

# Reed Players Doubling on Flute

BY ERIC RUYLE

It is hard enough to master one musical instrument, but trying to master two seems insurmountable at first. However, some reed players want to play the flute and take lessons from professional flutists but become frustrated and bewildered at their limited progress. This is often caused by the problems reed players have with how flute tone is produced. Sometimes a student who plays another instrument quite well becomes impatient with the struggle to learn the basics of playing the flute. Because flute teachers are generally unfamiliar with the habits and expectations that reed players have developed over the years, flute teachers are not alert to having these habits interfere with learning to play the flute.



Clarinetists and saxophonists often produce a thin flute tone in the third octave because they press the flute too firmly against the chin, which makes the embouchure less flexible. A clarinet or saxophone is played with the top teeth touching and holding the mouthpiece. In contrast double reed players wrap both lips around the reed to create a similar stabilizing point.

Reed players are initially afraid the flute will fall, and press the flute too firmly into their chin in order to achieve stability. It may help to teach beginning doublers to use the Rockstro method to position the flute, turning the headjoint inward slightly and rolling the body outward. The Rockstro position places the key mechanism rods over the center of the flute tube, so the center of gravity of the flute is balanced, which takes less

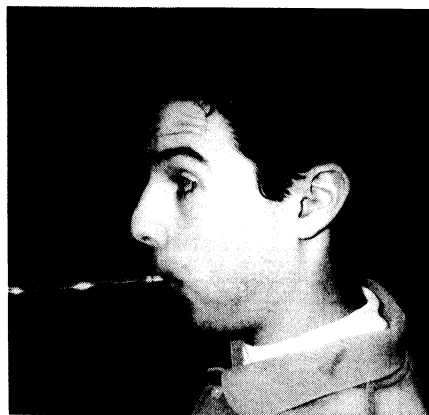
finger and hand pressure to keep the flute from rotating. In *Music and the Flute* Thomas Nyfenger suggests a modified Rockstro position, which also turns the headjoint inward and the flute body outward, but the tube rotation is less. Either Rockstro or modified Rockstro provides better stability than lining the center of the tone hole with the keys.

Reed players hold the mouthpiece or reed in their mouths while flutists simply use the embouchure to direct the air. Nyfenger described embouchure formation and control best when he pictured the lips as a shotgun barrel that aims the air. By thinking of the lips this way, doublers stop pinching, relax the bottom lip, form the required cushion for the air stream, and begin to view the embouchure as an integral part of the sound.

When most beginning doublers articulate, they tend to tongue too hard and their embouchures change shape because the lip muscles are weak. Flutists build endurance by playing in ensembles, but doublers often use the flute only occasionally. A reed player articulates by curling the tongue to accommodate the reed or mouthpiece, and the tongue touches the reed with enough force to pause reed vibrations. This is in direct contrast to flute articulations, in which no part of the flute is inside the mouth. Here there is no need to curl or force the tongue. Flute teachers often attribute heavy articulation to using an incorrect syllable, but with reed players the problem usually stems from using too much force.



At first a doubler should practice without using any articulations until the tone is focused and consistent. Scales are the best way to begin playing articulations because these are familiar and focus can be kept on the tone. It will keep students interested if they also work on pentatonic and various modes that are used in jazz.



Teachers should choose solo music and etudes that match the good technical knowledge and finger technique most doublers may have, but doublers lack the lip dexterity to play the standard Andersen etudes. The *Forty Studies*, Op. 101 by Hughes and *Fifty Melodic Studies*, Op. 4 by Jules Demersseman are a good alternative because they are short and use minimal articulation.

All teachers agree that practice time should be devoted to tone studies, and harmonics are a good way to start a practice session. These could precede long tone exercises from *De La Sonorité* by Moysé or the *Afternoon of a Faun* tone study in Trevor Wye's *Practice Book on Tone*.

Doublers often play the flute the same way they play their primary instrument, and the results are horrible. Flute teachers who understand the physical differences between flute and the other woodwind instruments will adjust lessons to overcome these problems, and progress will be made much swifter.

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