

## The Flute Family

Flute: A woodwind instrument sounded without the aid of a reed.

Flutes may be classified into two categories:

- A. Flutes which use a whistle mouth piece like the pennywhistle, recorder, flageolet or ocarina.
- B. Flutes which require the player to direct air against the edge of a hole (embouchure\*-hole flutes). Ex: orchestral transverse\* flute, panpipes, piccolo, and fife.

Flutes may be among the oldest instruments in history. Examples can be found among the artifacts of most ancient civilizations. The first transverse flute appeared in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and was referred to as a *Schwegel*. Early history refers to the flute as a military instrument while the recorder, dating from the Middle Ages, was used as accompaniment for song and dance. In the Renaissance period, several sizes of transverse flutes were developed but recorders were more popular until just after 1700.

The modern orchestral flute dates back to ca. 1850 and was the invention of Theobald Boehm (1794-1881). Known as the father of modern woodwind instruments, his instrument of 1832 formed the basis from which other flutes and woodwind instruments evolved. He is credited with developing the cylindrical-bore flute in 1847- an instrument that even today, remains almost in its original form. Boehm also invented a new system of fingering which featured a separate tone hole for each note thus avoiding weaker notes with fork\* fingerings.

New developments and improvements continue to be made by today's makers and players; most of these however, are not complete redesigns but are refinements or extensions of the standard Boehm flute.

Flutes can be made from silver, platinum, gold or an alloy. They are nontransposing instruments with a three octave range.

\*embouchure – The placement of the lips, facial muscles, and jaw in the playing of wind instruments.

\*transverse flute – a flute in which the air stream is directed perpendicular to its length rather than along it.

\*fork fingering – a fingering in which the middle finger of either hand is lifted while the two fingers on either side cover their respective holes.