

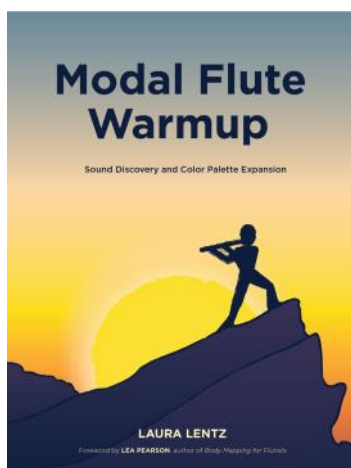
Book Review:

Modal Flute Warmup by Laura Lentz

By Erika Marcucci

Why is it, as flute players, there is an unspoken stigma against playing modes and improvisation? No one ever said that we couldn't do these things, and yet many of us find ourselves shying away from incorporating modes and even being hesitant or afraid to try to improvise. If other woodwinds can do it, then why can't we? Fighting this stigma is precisely what Laura Lentz has done in her new book, *Modal Flute Warmup* (released December 2023). Inspired by Sam Baron and his exercise, "Each Motif One Fast Puff of Air," Laura has created a safe space in her book that allows one to practice freely, happily, and comfortably, all while using modes as the driving force for personal development and discovery. Her careful consideration of these modes and their characteristics gives us the tools we need in order to cultivate our own creativity and musicianship through passion, expression, and improvisation.

Chapter 1: Start to Discover. Within this chapter, we are invited to look deep within ourselves and our playing in order to help discover our own sound. Laura has included nine sections for the reader to explore in order to hear, feel, and notice what one is doing on the flute as they create sound.



One of the most influential parts of this chapter is the Exploration and Discovery box that can be found at the end of each section. These offer prompts for the reader to ponder as they prepare themselves for playing, one of which is an action (exploration) while the other is your response (discovery). The performer must actively engage their mind in what they are trying to accomplish in order to notice what many times may be overlooked. A wonderful example is in the section on breathing where we are asked to play a single low G and repeat using different kinds of inhales (through the mouth, nose, or sip breaths). Through this process, Laura incorporates questions to consider from *The Alexander Technique for Musicians* such as, "Is there movement in my ribs?" or "Is my back responding to my breathing?". When we play the flute, we all know the obvious parts of our body that assist with proper breathing technique, however the parts that surround the lungs and diaphragm are often overlooked. This chapter helps us to be more mindful of everything that needs to be connected in order to continue the growth and development of our flute playing which, in my opinion, will also help us to change our mindset with regard to modes and preparing for improvisation.

Chapter 2: 6-Part Modal Warmup. Laura describes this chapter as having "the warmup that gives opportunities for further sound discovery as well as color palette expansion." She goes on to give a brief explanation of each mode and how it would be played, and also states that each mode has its own character, or color or emotion. A chart of the Suggested Color Spectrum of Modes is included to offer more opportunities for exploration and interpretation, and encourages the flutist to inquire about any images, feelings, or moods that may have been provoked by their practice. On the podcast *PorterFlute Pod*, hosted by Amy Porter, Laura states that, when we play scales, we're given an opportunity to think about many different aspects of our playing and we are provided with so much information that can benefit our development. One of her main focuses when writing this book was the idea of

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discovery, and that when we are practicing and using materials that invite the sense of discovery we can take an active role as learners. This is evident as you work through each section of the warm up, incorporating the use of whistle tones, harmonics, breathing, and the quality of air and sound in technical patterns rather than “fast fingers”. Amy Porter describes *Modal Flute Warmup* as being a three pronged doorway to other types of music, improvisation, and extreme discipline.

Through this book, it has become clear and easily accessible for any flutist to study modes more closely, creating a new experience that differs from our standard major and minor scales. This is particularly present in the fifth part of the chapter entitled *Modal Noodles*, where the flutist has the opportunity to experience the same modal color in a melody rather than just a scalar exercise. One of the most beneficial tools in this section is the improvisation section at the end of each “noodle”. We are given a starting point to create a melody within a particular mode and open measures to write down ideas should that be helpful. For those of us who have never had an opportunity to improvise and would typically not feel comfortable, this is an incredibly mindful addition that creates a space for ideas to be possible and accepted. Not everyone learns in the same way, so memorization of a particular melodic idea can be very challenging for some and may even deter people from trying again simply due to frustration. This aspect of the book, in my opinion, was one of the most helpful stepping stones for breaching the uncertain world of improvisation because our ideas can be safely secured on the page and edited any time. On the podcast, Laura stated that “improvising does not mean Jazz. Improvising just means creating your own music at the moment using a mode. Put on a drone of a low D and just have fun.” She expressed that she wrote these “noodles” because she was curious about play-

ing melodies where she could explore all of the things that modes have to offer. We get to experience new patterns, different finger combinations, new colors and emotions. They take us out of the box of tonal harmony and allow us to open our ears and mind to new musical possibilities.

As I stated in the first sentence, there tends to be a stigma with flute players when it comes to modes and improvisation and I have not been immune to this feeling. Because I did not grow up as a Jazz musician, and these techniques were almost always associated with that genre, I never felt comfortable or capable of learning how to do them. On the *PorterFlute Pod* podcast, Laura said something that really resonated with me and has influenced my practice since using her book, and it’s something that I would like to share with all of you in this review. “Don’t be afraid to take the inspiration that’s grabbing you and run with it.” *Modal Flute Warmup* is not simply a flute technique regimen that encourages proper skill building. It encourages confidence. I have recently been using Part 2: Modal Harmonics with one of my students and there have been major breakthroughs with the way he understands the flute embouchure and has begun processing the kind of air that is required when playing flute. In my own practice, I have noticed a tremendous difference in the way I analyze what I’m playing and how I am playing it. I am more mindful of changes in my embouchure and changes in my breathing as I work through the Modal Patterns and Noodles. I wholeheartedly recommend this book and encourage you to incorporate it into your practice. You will notice immediately the doors that are opened even from reading the first page.

Click the image to listen to the full podcast of Laura Lentz and Amy Porter

