

Note: Have a teacher
set up the reed,
ligature, mouthpiece,
and barrel for the first
lesson

PART I: EMBOUCHURE FORMATION

At the most basic level, the clarinet embouchure can be broken down into 4 simple steps:

Stretch, Set, Close, Blow

STRETCH the lower lip down to achieve a flat, pointed chin. Stretch the lip as if you are going to put chapstick on the lip; there should be little to no movement on the lip. Another popular way to describe the lip is that it acts as a cushion; also saying “A” and “Q” will engage the corner muscles and encourage them to be firm.



Stretched lip, pointed chin – front view



side view



don't let the finger move the lip!

SET the reed on the lower lip, without moving any additional lip inside the mouth. Not sure how much mouthpiece to take in, or where to connect with the lower lip? Place a piece of paper between the reed and the mouthpiece. The point where it stops is where the lower lip should be placed. Draw an imaginary line around to the top of the mouthpiece – that is where the top teeth should set.



Front view



Paper trick

CLOSE the top teeth on the top of the mouthpiece. At this point, there should be good connection with the lower lip on the reed and the top teeth on the mouthpiece.



Front view



Side view

BLOW fast air without puffing cheeks. Remind the student to say “A” and “Q” to encourage the correct facial muscles. A F# concert will sound.

The following photos are common mistakes that young clarinet players make:



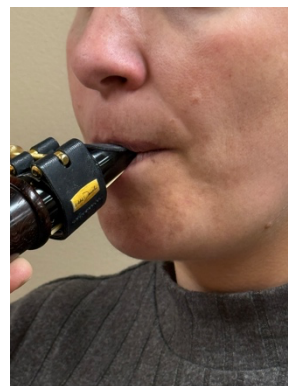
Not taking enough mouthpiece



Bunched chin (likely low tongue position, as well)



Bunched chin, angle too close to body



Angle too far away from body

PART II: MOVING BEYOND STRETCH, SET, CLOSE, BLOW

The Barrel and the Mouthpiece IS the instrument!

Breath

- Inhale nice and relaxed through the mouth, out with a fast “shhhh”. Repeat the process, this time imagine you are exhaling through a small straw. Fast air!

Reeds

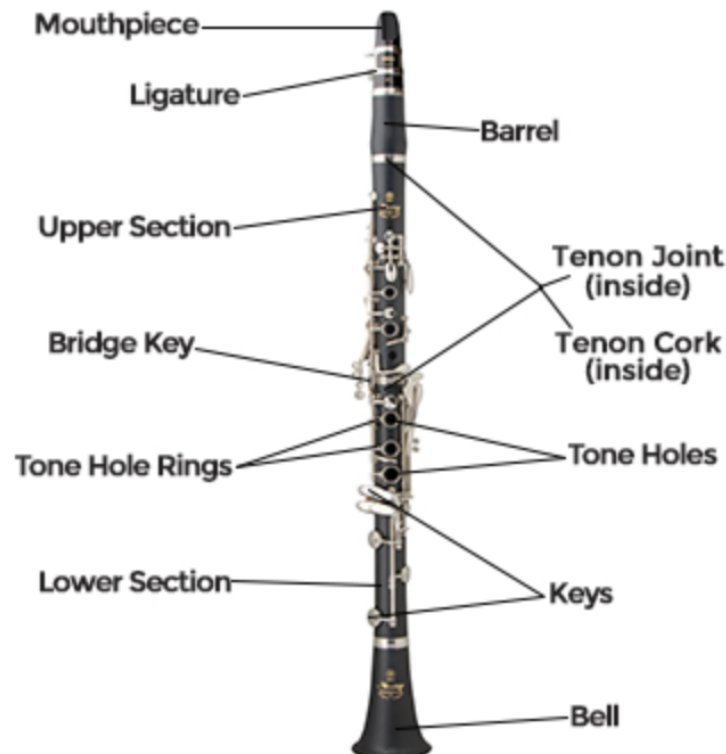
- Start with strength at least a Vandoren 2 ½ blue box or Size 3 Juno / Rico. If the reed is too soft, then students can produce a sound without utilizing a correct embouchure or using enough air pressure.

Review the 4 step process from before

- Stretch the lower lip. The Lower lip is a cushion for your reed.
“Stretch your chin down. This is called a pointed chin”
- Place finger on your cushion lip. The part where your lip meets the skin is where it should go over bottom teeth.
- To find the where the lip meets the reed, try the Paper trick behind reed to show where top teeth go – draw with pencil on the reed.
- Bring mp / barrel to you using your left hand
- Place reed on lower lip, close top teeth on mouthpiece
- Close corners of mouth
- Blow. Resulting sound is an F# concert

REPEAT this process until the student can't get it wrong 😊

Notice – we didn't spend 8 minutes talking about breathing or the diaphragm... yet. Try to model as much as possible and only give one instruction at a time. Be careful of information overload!



PART III: THE FULL CLARINET!

Assembling the instrument

- Place the assembled mp/barrel/reed/ligature somewhere safe.
- Twist lower section into the bell, then twist the upper section into the lower section while being careful not to bump the bridge key. Place the mp/barrel into the instrument.
- The reed in the back should be in line with the thumb rest.

First note – E

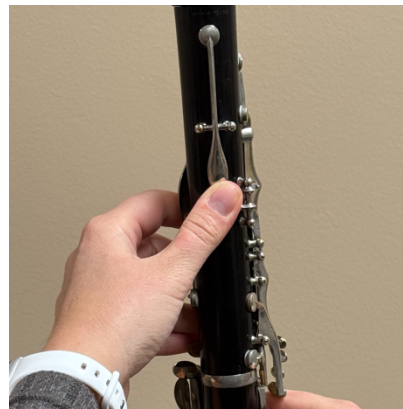
(in order to not overwhelm the student with right hand placement *initially*, have the student pinch the thumb rest when the entire clarinet is put together – Right thumb on top of the thumb rest and right index finger on the bottom of the thumb rest. Now they are only dealing with left hand notes and hand position.)

Place fully assembled clarinet on knee. Place left fingers on an E fingering (T – 1) and right hand thumb / index finger pinching the thumb rest. Remind students that they should be covering the holes with the pads of their fingers.

Left hand position should look like this:



Front view: Curved fingers, open palms, pinky hovering over available pinky keys



Back view: Left thumb should point at a diagonal - 2:00 on a clock is a good way to remember

Bring the clarinet up to you. Set, breathe, play!

After the student spends a bit of time on the left hand notes / hand position, has established a great sound, etc., then you can switch the right hand to have the correct placement. The right thumb should go under the thumb rest at the point where the nail and cuticle meet. The right palm should remain open and in a “C” shape. Pinky should hover over the 4 pinky keys. Right hand position should look like this:



Front view: right hand position



Side view, correct hand position

Tongue Position

The tongue position when playing clarinet should be high in the back, and low in the front. If a student makes an unsupported wobbly sound, my best guess is that they are far too relaxed and their tongue position is too low. Have them hiss like a cat to feel what it's like to have the tongue up in the back. A student can also say "eeee".

PART IV: ARTICULATION BASICS

Articulation is the separation of notes, not the interruption of air. Before you introduce articulation, a student should already be producing a solid embouchure and characteristic tone quality. Here are some common ways to start working on articulation:

1. Instruct student to say "tih" or "duu" without moving their jaw. This is the motion of articulation – the tip of the tongue gently touching the area right below the tip of the reed.
2. Create an F# sound on barrel / mp. Instruct the student to hold the sound for at least 4 seconds, then touch the tip of the tongue on the reed – this will stop the sound being produced. The air pressure should be building, and then instruct the student to remove the tongue and have the same note sound without any bends in pitch. Repeat this process and remind the student to keep thinking "eeee" in the back of the throat (or you can hiss like a cat!)
3. Set embouchure. Start with the tongue on the reed, and then the remove the tongue to help start the sound - this is eventually how notes should be started. From here, keep air steady and continue articulating at various speeds.
4. Morse code exercises: Once a student is feeling comfortable with articulation, try some fast and slow rhythms and make sure the pitch is not bending and the jaw is not moving.

For all of these articulation exercises, students can place their free hand under their jaw to make sure it's not moving.

PART V: STANDARD FINGERING CHART



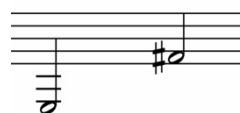
Musical instrument guide

Clarinet fingering chart

	Alternate fingering 		Alternate fingering 		Alternate fingering 												Alternate fingering
							Alternate fingering 						Alternate fingering 				
	Alternate fingering 		Alternate fingering 		Alternate fingering 		Alternate fingering 										

PART VI: COMMON OUT OF TUNE NOTES

There are four main ranges of the clarinet:



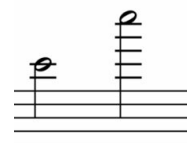
chalumeau



throat tones



clarion



altissimo



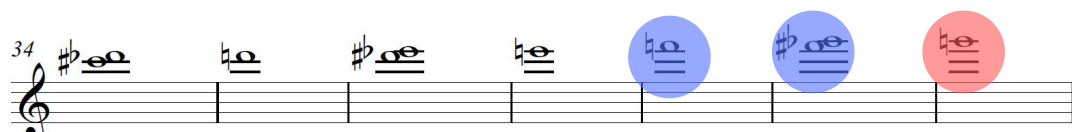
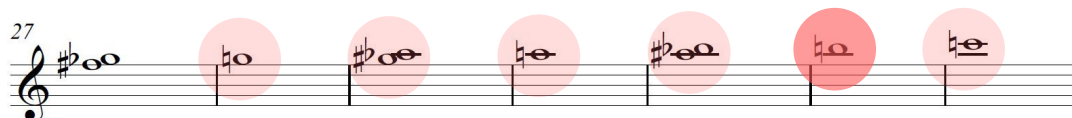
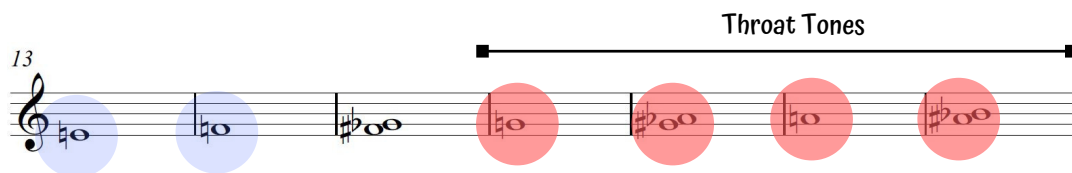
Clarinet Pitch Tendencies

Very Flat

Moderately Flat

Moderately Sharp


Very Sharp



The following images are used with permission from Katy Steklac's ABC Project. It is phenomenal!


Common out of tune Chalumeau notes

These notes are slightly flat:


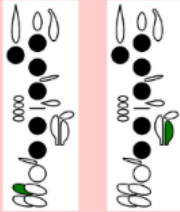


There are no alternate fingerings for these notes. Maintain a firm embouchure, and do not over blow.

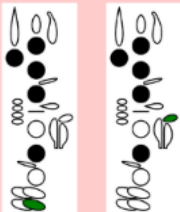
These notes are sharp – try saying more “ah” for a tongue shape, or you can use add some of the pinky keys to vent the note.








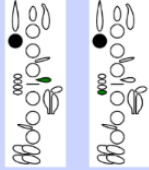
Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR




Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR



These notes are slightly flat – may need to firm up the embouchure a bit, or raise tongue placement.

	<p>Firm embouchure, and arch the tongue OR</p> 
	<p>Firm embouchure, and arch the tongue OR</p> 
	<p>Firm embouchure, and arch the tongue OR</p> 

Throat Tones – these are ALL very sharp! Add your right hand fingers, and try to lower the tongue. You can also add the 3rd finger in your left hand.



These are the throat tones of the clarinet. They all tend to be very sharp, and they are considered bad notes on the clarinet because of their poor tone quality. "Resonance fingerings" can help improve the pitch. This means that adding combinations of fingers not already in use. The most common is to put the first three right hand fingers down while maintaining the standard fingering, but it will depend on your own instrument.

Out of Tune Clarion Notes – all of them are slightly sharp!



No alternate fingering. Tune this note by adjusting the middle joint between the upper and lower joint (by the bridge key). If it is sharp, pull out. If it is flat, push in.



Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR



No alternate fingering. Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue.



Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR





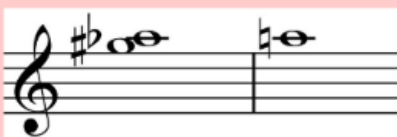
Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR



Note: When adding key shaded in green, leave half of the hole uncovered.



Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR




No alternate fingerings. Relax embouchure,
and drop the tongue.



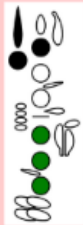
Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue
OR






Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue


OR






Relax embouchure, and drop the tongue

OR





Out of Tune Altissimo Notes. The ones mentioned here tend to be flat. In addition to firming up the embouchure, you can also use an alternate fingering. There are many alternate fingerings for most altissimo notes. <https://www.wfg.woodwind.org/clarinet/>



Firm the embouchure, and arch the tongue


OR





Firm the embouchure, and arch the tongue

OR



Clarinet Peer Checklist

NAME _____

DATE _____

1. Set up
 - ☐ Clarinet is assembled correctly. Reed is in line with thumb rest. Careful attention was paid when putting the top and lower joints together, not to bump the bridge key.
 - ☐ Tip of reed is at the tip of the mouthpiece
2. Left Hand Position
 - ☐ Fingers hovering over the keys
 - ☐ Circle check! (squeeze then check fingers – use pads of fingers)
 - ☐ Rock fingers between G and A (using knuckle)
 - ☐ Thumb pointing at 2:00 when fingers are on keys
 - ☐ Left palm remains open
 - ☐ Pinky hovering over the 4 pinky keys
3. Right Hand Position
 - ☐ Right thumb under thumb rest at point where nail and cuticle meet
 - ☐ Fingers hovering over the keys
 - ☐ Circle check! (squeeze then check fingers – use pads of fingers)
 - ☐ Right palm open
 - ☐ Pinky hovering over the 4 pinky keys
4. Air
 - ☐ Inhale through the mouth, exhale out of mouth as if blowing through a straw
 - ☐ Inhale through the mouth and exhale for at least 10 seconds. Keep air pressure constant!
5. Embouchure (barrel and mouthpiece only)
 - ☐ Flat, stretched chin
 - ☐ Top Teeth on mouthpiece
 - ☐ Lips closed all the way around
 - ☐ Student takes enough mouthpiece
 - ☐ Student play and hold note on barrel / mouthpiece – F#
6. Tone (Embouchure, continued)
 - ☐ Place mouthpiece / barrel on clarinet
 - ☐ Play first line E (T / 1). Strive for steady tone.
 - ☐ Partner – gently tap the barrel – the barrel and mp should not move!
 - ☐ Student takes enough mouthpiece
7. Articulation check #1- barrel / mouthpiece combination
 - ☐ Demonstrate playing a note and holding with a huge sound
 - ☐ Place free hand underneath jaw - Articulate with a “du du du” articulation – air never stops!
 - ☐ Student takes enough mouthpiece in to make sure reed resonates
8. Articulation check off #2
 - ☐ Demonstrate playing a Low C with a huge sound
 - ☐ Air remains steady – teacher demonstrates an articulation rhythm, student plays it back. Partner check for no jaw movement.
 - ☐ Student takes enough mouthpiece in to make sure reed resonate

PART VII: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

These are a few of Danielle's favorite things....

Books / Resources for the Teacher

Klarinette Toccaten, Ray Chapa

Clarinet Gymnastics, Ray Chapa

The Educator's Guide to the Clarinet: A Complete Guide to Teaching, Learning, and Playing the Clarinet, second edition. Thomas Ridenour, 2002

Books for the Student - Beginner level

Rubank Elementary Method

The Progressing Clarinetist, Leon Lester

Books for the Student - Intermediate level

Rubank Intermediate Method

Thirty-Two Etudes for Clarinet, Cyrille Rose

*FYI: Dr. John Walker wrote piano accompaniment music for these etudes!

40 studies for Clarinet, Cyrille Rose

Melodious and Progressive Studies, Books I and II, David Hite

Selected Duets, edited H. Voxman, Volume I and II

Books for the Student - Advanced / college level

Rubank Advanced Method, Volumes I and II

Complete Method for Clarinet, Carl Baermann

416 Progressive Daily Studies for the Clarinet, Fritz Kroepsch (revised Simon Bellison), Books I – IV

Favorite mouthpieces

Vandoren Black Diamond

Vandoren M30 Lyre

Vandoren 5RV Lyre

Danielle plays a handmade Michael Lomax mouthpiece

Favorite ligature

Rovner Dark Ligature

Rovner Versa Ligature

Favorite Reeds

Vandoren! I like the V12 cut, but blue box is just fine, as well.

Plastic reeds: Légère are great and very durable.

Websites that have extremely helpful information!

<https://www.clarinet-now.com/>

Christopher Jones, former West Point Band and US Military Academy clarinetist. Tons of information on embouchure, reeds, set up, scales, etc. Engaging videos, too!

<https://vandoren.fr/en/>

All information you'd ever need about reed selection

Article on [Adjusting Clarinet reeds](#)

<https://clarinet.org/adjusting-reeds-for-the-beginner-to-advanced/>

Information about adjusting (sanding) reeds

<https://clarinet.org/>

International Clarinet Association – many helpful resources

<https://bullseyeintonation.weebly.com/>

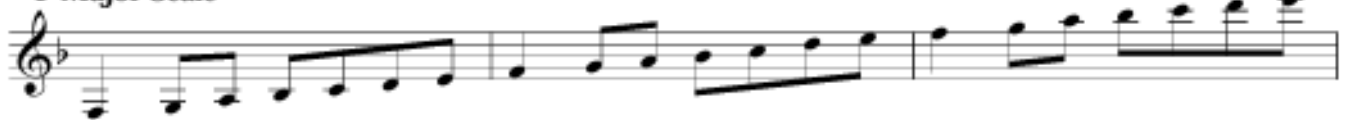
ABC Project by Katy Steklac that has incredible graphics on pitch issues – for all instruments, not just clarinet. Printable worksheets!

Right vs Left Pinky use – Major Scales

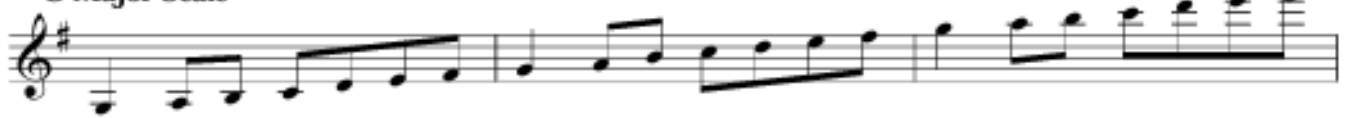
C Major Scale



F Major Scale



G Major Scale



B-flat Major Scale



D Major Scale



E-flat Major Scale



A Major Scale



A-flat Major Scale



E Major Scale**D-flat Major Scale****B Major Scale****G-flat Major Scale****F-sharp Major Scale****C-flat Major Scale****C-sharp Major Scale**

These final pages are used with permission from Ray Chapa, a wonderful clarinet teacher from Texas. This is from his book *Klarinette Toccaten*, published in 2012. He was my clarinet clinician at ABC and he changed the way I teach. These pages will be discussed in greater detail during my clinic.

(CHAPTER I)

“FingeringLessfingerings Chart”

The staff with an F Scale descending functions nicely as a basic fingering chart for the clarinet. The notes of the left and right hand are conveniently separated by the bar line. The visual aid afforded the student is invaluable as the student descends one finger at a time to play the F Scale.



- **Thumb** descends 1, 2, 3 fingers to low c. (Alphabetically Backward)
- Second measure starts R.H. b¹ 1, 2, 3 to *Pinky* low f.
- The bar line divides notes & fingerings of L.H. & R.H.

Thumb & One ... Make a Handle!

The diminutive grip offered by the fingering for 1st-line e, coupled with the thumb rest and a well formed embouchure, is more than adequate for students to initiate technical study. Now that a modicum of stability has been acquired and they're at the post ... *Let the enthusiasm ensue!*

“Doodling”

Ex. 1



- Starting on e: Lift 1st finger.
- Replace 1st finger.
- Add next finger.
- Continue lifting & replacing & adding fingers.
- Doodle on to low f.
- Commit to hole ... ON or OFF (like a *toggle switch*).
- Doodle back!

The first **Toccata** is designed to encourage students to explore the space of the instrument and in so doing gain confidence early on. At first glance, the exercise appears to be quite formidable. Quite the opposite! Starting on e and successively lifting and replacing fingers in their naturally occurring order affords the student two chances at each hole. (**Descending without lifting and replacing the fingers offers but one opportunity and is much harder to accomplish.**)

Students must not hesitate or freeze if the first attempt at adding a finger is *off target* and misses completely. Success is all but guaranteed on the second try. This is because the brain processes information from the failed effort and makes the necessary adjustments.

The doodling process is akin to instructions on the shampoo bottle, “*Lather, Rinse, & Repeat.*” Students should be instructed to, “*Lift, Replace, & Add* the next finger to low f.”

(CHAPTER I)

Students must be admonished to commit to the hole; to avoid the sloth-like motion that the overly cautious among them tend to exhibit. A partial, in-between closure will result in a “warping” of the pitch.

“Accelerated Doodling”

(♩ = 120)

Ex. 2a



- 4 notes

Ex. 2b



- 7 notes

Ex. 2c



- 19 notes

Steps to Initiate Sound on Low F



- Doodle down to low f ... STOP SOUND ... Replay low f.
- SILENTLY doodle down to low f ... Take a breath & Play low f.

“Seals of Silence”

When attempting to play low notes, beginning students often “cluster bomb.” They throw the fingers down all at once and fail to secure each hole completely. The “*Seals of Silence*” are designed to instill a better habit.

- Students instruct themselves to “Seal” each hole individually.
- “Seal” ... as thumb covers.
- “Seal” ... as 1st finger is added.
- “Seal” ... as each finger covers to low f.
- After all the holes are “sealed,” PLAY LOW F!
- Reduce sealing time, but ALWAYS “SEAL.”

(CHAPTER II)

“Half-holing”

The lowest notes of the clarinet from low e to 1st-space *thumb* f will *overblow* a twelfth (octave and a fifth) by pushing the register key. The result will be the notes of the *clarion register* (3rd-line b to “High C”).

A third register is attained by playing 4th-space e and opening the first hole of the L.H. The result will be high c-sharp (a major sixth higher). Continuing chromatically, the same procedure will yield additional notes of the *altissimo register* to *high* g above the staff.

Except for some alternate fingerings, the first hole is open for notes above “High C.” These pitches, however, will *speak* with greater ease if the first finger of the L.H. rolls downward as it exits the hole. The technique is referred to as *half-holing*.

Lifting the finger straight up will produce a “pop” or an occasional squeak. This is due to an inherent design flaw in most clarinets made worse by occasional *embouchural* improprieties. The *annoyance* can be demonstrated by playing low c, pushing the register key, and abruptly lifting the first finger. Swiftly rolling the finger away will eliminate the intrusive sound.

If approaching from off the first hole, covering its bottom half will ensure that the pitches of the third register speak effortlessly. Half-holing also facilitates tonguing in the *altissimo*.

CAUTION: Covering too much of the opening will cause the pitch to be flat and the tone “covered”!

The rapid rolling away of the half-hole technique can be perfected by practicing the following five exercises. Through association with the already familiar notes of the lower registers, the higher notes of the *altissimo* will be perceived as less threatening.

Ex. 12a

- Play low a.
- Push register key to *clarion* e.
- Half-hole to ascend to *altissimo* c#.

Ex. 12b

- Play low b^b.
- Push register key to *clarion* f.
- Half-hole to ascend to *altissimo* d.

Ex. 12c

- Play *fork* low b^b (*low* b^b & *banana* key between 2nd & 3rd ring).
- Push register key to *fork clarion* f#.
- Half-hole to ascend to *fork altissimo* d#.

Ex. 12d

- Play low c.
- Push register key to *clarion* g.
- Half-hole to ascend to *altissimo* e.

Ex. 12e

- Play low d^b.
- Push register key to *clarion* a^b.
- Half-hole to ascend to *altissimo* f.

Except for c-sharp, the preceding notes of the *altissimo* include the **R.H. Pinky** (for fine tuning). Because the thumb rest is essentially a fulcrum, **pushing down too hard on the pinky will create a see-saw effect**. This will result in upward pressure against the top teeth and make the exercises difficult to accomplish. To avoid this, use of the *pinky* is not recommended at this time.

CHAPTER VI

CROSSING THE BREAK

“Right Hand Down ... but when?”

The notion that adding all of the fingers of the right hand to throat tones will facilitate *crossing the break* is often overestimated. Fundamental hole-covering skills acquired by *doodling* will more than prepare students for this task. Overuse of *the right hand down* will at times actually impede technical progress.

Applying the right hand, however, is an excellent way to flatten the pitch of wayward throat tones when necessary. **(Throat tones become increasingly sharp on the clarinet as the volume decreases.)**

The technique must be used with discretion, however. Adding all of the fingers will further *stifle* the already stuffy tone quality of the *throat register*. For this reason, the practice is apropos in a group setting, but less so when playing solo.

Ex. 1



- Play *chalmereau e*.
- Push register key to *clarion b*.
- Keep R.H. Down when going to a.
- Minimize L.H. finger motion to a. (OK to leave L.H. 2nd & 3rd fingers down.)

“Twilight ... in the Zone”

Ex. 2



- *Rolling pinch* of the *thumb & index* enables the break cross of *b^b* to *bⁿ*.
- *Doodling* ensures that R.H. fingers will cover the holes.

This Could Work!

(The following 4 exercises are adapted from the originals by H. Klosé.)

Ex. 3



- *Cross Break* a to b.
- Leave R.H. down from b when retreating to a.

(CHAPTER VI)

Ex. 4



- *Cross Break* a to b WITH C KEY to prepare for c.
- Leave R.H. down from b to a to prepare for b's return.

Ex. 5



- *Cross Break* a to b to c to d.
- Measure 3 – leave R.H. down from c to a to prepare for b.

Ex. 6



- Leaving R.H. down until f# makes it easier.

(CHAPTER VII)

“Seven Notes Ascending Chromatically”

Ex. 5a



- Break it down.
- 3 notes ... low a, b^b, fork b[♯].
- 2 notes ... c, c[♯].
- 2 notes ... d, d[♯].

“Seven Notes Descending Chromatically”

(♩ = 60)

Ex. 5b



“TaknputTaknputTaknput”

- *Side* (e^b).
- Take one off (to d).
- Put two down (to d^b).
- Take one off (to c).
- Put two down (to *fork* b[♯]).
- Take one off (to b^b).
- Put ONE down (to a).

SideUnsidePinkyUnpinkyForkUnfork”

- *Side* (e^b).
- *Unside* (to d).
- *Pinky* (to d^b).
- *Unpinky* (to c).
- *Fork* (to b[♯]).
- *Unfork* (to b^b).
- It's what you do!