

Harmonics Part 2

From the teaching practice.

Flageolets for advanced flutists

Part II

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After writing my article on flageolets or harmonics for FLUIT 2014-4, more ideas about the subject came up.

In part 1, I explained HOW to play harmonics, in this second part I will concentrate on WHEN and WHERE to play them.

In order to be able to use harmonics in various situations it is important to practice harmonics until they sound as nice as normal tones, just a bit thinner. When this is achieved and the harmonics are also well in tune then it is time to start working on the dynamics. Thin and soft harmonics make beautiful echoes! Hillary Taggart's excellent exercise *the Alphorn*¹ for working on this was discussed in part 1.

Another exercise for practicing harmonics can be found in Robert Dick's *Toonvorming door nieuwe technieken*². Using a part of Bach's *Allemande* from the Solo-sonata in A minor, he makes you play harmonics on almost every note. This exercise is perfect for practicing different harmonics on one fundamental and for creating a flexible mind as to which harmonic can be used where. He asks for the first and second harmonic and goes even higher than that. It is a challenge to work towards one dynamic level, one steady tone-color and in the end playing the piece with all these harmonics as if you've never played it otherwise!

The image shows a musical score for an exercise on harmonics, consisting of six staves of music. The music is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 7/8. The score is divided into two systems of three staves each. The first system contains the first two staves, and the second system contains the remaining four staves. The music features a series of eighth-note patterns, with diamond-shaped markers placed below the notes to indicate the positions for playing harmonics. The markers are placed on various notes across the staves, indicating the specific notes on which harmonics should be played. The exercise is designed to practice playing harmonics on almost every note of the fundamental.

A good exercise especially for high harmonics can be found in *For the contemporary flutist* by Wil Offermans³. In the example below the focus is on the higher harmonics, more than an octave above the fundamental.

Etüde / etude 2 Obertöne / Harmonics

Con brio
♩ = ± 88

Harmonics can be very useful in places where tones in the third octave continue to be sharp and when lowering the direction of the airstream causes an undesired ‘covered up’ tone quality. Nowadays I am fortunate to play on a well-tuned flute but for many years I played almost every tone in the third octave with an auxiliary fingering or as a harmonic. My mind was busier playing the flute than playing the music!

Finally, a trick that can make a flutist’s life easier: some composers are charmed by the sound of the flute’s highest octave but have no idea of extreme fingering technique it requires when played in fast runs. Practicing them over and over again is a possibility of course, but a few harmonics here and there (when it is not a solo) can be very helpful!

In the example below all the flute’s semiquavers in the third octave (second staff) can be played as harmonics.

M. Ravel: Ma mère l'oye, Laideronnette, Impératrice des pagodes.

¹ Hillary Taggart – *In the Sun*. Fourteen pieces for solo flute. Hunt Edition HE 79.

² Robert Dick – *Toonvorming door nieuwe technieken*. Ed. Rien de Reede. Molenaar Edition, p.21

³ Wil Offermans – *For the contemporary flutist*. Zimmermann ZM 29700