



Helpful Tips

Piccolo to Bass Tips

Debbie MacMurray

December 7, 2024

Topics for Discussion

Set Up: Find a lightweight/sturdy/dependable flute stand for the instruments you normally play with so they are not only in easy reach for you but are safe from falling/getting dents from others around you.

Intonation: How long has the next instrument been sitting – is it cold (probably low in pitch), warm due to room temp (probably high in pitch)....if the room is going to be cold, should I use a “flute cover?” assuming there’s time to remove the cover before pickup to play?

Sound: Whistle tones, get sound/octave in your ear as you pick up the next instrument.....

Ear/Hearing: How to get the “octave” of the next instrument into your ear/head.....

Embouchure: What size aperture do you need for the instrument you are switching to? How relaxed to make the embouchure? Where to place the air? These are all “muscle memory” things going through our heads when switch instruments, especially on a quick switch in the same piece.....

Time to Switch: Do you need to put one instrument in your lap or on a shelf/under your arm (piccolo?).....Memorize where the pegs are so you put the instrument ON the correct peg....MARK the switch in your music just like those on iPads mark their page turns...

Practicing: practicing your program/instruments in the order you will play on the concert....



Tips from friends

“The success of the switch is done with changing the size of the aperture. The higher the note the smaller the aperture. In practice play all three harmonic partial from low G...that would be G1, G, D3. If you do this enough, you will develop muscle memory.” Patricia George

“Adding in a discreet whistle tone often helps a little on dramatic embouchure switches...” Cindy Ellis

“Lower flutes need a relaxed embouchure. One show I had a piccolo to alto flute switch, I would blow raspberries to loosen my lips as I was grabbing one instrument or the other.” Michelle Tyler Scheen

“The hardest part for me now is remembering response time. After playing low flutes and anticipating and ‘staying ahead’ to be on time, piccolo response is immediate.” Mary Predmore

“In general, I find it harder to go from small to big so practicing whichever way is more challenging for you is important. Another word of advice...when making a quick switch keep your eyes on the peg to avoid accidents. One time, thinking the flute was on the peg..it wasn’t; thus, a dent in my headjoint.” Nan Raphael

“My tip is to invest in a shelf that fits on the music stand to place the piccolo on. Much easier to make quick switches when you don’t have to accurately place the picc on a peg.” Laura Benning

“Not a multi flute players but I played shows on multiple Woodwinds. Use your own instrument stands and practice the switch physically for sage placement so that you can do it basically without looking. You usually need to memorize that part of the music as well” Nancy Newman

“I think the longer the flute, the deeper the breath! The short the higher (within reason.” Dennette McDermott

“Get the feel of each instrument on your lips. Remember the exact position for the best, controllable air stream for each instrument. Having this clear in your mind removes a big source of tension.” Bill Butler

