

**ALL THOSE FLUTES:
how a flute choir can enhance your school band program**

A brief history of the flute choir

What is a flute choir? Today the term generally refers to an ensemble of 5 or more flutes. Using this definition one could argue that flute “choirs” have been around for a long time, fife and drum corps and Irish flute bands being prime examples. Flutists have always enjoyed performing together. Boismortier, an 18th century composer, wrote beautiful flute quintets, still popular today. However, the “modern” flute choir is a recent development, and the once sparse selection of repertoire for the group is now abundant and includes a large variety of literature.

In the 1960’s “modern” flute choirs surfaced in many different parts of the country, largely unbeknownst to each other. Typically these flute choirs were formed in colleges as a means of including the many graduating high school flutists in college music programs. The directors often arranged or composed music for the groups. Gradually these groups began to learn about each other, and in 1972 a small group of flutists pursued a vision of a national meeting to come together just for the love of the flute. The National Flute Association was formed with its first annual meeting held in California in August 1973. James Christensen was asked to arrange Bach’s *Air from Suite No. 3 in D Major* for mixed flute ensemble, which was the only work presented for flute choir at the meeting. This was the beginning.

In 1976 The National Flute Association included several competitions in their plans for the annual convention, including a newly published music competition as well as a competition for a High School Flute Choir. Thus the flute choir movement took off. Bass flutes were first commercially available in the late 1960’s. Less than two decades later at the 1982 convention, the Tokyo Flute Ensemble Academy performed with contrabass flutes as part of their group. By 1985 the flute industry was producing better and more affordable alto and bass flutes. Arrangements and original compositions for flute choir began to be published. In 1978 Myrna Brown produced a repertoire list of 128 flute choir works, many in manuscript. In 1996 Carol Kniebusch Noe, formerly at James Madison University, published *A Guidebook to Flute Choir Literature* which was 104 pages long! Presently there are over 1000 pieces available for flute choir.

About Flute Frenzy

Flute Frenzy was established in May 2000 to introduce flute students to the entire flute family and offer them a chamber music experience where they could play various flutes, including piccolo, C flute, alto flute and bass flute. Members of the group attend middle schools and high schools in Williamsburg-James City County and York County. They practice one evening each week and present several concerts each year. Venues have included the Kimball Theatre, Bruton Parish Church, the Williamsburg Regional Library, and The National Flute Association's 2002 Annual Convention in Washington, D. C. In addition to its regularly scheduled concerts, Flute Frenzy performs throughout the community for churches, clubs, and retirement homes, as well as for festivals and other special occasions.

Margaret Carlson is Flute Frenzy's conductor and artistic director. She grew up in Williamsburg, Virginia, graduated from York High School, received a Bachelor of Music degree in flute performance from Greensboro College and a Master of Music performance degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music. Presently a Williamsburg resident, Mrs. Carlson is a free-lance flutist and private flute teacher. A former member of the Ft. Wayne Philharmonic, the Norfolk Symphony and the Virginia Opera Orchestra, she currently performs with the Williamsburg Symphonia as well as with various chamber ensembles.

The instruments

The most common instruments in a flute choir are piccolo, C flute, alto flute and bass flute. Eb flute and contrabass flute are recent additions. Students really enjoy having the opportunity to play the different flutes, and each instrument brings a distinctive tone color to the ensemble. However, because many groups only have access to C flute and piccolo, compositions are often published with C flute substitutions for Eb flute or alto flute. A number of composers have also begun writing for “expandable” flute choir. An “expandable” work can be performed successfully with various numbers of flutes, for example from a quartet format to an octet, using alto and bass flutes as an added dimension, rather than a duplication of existing parts.

What the students learn

Because flute choir is a chamber music experience, it offers the students the opportunity for more individual attention than is possible in the school band setting. We focus on typical chamber ensemble skills, with special emphasis on developing listening skills to improve intonation, phrasing, articulation and tone quality. The flute choir repertoire varies from three to as many as twelve individual parts. Therefore the students become more independent, rather than “following the leader,” as often happens in band when there are many flutes on one part. In addition, by changing parts and instruments, the students learn to pay attention to where their part fits into the harmonic and melodic structure. Because there are few players on a part, the students become more comfortable with playing by themselves as well as the constructive criticism necessary to correct errors. By learning to direct while playing, they become more aware of the meaning of a conductor’s motions and learn when it is especially important to pay close attention. All of these skills translate into a more competent, cooperative and responsive flute section in the band.

What the students have to say

The students' desire to be a part of flute choir is probably the best testament to the importance it plays in their musical development. Below are some student comments which describe what they like about flute choir, what they have learned from it, and how they feel their playing has changed as a result of participating in the group.

I like flute choir because:

- *You play different parts and different flutes.*
- *The music is challenging.*
- *There is detail on what you're doing wrong and how to improve it.*
- *In a smaller group it's easier to learn theory.*
- *Difficult parts are worked out individually.*

I have learned:

- *How to play the piccolo, the alto and the bass.*
- *How to lead in some songs and come in at the right time.*
- *How to play with a clearer tone.*
- *How to play with and listen to others and tune to them.*
- *How to practice.*

Participating in flute choir has changed my playing in that:

- *I feel better about myself at playing the flute.*
- *I don't get scared when I play by myself.*
- *I feel more confident and happy about it.*
- *I have become more aware of the music and the people playing around me.*

I would describe flute choir as:

- *Sophistication and fun combined in music to make one enjoyable experience.*
- *Fabulous fun and fantastic friends playing fine flutes at Flute Frenzy.*

Flute Frenzy's favorites

Title	Composer/arranger	Publisher
A Lyric Noel	arr. McMichael	Alry
A Renaissance Noel	arr. McMichael	Alry
A Swinging Safari	Kaempfert/Christie	Alry
Amazing Grace	arr. Holcombe	Musicians Publications
Appalachian Sketches	Melvin Lauf	Flute.Net Publications
Ball Games	David Wells	David L. Wells Music
Canon	Pachelbel/Walker	Rubank
Childhood Favorites	Ricky Lombardo	Lombardo Music
Children of the Wind	Catherine McMichael	Alry
The Galway Piper	arr. Simpson	Alry
Greensleeves Fantasia	Vaughan Williams/McGinty	Hal Leonard
Holiday Fantasy	arr. Ben Meir	Megido Music
I Think I'm Going to China	Rick Pierce	Falls House Press
I Wonder As I Wander	Niles/Pearce	Alry
Joy to the World	Axton/Custer	Warner Bros. Publications
Legends from the Greenwood	Catherine McMichael	Alry
Let There Be Peace on Earth	Miller & Jackson/Lombardo	Lombardo Music
Londonderry Air	arr. Grainger/Webb	Alry
Misty Mountains	Melvin Lauf	Flute.Net Publications
Morning Has Broken	arr. Rice-Young	Alry
Noel Suisse	Daquin/Ephross	Southern
Over the Rainbow	Harburg & Arlen/Custer	Warner Bros. Publications
Pink Panther Theme	Mancine/Rice-Young	Alry
Procession of the Sardar	Ippolitov-Ivanov/Thurst	Southern
Silver Winds in the Night	Gruber/Berkey	SDG Press
Simple Gifts	arr. Lombardo	Lombardo Music
The Sound of Music	Rodgers/Pierce	Falls House Press
Sugarplums & Mistletoe	Michael Isaacson	Alry
Teddy Bears' Picnic	Bratton/Lynch	Chapel Digital
Wind Dance	Todd Coleman	Falls House Press

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