

## 9 Ways to Elevate Your Fue Playing

Fue is the broad Japanese word for flute, but this label is commonly used to refer to the shinobue (horizontal flutes made from the shino bamboo). In general, there are two main categories under which shinobue are sold: **1. koten joushi** (also called hayashi bue or matsuri bue) are used in Japanese traditional and folk music, where the finger holes are uniform in size; **2. uta you** (or uta bue) are tuned to the Western scale and the finger holes vary in size to accommodate this tuning. The number on the plugged end of the instrument designates the key – the higher the number, the higher the pitch and shorter the length – and each numerical increase raises the key by one half-step. For example, the number 6 fue is in B-flat major, while the number 7 is in B major and the number 5 is in A major.

With its high-pitched projection and range of possible timbres, the shinobue is a natural partner to taiko and can substantially add life and variety to taiko and other ensembles. Learning how to play fue will boost a taiko player's musicianship because this new perspective provides better melodic awareness and listening skill. Here are 9 ways to help elevate your fue playing:

**1. Own a quality instrument** – there is no substitute for learning on a proper instrument. While plastic or cheap bamboo fue are better than nothing, decent ones can be purchased for slightly over \$100 and very good ones start at around \$200. Asking established fue players for recommendations is the best way to start researching.

**2. Long tones** – practicing long tones is crucial in developing good tone, breath control, and embouchure refinement. It's an integral part of a daily warm-up routine.

**3. Octaves** – work on octave jumps without changing the fingering. To start, hold the fue from below (so that the holes are all open, the '7' fingering) and alternate between the low and high octave.

**4. Fingering** – hold the fue in a relaxed and comfortable position so that all of the fingers can move freely. If air is leaking from any of the holes, change the hand position rather than gripping tighter to close the leak.

**5. Metronome** – using a metronome is important for several reasons. In practicing octaves, striving to make the change accurately with the metronome will make a big difference in embouchure control. Fingerings create most of the rhythm on the fue, so working to move the fingers precisely with the metronome will tremendously improve rhythmic accuracy. The metronome can also help measure progress of breath capacity and consistency.

**6. Tuner** – training with a tuner is the only way to get an accurate assessment of your intonation. Playing in tune is especially important when playing with other pitched instruments.

**7. Mirror** – practicing in front of a mirror will help make visual corrections so that correct positioning and embouchure formation can be internalized. Similar benefits can be achieved by videotaping yourself.

**8. Music from the source** – studying folk melodies, festival music, and the many traditional forms of Japan is invaluable in providing context and helps you understand the aesthetic roots of the fue. Traveling to Japan, listening to recordings, or watching videos of noh, kabuki, gagaku, minyo, nagauta, omatsuri, obon, and other traditional music will deepen your appreciation of the instrument and enhance your musical approach, regardless of style.

**9. Study with a good teacher** – this is the fastest, most effective way to improve as a musician. Current technology makes online instruction accessible all around the world, whether it's pre-recorded video lessons or real-time private lessons through video conferencing applications.

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