

# From the Performance Health Care Committee



Chip Shelton

## Flute Playing with Braces

Committee members offer tips for flutists getting braces or other adjustment devices.

by Chip Shelton

Getting braces doesn't equal the end of productive and satisfying flute playing. It just means making adjustments and learning new techniques.

"You can do it," says Susan Fain. "It's just different." She advises flutists to avoid major performances too soon after getting braces. "I got my braces the day after giving a solo recital because I had no major performances coming up."

Fain recommends orthodontic wax to relieve lip irritation. "When soreness subsides, start with just the head joint," she says. "Use several layers of masking tape or Yamaha lip plate patches on the lip plate to provide extra friction and offset the extra space your braces require."

Flutists can begin with work on harmonics using only the headjoint and then move on to left-handed songs and full flute harmonics. "At slight risk of slowing treatment, I chose to play without elastics in place to avoid interference with having the biggest oral cavity possible and space between the teeth," Fain says.

"Your embouchure may tire easily. It will improve with time. Schedule shorter practice sessions and gradually increase the length of time you can play," she notes.

"My upper octave and air stream are better now with the new position of my teeth even with the braces on," she says. "In the low octave, using a high-octave embouchure has been helpful."

Fain notes that playing with braces has strengthened her oral musculature because there's more distance to cover to get the airstream correct. "I am now playing difficult repertoire with braces. I just needed time to regain confidence," she says.

Melissa Vining chose an aligner treatment (Invisalign) as an alternative to traditional braces, using clear, removable aligners and composite attachments. She advises that although flutists may find fewer challenges with alternatives than with traditional braces, their use will still require an adjustment period.

Her product doesn't use bonded brackets as traditional braces do, but it often requires composite attachments that protrude. These attachments can cause lip and cheek

soreness. Orthodontic wax can help, especially on the lower teeth where the flute lip plate presses.

To avoid increased treatment time and compromised results, the aligners are worn as much as possible, removing them as necessary to eat or brush teeth. "This means that, ideally, the aligners are worn even when practicing and performing," Vining says. "Susan Fain's suggested techniques for playing with braces will be helpful."

For healthiest results, aligner treatments should be handled by an orthodontic specialist rather than a dentist who is not a specialist, and mail-order services particularly should be avoided.

I myself, as a dual-career orthodontist and flutist, have played with both braces (for 24 months) and Invisalign (for eight months, to correct slight relapses).

*Susan Fain has a BA in flute performance, an MM in flute performance and musicology, and a DMA. She is adjunct professor at Cameron University in Lawton, Texas, and Oklahoma City Community College. [sdfain1@charter.net](mailto:sdfain1@charter.net). Melissa Vining is a teacher and founder of [Mind Body Music Academy](#) in Boston. **Chip Shelton** is an orthodontist (retired), flutist, and multi-instrumentalist in New York. His 11th jazz album released in June, and his January principles-based self-help book *Excel in 2 Careers... Plan Be Your Dream* is featured on Amazon Books.*



Susan Fain



Melissa Vining