

# 'OHE HANO IHU

## The Hawaiian Bamboo Nose Flute

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The *'ohe hano ihu* (pronounced "oh-hay hah-no ee-hoo), often called *hano* for short, is an ancient Hawaiian musical instrument strongly associated with the spirit of *aloha* for which the islands are so famous.

*'Ohe* means "bamboo", *hano* means "to glorify" and "to breathe strongly", as well as "a nose flute", and *ihu* means "nose." In ancient times the *hano* was used to woo a lover, partly because of its sweet sound, partly because of the meaning of the word *hano*, and partly because the manner of playing was a reminder of the Hawaiian style of kissing. The Hawaiian kiss, called *honi*, was actually a touching of noses side to side in order to share the life force or breath of the other. Because of the association with *aloha*, the flute was also used to accompany certain chants and used for the purpose of blessing an area or an event.

As the name implies, the nose flute is played with the nose and not with the mouth. In a nose flute the blowhole is set back almost to the edge of the flute for easier access to the nose. The most common way to play it is to hold the flute in the left hand with the thumb underneath and the first three fingers on or near the three holes in the top center. The end of the flute with the blowhole is held lightly against the upper lip with the left nostril *near* (not right on top of) the blowhole. The right hand supports the close end of the flute while the right forefinger gently holds the right nostril shut.

The next step is to breathe gently out of your left nostril so that you get a sound out of the flute. Because each flute is handmade and unique, you may have to adjust the position of the flute in order to get a clear tone. You may try rolling the flute slightly from side to side, moving it up or down, or moving it from side to side. The tone comes from your breath moving across the hole, not directly into it.

Some flutes will sound very clear and others will sound whispery, depending on the type of bamboo and its particular configuration. A well-made flute, however, will produce a sound quite easily. Half-tones can be achieved by covering half a tonehole with your finger. With many flutes you can get a falling tone effect by gradually reducing your breath at the end of a note. If you blow too hard you will get a rather unpleasant howl instead of a sweet, soft note of love.