

Teaching & Learning: Tone Color Perspective and Examples from The Flute Practice and Flute Doctor Highlights from BJ Nicoletti

FROM “THE FLUTE PRACTICE”

<https://theflutepractice.com/>

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Tone Colors Perspective YouTube Video (11:17) - <https://youtu.be/MsDVftlpYWE>

This YouTube video by Tatianna, founder of The Flute Practice (a robust online environment focused on the teaching and learning of the flute), describes the meaning of tone color with the flute and then provides some playing tools and tips for creating a range of color changes to the flute’s tone. She also provides cautionary tips for protecting intonation and quality of sound.

For All Skill Levels

Many of us have had instruction on creating tone colors, practiced changing tone colors, and developed our own strategies for deciding on and applying tone colors to our repertoire. However, it never hurts to hear different perspectives. Different perspectives usually add depth to our understanding or, at the very least, serve as a reminder or an affirmation. Most importantly, hearing these different perspectives could be just what a more intermediate/earlier level flute student needs to hear and in the way they need to hear it. Further, Tatianna’s delivery on this topic is engaging, joyful and encouraging.

Basic Ways of Creating Tone Color on the Flute - “Sing Your Imagination”

Here are some highlights which are in no way intended to replace watching the actual video.

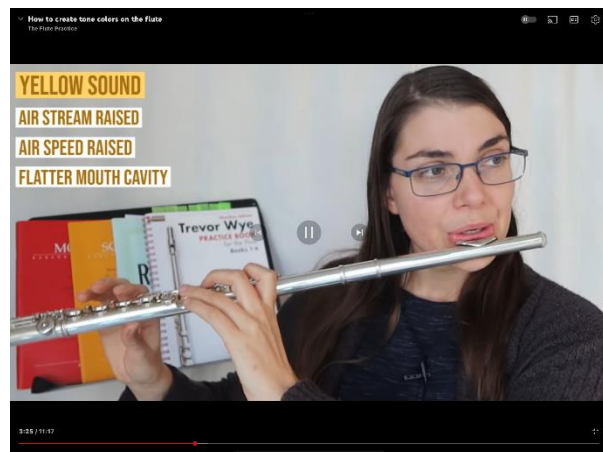
- First, remember, we all have tone color already. Each player has their own unique sound. Another word for this is the “timbre” of our sound. We’ve already got a foundation to work with. Have fun. Use the imagination.
- That said, expanding our tone colors doesn’t just happen. It must be learned and practiced like any other element of playing.
- Essentially, here are the influencing factors on tone color: air speed; air direction; shape and size of the embouchure; holding the lip tight or loose; lips forward or backwards; and, the shape and size of the mouth cavity.
- She even goes so far as to say our own body and our mindfulness of how it resonates is a factor.



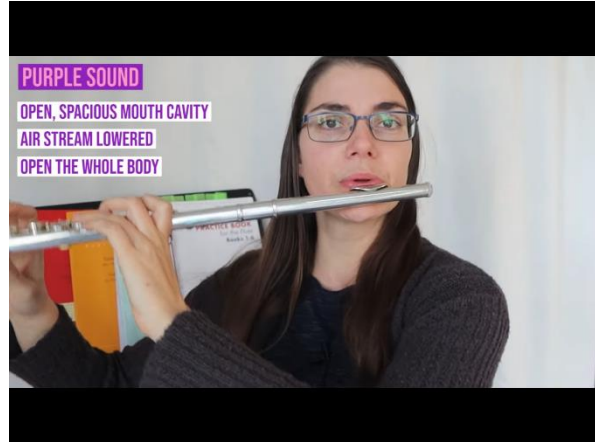
Different Ways to Think About Tone Color

In summary, here are the two foundational color lenses she gives along with instructions on how to bring these colors to life on our flute. Again, these highlights don’t replace watching the video itself. Watch the video and try what she says.

- First, referencing Trevor Wye (including encouraging the yellow-purple exercises in his Tone method book), she describes the color concepts of yellow and purple. Yellow is more airy. Purple is more rich, darker, and stronger in the upper partials. Work with these two and grow from there.
- For yellow, we are more forward with our lips and jaw. We raise the airstream. There is more airspeed (be careful of going sharp here) and the cavity of our mouth is smaller and in more of an “ew” shape. She encourages us to practice all the colors with varied dynamics so we don’t get locked into, for example, yellow always being soft or purple always being loud.

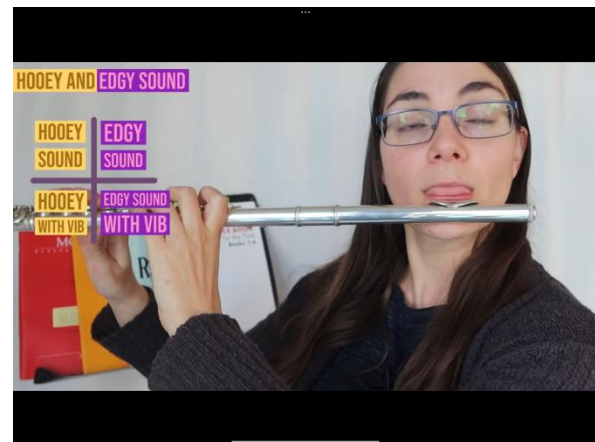


- For purple, think about the whole opening in the mouth. Drop the lower jaw back and down. Try to make the sound open with your whole body. Blow the air down into the flute, but be careful not to go flat.



- Overall, she says “never change color at the expense of pitch,” all people will hear is a bad sound, not the color you hope to deliver.
- For other colors, she points to our toolbox for effecting colors, above. We have to use all these tools to explore color generation beyond the foundational yellow and purple.

- She points us to the “hooley more ethereal sound” and the “edgy more focused sound.” It is useful to start with these and then add vibrato and take it away. Change the speed and depth of the vibrato. Viola! More colors.



- Next up, vowel sounds. Play with the shape of the mouth and the tongue. Aaaah, eeeee, ooohhh, Oooo (uuuu). Control the intonation with the shape of the lip.
- Last, but not least, she wants us to use our powerful imagination. Imagine it and then hold onto it.

A LITTLE MORE PERSPECTIVE - FROM THE FLUTE DOCTOR

If you'd like one more perspective on tone colors which takes this knowledge to another level, I found listening to Dr. Angela McBrearty's YouTube on “Finding Color in Your Musical Line” well done and helpful. She echoed some of the above concepts but also talked about being very intentional with your playing, not just instinctual. It's ok to use your instincts but wrap that with mindfulness and intentionality. Importantly, she plays actual musical passages and talks about creating the line using colors. A general tip she provided was that a drop in an interval or change in the direction/surprise to the ear may be places where we should change our color.

<https://doctorflute.com/> YouTube: @DoctorFlute
 Link to Video - [Finding Color in Your Musical Line](#) (8:16)

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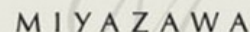
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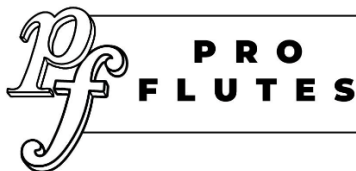
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