

## PLAYING THE FLUTE WITH BRACES: A GUIDE TO SURVIVAL

By Shelley Collins

I began playing the flute at age nine, and I had braces on my upper and lower teeth for almost all of my first four years of playing. I was often frustrated by the effect that braces had on my flute playing, so I understand the dismay my students express when they begin playing the flute with braces.

It has been my experience that students with braces usually do not produce the same clear sound as they did before (and will again after the braces are removed). I have found that students playing with a "smiley" embouchure tend to have a worse time of it, while students who use the "center" of their lips do better with all of that metal in their mouths. My students report that the tight, "smiley" embouchure makes playing more painful after they have had their braces tightened. If you pull back at the corners of your lips, this might be a great time to break that habit. I have found that harmonics exercises are quite helpful for this.

I do not make tone the focus of instruction for students with braces. Obviously, it is still a part of the lesson and of their daily practice, but I use the "braces years" as a time to work on technique, breathing, phrasing, intonation, learning new repertoire, and listening to recordings and live performances of fine flutists. I don't make a big issue out of the tone when it is obvious that the braces are going to always be a problem; otherwise, I find that students become even more self-conscious, and the tone can get even worse as students become more tense.

Students do become amazingly good at adapting; within a few months, you will probably barely notice that you are playing with braces, if you can stick with it during the frustrating transition period. Try to continue to practice consistently!

There are days when playing with braces can be somewhat painful. Try to avoid having your braces tightened (or any other major adjustments) right before a performance, competition or lesson. If you must have a procedure done that will make it impossible for you to play for a while (such as having your mouth wired shut), be sure to talk to your flute teacher and ensemble directors so that you can schedule this for a time that is not inconvenient for you musically.

Luckily, orthodontic practice seems to be getting even better, and results are achieved more rapidly than they were a decade or so ago. I had braces for five long years, while most of my students usually have them for no longer than two or three. (Not that this will console you any when you have just had your braces tightened!)

As a final piece of advice, please remember to wear your retainer after the braces are removed so that your teeth don't move again. Wearing braces once is enough!

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The musical score consists of six staves of music. The first staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat major) and a common time signature. The second staff has a key signature of one sharp (F major) and a common time signature. The third staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat major) and a common time signature. The fourth staff has a key signature of one sharp (F major) and a common time signature. The fifth staff has a key signature of one flat (B-flat major) and a common time signature. The sixth staff has a key signature of one sharp (F major) and a common time signature. The music features various note values, rests, and articulation marks, including slurs and accents. The key signature changes from C major to G major and back to C major. The music is written in treble clef with a common time signature.

\*Use the fingering for the lowest note.