

# Flute Talk

December 2014

Mary Kay Fink • Surviving The Nutcracker • Playing Multiple Flutes



# Starting Over

By Geri Rizzo

**A**re you a flutist who has started playing again after a five-, ten-, or twenty-year respite? I was and I learned a few valuable lessons along the way. After more than twenty years of playing again, I now am teaching someone whose journey is similar to mine. My experience of starting over has helped me offer guidance and inspired me to share my story.

I attended the New England Conservatory of Music on a full scholarship and studied with some of the finest flutists of the Golden era: Claude Monteux, Jim Walker, James Pappoutsakis, and Frances Blaisdell. I have wonderful memories of my times with them, the progress that was made, and the dreams I once had. Sometimes, however, life throws us curveballs. My life took a different path away from music when I started a family.

Whatever the reason, it is never easy to begin playing flute again. First, there is the memory of one's former glorious sound, embouchure flexibility, and technical prowess. Then the reality of how you sound now sets in. Relearning to play, as opposed to picking it up for the first time with no expectations, is quite unnerving to say the least, but you can do it and create a new dream in the process.

## Baby Steps

The first thing to do is not hold on to the flutist you used to be. Concentrate on taking baby steps. I began by listening to recordings of flutists I admired and focusing on their phrasing. It brought back the memory of how I used to feel when I could play well and gave me the incentive to keep trying even through the times I thought I would never sound that good again. So don't set lofty goals at the outset. Doing so will only result in frustration. Pace yourself, accomplish a little, and then reset your goals to accomplish a bit more.

## Breathing

By and large the most difficult technical aspect of playing the flute is breathing. I was surprised to learn that the flute requires the most air of any wind instrument. Playing long tones (or should I say attempting to) was helpful, and I constantly reminded myself that Rome wasn't built in a day.

## Fingerings

I remembered the first and second octave fingerings and where the notes were on the staff. However, the notation of the higher notes above the staff was more difficult to remember, and something I did not want to attempt yet since the squawk I produced was anything but encouraging. So start with what you can play now.

## Repertoire

A really bad idea is looking at your old repertoire and thinking you should be able to play it. Playing this reper-



*Geri Rizzo is a flutist, singer and songwriter residing in the Atlantic City, New Jersey area where she freelances in many genres. She particularly enjoys teaching young musicians. [www.geririzzo.com](http://www.geririzzo.com), [www.magicfluteweddings.com](http://www.magicfluteweddings.com)*

toire is not going to happen any time soon. Start simply. Realize that you are a beginner again; but a beginner who has the advantage of knowing that time and practice will produce results.

### Take It Easy

Once again remember that breathing is probably the most challenging hurdle. I found that if I played a simple favorite melody and enjoyed doing just that, the fingers and the breathing worked themselves out much more easily than when I played scales. Each practice session I played from a book of songs that included a CD accompaniment to help get a sense of flow back.

### Find a Place to Perform

One of the quickest ways to get your chops back is to play with others. Performing at church and retirement communities helps you as much as it helps the audience. Join a community band or flute choir. If you like jazz and rock, attend some open mics and meet other musicians.

### The Flute

Get your flute serviced – especially if it has been sitting unplayed in the

case for years. Besides fixing your flute, a good repair person can be a good resource about flute activities in the area.

Don't blame your instrument as I did. I must have gone through three different brands of flutes in my first year of starting over. In the end it was very hard to admit that it was me and not the instrument. Sublimating one's ego is never an easy thing to do, but under these circumstances, it is highly advisable. Remember your goals and stick to them.

### Find a Good Teacher

After practicing for one to two hours daily for a year, I found a teacher to guide my progress. Finding a good teacher may not be an easy process; so don't be afraid to change teachers if the first does not work out for you.

### Find Inspiration

My repair person suggested I attend a masterclass taught by Gary Schocker. His sense of humor and personable ways, combined with his beautiful playing, were an inspiration to me. Performing in a masterclass this second time around was very different for me. I was not flogged if I hit a wrong

note. Schocker made suggestions, played the passage, and made it seem so easy to follow suit that I was soon doing just that. Before I knew it, I was able to play the Taffanel and Gaubert scales effortlessly once more and revisit some of my beloved repertoire. I began to put in even more practice time because I now had a glimmer of how I used to play.

Practicing was no longer a difficult experience technically and emotionally, so of course I wanted to play more and more. I discovered that all the pieces I had once memorized many years ago were still there under my fingers. Attend masterclasses whenever possible.

### Record Yourself

Recording practice sessions and performances provides a valuable yardstick to measure progress and discover what needs fixing to reach goals. You may be surprised that your playing is actually better than you expected.

### Success

After three years, I had my mojo back. It may take you more or less time. I now have been performing again for 23 years and have several stu-

**Flute World**  
America's Flute Specialty House