

## The General Care of the Flute, Part 1 - Storage *by Martin Greene*

The keys to storing and keeping a flute correctly are first, to have a good case and case cover, and second to have an awareness of the location of the flute and conditions which prevail there.

First, the case. It is amazing how many people regard the case as a mere option, when in fact a case is a necessity to owning a flute. It is not merely a storage area, in the sense that a garage is for a car. Without a case the flute would quickly receive damage that would render it incapacitated. The case should be sturdy and capable of withstanding a moderate blow without dent or crumpling.

If it is the French style (no handle) it requires a cover, as well. The cover supplies a handle and also another layer of protection against blows. The flute is so small an instrument, it's tendency is to be maneuvered about frequently, and blows are nearly inevitable. Although a leather case is attractive and smells good, it is not inherently superior to a good plastic case.

The case cover should be padded if at all possible. If a generic (i.e. not supplied by the manufacturer of the flute) case is used, make sure that it fits the flute's three pieces tightly, so that the instrument won't rattle around when carried or moved. Always check that the latches are securely closed when transporting the flute. One of the most common causes of damage occurs when the flutist picks up the case only to see the flute drop out and hit the ground.

Second, the conditions of storage. There are two main considerations,

(1) temperature and (2) possibility of theft. If a flute is in a good case with a good cover, temperature changes and other weather conditions are largely ameliorated. Nevertheless there are limits.

Do not leave the flute in a car with the windows rolled up in Summer. Do not leave it in the Sun for any extended period of time, cased or not. Do not leave it outdoors when temperatures are low, cased or not. These are all common-sense remarks, yet they are sometimes forgotten.

Even a case and cover cannot protect a flute from being overheated in a car. Oil will "cook" out of the joints, and the entire instrument will undergo expansion later followed by contraction, with possible damage to the mechanism, especially where it attaches to the flute's body. If gotten very cold, the same damage can occur; also, the oil may thicken in the mechanism and cause binding, with bad results.

Of course one should avoid allowing the flute to be rained on, and it is a good idea to avoid conditions, such as the beach, where wind and sand are combined. Sand wrecks the mechanism, and condensation, if it carries salt, is not good either.

Unfortunately theft is a real possibility, especially because the flute is a small instrument (easily concealed under clothing, easily carried) which is also popular and expensive. The popularity of flute playing means that thieves can pawn the instrument easily, and it is well known that some flutes are very valuable. That's the bad news.

The good news is that the flute's small size means there is really no reason why it cannot be kept within eyesight of the owner at all times. This is probably the best policy to pursue. If leaving the flute at home, make sure it is adequately insured (the NFA offers low cost insurance for members).

Most chances for loss of a flute occur when traveling. Again the rule is: try to keep it always within sight. This means, don't leave it in your hotel room. Don't leave it in your car (which you shouldn't anyway, due to temperature problems). Don't set it down on a rack in the tourist souvenir shop. If you cannot tolerate carrying it and keeping an eye on it rather constantly, it is best to leave it at home. Or better, leave it at the home of a reliable friend.