

# *Fujarôčka, fujara*



## *Fujara manual – basic playing handbook*



**Výroba fujár a pastierskych píšťal**



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## **Introduction**

In this manual, I'd like to briefly introduce this unique instrument and try to show you the basics of playing, while offering some helpful advice on how to take care of your "fujara" [fooyara] or shepherd's overtone flute. It is aimed primarily at beginners, though more advanced fujara-players might find it useful, too.

## **Description of the fujara**

The "fujara", or sheperds' overtone flute, is a unique Slovak folk wind instrument. It is lovingly called queen among folk instruments, not only in Slovakia. It is made mostly from wood of the common elder, or *Sambucus negra*. This hardy wood type has excellent musical resonancy. It is also filled with a soft resin, making drilling it easier. The fujara evolved from a three-hole bass flute that had been used in smaller form since the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century. Fujaras are made in different sizes, ranging from 85 cm to 172 cm, but they can sometimes be both smaller and larger. The tuning of a fujara depends on its size and the circumference of its drill hole, but it is generally so that smaller instruments are tuned higher, and larger instruments are tuned to a lower register. The fujara consists of two main parts – the main flute airpipe and smaller airpipe. They are connected by a leather belt or "švihel". There are 3 openings in the bottom part of the main flute airpipe. To enable a player to reach these bottom holes while blowing the air into the top of the instrument, the smaller airpipe was added. The instrument's body is usually slightly curved, which corresponds to the wood's natural growth. Any ornaments or designs on the surface of the body draw from the rich tradition of folk motifs, or are influenced by the fantasy of the producer himself. See the attached picture for a detailed description of the parts of a fujara.

## **Fujara manufacturer**

My name is Jozef Mikulášek, I was born in 1969 in Hlohovec. Since I was a child I have had an affinity for nature and all things related – mainly wood. I enjoyed making different things out of it, whether it be for household use like shelves or spoons, or just for leisure like small figures or keychains. My first encounter with a fujara was during a visit to a "salaš" or traditional sheep farm near Banská Bystrica when I was a student. The "bača" (sheperd) was very friendly and talkative. We sat around and he told us various stories, how to tend to sheep, on making cheese, and the like. And, emboldened by the liquor we had brought him, he decided to play for us on his old, smoky fujara. As I sat there in the "koliba" near the door, the hazy draft blowing in my direction, my eyes began to water to the point of tears. The old bača thought his playing moved had me so, and so he good-heartedly offered me his instrument to try it for myself. And I did. As soon as I blew my first note, I knew I had fallen in love with the fujara for the rest of my life. Its strong tone and soft rumbling vibrations in the fingers enchanted me so much that I wanted a fujara of my own. However, as I was a student and couldn't afford such a costly instrument, I took to making it on my own. It took me a very long time to gather the necessary materials and some basic information on the production of fujaras. In the meantime, I had made a family as well, so there was less time for leisure anyway – so I made my first fujara in 1998. It was small, yet had a surprisingly good tone – surely a coincidence. But this initial success inspired me to make more fujaras – and larger ones too. However, their production was full of obstacles for me. Hlohovec and its environs are not exactly a region typical for this instrument, and I had no one to go to for advice. I learned from my own successes and mistakes, but looking back, I think this hard road might have been one of the reasons behind my love of the instrument and my respect for traditional working methods. As time passed, I had the opportunity to meet many well-known fujara-manufacturers or instrumentalists that I had until then known only from the radio or from their records. They were usually somewhat older than me, yet they accepted me wholeheartedly amongst themselves. In 2000, excellent fujara player Ľubo Janec, fujara

player and manufacturer Janko Šulík, and I founded a fujara trio in Hlohovec. We appear regularly at various folk festivals. In 2002, I became a member of the association of slovak fujara players and manufacturers, founded in Korytarky near Detva. We meet annually to share experiences, play and sing – every such meeting is very cordial indeed.

At present, I spend most of my free time with fujaras, and apart from folklore festivals I participate in many traditional craft markets, especially around western Slovakia. I present my handiwork, demonstrate the making of fujaras and flutes, and I try to teach people how to play these instruments. My son Marek, born in 1990, often accompanies me to these markets to show his work with traditional wire crafts. His first expositions from tarnished copper wire were displayed when he was 14. You can find out more about his work from the next pages.

To conclude, I would like to end on this thought. There are many things that one cannot do without the help of others. In my journey towards the making of a fujara, I met many people who helped me kindly, be it with good advice, experience, technical solutions, recognition, or even well-meaning criticism. A person needs all of these to successfully improve. I cannot possibly begin to name all those who helped me, but I may well hope that after reading this text, they will find themselves in it and I would like to use this opportunity to thank them most sincerely.

### **Playing the fujara**

It is not very difficult to play a fujara. For most people, it is a question of overcoming their respect and distance from the instrument, and trying it out for themselves. If you can do this, and if you are willing to listen to some basic instructions on how to hold the instrument, you are halfway to becoming a successful player. To play, you don't need to apply any pressure on the mouthpiece (cencúl), and you don't even have to have a large lung capacity, as some may think. You have to acquire a "feel" for the pressure of the breath that you blow into your fujara. Stronger blowing means higher tones, and weaker blowing gives you lower tones, but we will get to this soon. To get to know your instrument better, see the description of the fujara and its parts. .

**HOW TO HOLD YOUR FUJARA** – A smaller fujara may be held as you would hold a pipe or recorder flute. Cover the upper hole with the middle finger of one hand. With the index and ring fingers of your other hand, cover the middle and bottom holes, respectively. Larger fujaras should be held in such a way that their weight is supported entirely by the thumb and index finger of your stronger hand. In effect, you are holding the entire fujara between just these two fingers. Cover the upper hole with the middle finger of this same hand. Then use your other hand to cover the middle and bottom holes with your thumb and ring finger, respectively. Your arms should be slightly bent at the elbows so that you may reach the mouthpiece without arching your back. Support your "stronger" arm by holding it alongside your body – you may hold the fujara close to your body too. This whole position may seem awkward at first, but it is merely a question of habit. Be sure to cover all holes completely. Check this by playing in front of a large mirror. I think you have easily mastered this step, and we can go on to other details. For your illustration, a picture of how to hold a large fujara is included.

**OVERTONE BLOW** – It is easiest for most people to learn what is most typical for a fujara – the overtone blow. To explain how to play it, I use two different analogies. While blowing air into your fujara, you will rhythmically interrupt the air flow by knocking your tongue on your front teeth, as if you were trying to say...tu, tu, tu, tu, tu, tu... Of course, you don't need to use your voice, because that is what the fujara is now doing for you. Start with a strong pressure blow, and continue on with consecutively decreasing pressure intensity with every new ...tu... . This was my first analogy. If it may be too technical for you, I have another which I often use at crafts markets when demonstrating how to play to bystanders. This analogy may be a little vulgar, but as they say, it is for the greater good. Imagine that you're eating something sweet, and suddenly the tip of your tongue starts itching like crazy. As if

you had just bitten into a red pepper in the middle of a sweet cake. I believe that the first reaction would be to turn aside and spit out the food with a strong, rhythmic... tu, tu, tu, tu.... The most important part is the way you spit out the food – in fact, it is the same ...tu, tu, tu, tu... which you should blow into a fujara to create the overtone blow sound. Naturally, you must do it dryly, without spitting. If you try this with your fujara, I think you will be successful with your first overtone blow. All that remains is to practice its intensity, so that you may use the whole sound spectrum of your fujara and a regular cadency of the descending tones. If you can manage this, congratulations!

MELODY – Now you can try to play a simple melody with basic tones, called aliquot tones. They are played with all three holes covered. Please note again that the fujara sounds with a different tone when different strengths of blowing are applied to it. By alternating strong and weak blowing, you can create a simple melody. If you blow harder, you will get a higher tone, and if you blow even harder, the tone will be even higher. This works the other way around to – if you blow a weaker stream of air, the sound is deeper. Try to practice playing different tones, up and down. However, don't try to just gradually increase your blowing pressure into a different tone – you must practice playing the desired tones straight away; that is, by estimating the required pressure intensity, which basically means starting each tone with our well-known...tu... . If you blow air at a constant intensity, the tone will stay the same. Try to resist the temptation to go off unfocused in playing a known melody right at the start. First you should get a feel for playing the different tones a fujara can make and estimating the right blow for them. Even if you improvise with this practice, you will soon see that the seemingly random melody you have played is interesting and beautiful too (and listeners will think you meant to play it!). It is ideal if you know a simple fujara song and play along by ear, trying to copy its simple melody. A good example would be the common fujara song “Ej horou, horou, pod' Janík domov“ (Oh, Come Home Through the Mountain, Janik). In its simplified form, it can be played even with only the basic aliquot tones with all three holes covered just by overblowing.

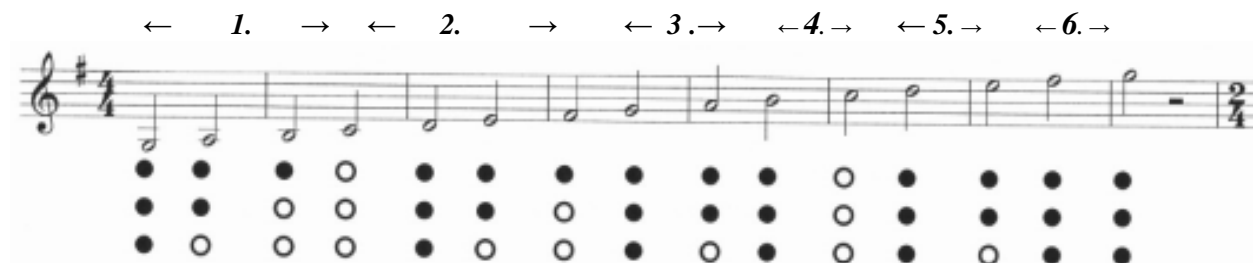
VIBRATO – If you have advanced so far as to play a simple melody, you can try to add vibrato to your extended tones in it. The most common vibrato is done by rhythmically covering and uncovering the top hole. This will compliment your melody – but be sure to use the vibrato only on prolonged tones in your playing. You cannot play a vibrato and simultaneously change tones with your blowing. It is important not to rush. First cover all the holes and blow a tone. Prolong it with a steady flow of air to keep it constant, and do a vibrato on the top hole. If you want to move on to another tone, first end your vibrato, cover the hole, and change your blowing pressure to play a different tone. This is the easiest way to play a simple melody on the fujara using the vibrato. If you master this, together with the overtone blow, I'm certain that you will enjoy the fujara very much.

Maybe these instructions will seem a little complicated to you the first time you read them. But if you take the time to review them again and try out each step for yourself, I think it will not take long for you to start playing and having fun with your instrument.

My main focus was on the basic aliquot tones that sound with all three holes covered. But the fujara's three holes offer a far greater combination of tones to play – see the attached fingering illustration at the end of this text. You must be sure to work with the strengths of your blowing to suit the tones you wish to play. The first “breath level” is only so soft as to dampen a mirror with condensation. Subsequent levels are gradually stronger. Also, remember that for aliquot tones, all three holes need to be covered, and each tone should be “set” with a successive ...tu... . A description of more complex fujara melodies and trills would only be confusing and superfluous. My aim was to introduce you to the fujara, basic playing skills, the overtone blow and vibrato, and to help you play a simple melody. The best way to advance is to talk to a more experienced player. However, I know from my own experience that once players become enchanted by the instrument and take the time to learn the basics, they advance fairly quickly by themselves! I wish you all the best and I hope that you too may help spread our folk traditions of beautiful instrumental music.

Tabulature of tones for a fujara tuned in “G”

*Breath level:*



### **Fujara maintenance.**

Keeping a fujara functional isn't difficult or time-consuming. Most people do so automatically. A fujara is made of wood, so our treatment of it should reflect this fact. You don't need to handle a fujara extra carefully, but neither should you knock it about too much. Fujaras are beautiful also thanks to their ornamental decoration, and as such they are often displayed on walls. Here, it is best to have the fujara hang on a small hook in the shape of an L under the leather švihel' belt that connects the main and smaller airpipes. After playing for some time, it is good to remove the cork stopper at the bottom of the smaller airpipe to let out condensed moisture from your breath. The mouthpiece should also be removed, and inserted only when playing – though gently, as it will in itself expand thanks to moisture and heat when blowing into your fujara. Fujaras should not be lengthily exposed to direct sunlight or extreme moisture. Long-term moisture exposure can make the over-saturated wood crack! Also, extremely dry air can “shrivel up” the wood. To protect a fujara from these adverse conditions, it is impregnated with flax oil (linseed oil). With regular playing, a fujara is kept in an optimal state of balance. But not all instruments are played regularly, and I dare to say that only a small percentage of all those manufactured are so used. Someone plays a fujara only rarely, and some people have it as a decoration on the wall. These fujaras don't come into contact with the moist air we blow into it, and may dry up as a result. They become musically redundant, so to speak. In such cases, it helps to oil the fujara a bit. It is best to use cold pressed oil. Sometimes it is enough to sprinkle a few drops into the parts of the fujara that make the tone, that is, into the edge and the slit. This means the inclined hollowed-out plane in the upper part of a fujara, and the slit directly opposite it. After about 5 minutes, use a stronger-than-normal overblow to blow out any remaining oil. The instrument comes alive again. It is important to blow out the oil so that it will not oxidise in the slit and create a thick layer that may block the slit entirely, causing the fujara to stop playing all of a sudden. This may also happen if the fujara is oiled too often. You can also wipe the outside of a fujara with oil to give it a nice shine and to liven up the decoration. Some drops of oil can also be sprinkled into the opening where one blows air into the instrument. As that is where breath moisture is most concentrated. Sometimes, a fujara may just stop playing of its own accord. Don't worry – in most cases, it's only because the slit has been blocked with something, a small object that you may have blown into the fujara, or some residue of wood filing in the smaller airpipe. I have also seen a fujara the slit of which was occupied by a small spider that made its home there for the winter! This may happen if fujaras are used infrequently, or they are displayed somewhere outside on a terrace or the like. I think the linseed oil in fujaras attracts them. To solve the problem, you should remove the leather stopper at the top of your fujara, and clean out the slit with a piece of hard paper (a business card will do). This should remedy most problems; however, if this still doesn't help, you should contact a specialist – a manufacturer. Sometimes, the leather belt connecting the two airpipes may become loose. If it is only a little loose, it helps to moisten it with a wet cloth –

this will cause the leather to retract when drying, and the belt is tight again. If it is too loose, it's best to untie the belt and tie it again.

## How to hold a fujara – covering the openings (holes)

