute, but I became even more interested in them later, when I realized that most professional flute players use alternative fingerings all the time, and that they are very important in orchestral playing.

## Why should alternative fingerings be used?

We should use them to enhance the music we play. They enable us to correct pitch problems or to facilitate passages that otherwise would be awkward or impossible to play.

Most players use alternative fingerings without realizing it. Trill fingerings are one example of alternative fingerings. Nobody would expect you to play an EF# trill with regular fingerings; why would you hesitate to play a very fast passage with that same fingering?

The trick is to know when to use and when not to use an alternative fingering and what kind of fingering to use for a given passage. For example, I wouldn't use the F# with the middle finger in the low and middle octave at the end of a phrase or in a slow passage because it would sound too flat, but I would definitely use it in a fast passage.

## In what specific situations could alternative fingerings be helpful?

1. To correct intonation problems. Example: Prokofiev Sonata - end of the first movement



The Bb tends to be flat on most flutes, even more so when we play pianissimo. Using a fingering that raises the pitch on that Bb makes this phrase much easier and more musical since we don't have to force that note to make it sound in tune. Try the following fingerings:

**F3**

**Bb3**



2. To play fast passages that otherwise would be impossible to play. Example: Prokofiev Classical Symphony - fourth movement



This passage is marked half note = 122 (sometimes it's played even faster than that). Most flutists use harmonic fingerings on the F# and D and an alternative fingering on the A to make this passage possible:

**B3**



**A3**



**F#3**



**D3**



**Should I teach my students alternative fingerings, and if so, at what age should I begin teaching them?**

Yes, I think so. I would follow a natural order. First I'd teach them all the basic fingerings they need to know. Then I'd introduce trills as they appear in the repertoire that they are studying. Later I'd introduce some alternative fingerings which are of great importance, particularly the ones for the high register. For example, the alternative fingerings for E, F# and G# not only correct the sharp tendency of those notes, but also help in slurred passages and improve the quality of the tone in some instances. Again, you should make sure that students know when it is appropriate to use those fingerings and that they play their scales and arpeggios with the basic fingerings.

**E3**



**F#3**



**G#3**



**Did you use any specific method for finding these fingerings?**

Yes, I did. When I look for a fingering for a specific passage, I first try to modify the basic fingering by covering or uncovering keys. On open-hole flutes I try half holes or depressing only the rim of the key. I also experiment by modifying harmonic fingerings in the same way.

**Currently, are there any other books that address the use of alternative fingerings in such a manner?**

Yes, there is a book devoted exclusively to fingerings for the flute that is pretty well known. Unfortunately, as the book was written in the 1960s, it is outdated and hard to interpret. There are also some books devoted to contemporary music techniques for the flute that are excellent; however, their purpose is very different since they concentrate mainly on extended techniques and

multiphonics

**You decided to self-publish your book, how hard was that and where can we purchase your book?**

It was very hard, but very rewarding since I had control over the end result without having to compromise quality or design. You can purchase my book on my website: [www.herszbaum.com](http://www.herszbaum.com) where you can also find lots of information about this subject.

**What has been the reaction to your book so far?**

I have been very pleased by its reception. Flutists of every level have commented on how easily they can understand the graphic notation. They've been surprised by all of the original information that this book contains.

Flutist Nestor Herszbaum Herszbaum has performed for European, North and South American audiences as a concerto soloist, recitalist and chamber musician. His vast experience encompasses orchestral playing, baroque music with period instruments, avant-garde music and popular music. Nestor has taught at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music Preparatory Department, University of Nebraska at Omaha and Creighton University. His book 'Alternative Fingerings for the Flute' has been well received since its release in August 2003.

Tiffany Campbell is currently a private flute instructor and freelance flutist in Lincoln, Nebraska. She received her undergraduate degree from Peru State College and her master of music degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she was teaching assistant to Dr. John Bailey. In addition to teaching and performing, Tiffany serves on the founding board of the newly developed Nebraska Flute Club. Her most recent project is a new online resource for flutists called "The Flute Source" ([www.theflutesource.com](http://www.theflutesource.com)), which includes a "Flute Webliography" of online study materials for flutists of all ages.