Music for All

Clarinet Master Class

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Master Class #1 Embouchure and Tone

What makes up the embouchure?

A. Lip muscles
B. Chin muscles
C. Jaw and teeth

What is the goal of the embouchure?

A. To help make a musical sound
B. In combination with the air and tongue, it is the way to form the clarinet tone.

There are two types of embouchures

A. Clamp-style (biting)
B. Friction-style (snugging)

When we think of these two types of embouchures, we want to be sure that we use the snugging type instead of the biting type. Most clarinetists are "biters." The result of biting is a tone that is brittle, pinched, sharp, shrill, and inflexible. With the snugging embouchure, we have to rely more on the air and the lips to control the sound.

How we form our embouchure and how we use our air all contribute (along with the reed) to the quality of our tone.

What are the characteristics of a good clarinet tone?

A. Focused
B. Warm
C. Clear

These are just a few. Listen to recordings of good players and try to come up with your own descriptors.

The use of the airstream is also important in the development of a good tone. The airstream for a wind player is like the bow for a string player. It must flow constantly. Some things to think about:

A. Take a big breath by inhaling a whispered "HOW"
B. Your air needs to be directed all the way to the lowest part of your abdomen (try to visualize a blown up balloon)
C. Blow fast, cool, concentrated air rather than hot air
D. Use the same quality of air in all dynamic levels

Master Class #2 Practicing

What is practicing?

It is what we do between lessons in order to improve!

What are the ingredients of a good practice session?

A. Have a goal in mind for every practice session
B. Have only one goal in mind at a time for each thing you practice
C. Break your sessions up into small chunks try not to do too much at a time
D. Make sure you have the necessary tools with you: metronome, pencil, tuner, music, etc.
E. Listen carefully to yourself and be honest with yourself!
F. Keep a journal of your progress every day
G. Give yourself time to learn you can't cram for a solo performance like you can cram for a math test!

It's important also to remember that you will progress faster if you practice regularly for shorter periods of time vs. haphazardly for one long session. Aim for 30 to 90 minutes a day (depending on your level) six days a week rather than 2 hours one day a week.

How do you structure your practice sessions?

A. Begin with a good warm-up (15-20 minutes)
    1. Long tones
    2. Scales and arpeggios
B. Etude practice (about 20 minutes)
C. Solo repertoire (30-40 minutes)
D. Other repertoire (band, orchestra, etc).
E. Use different techniques when you practice; i.e. articulate a passage that is slurred or slur a passage that is tongued; use

different rhythms to practice fast passages (more about this later)

F. Above all: Practice Slowly!

1. The slower you practice the better!! This cannot be emphasized enough!
2. For every one time you practice a passage quickly, practice it ten times slowly!

Master Class #3 The Use of the Tongue: Voicing & Articulation

There are two very important ways that we have to use the tongue when playing the clarinet.

A. "Voicing" refers to how we hold our tongue in our mouths as we play

1. Try hissing or saying the word "he" in a whisper
2. Notice that the back of your tongue goes high in your mouth and the sides of the tongue touch the upper teeth
3. We want to try to keep our tongue in this high back position as we blow air through the instrument
4. The result is a tone that is focused, better in tune, and resonant

B. We also use the tongue to produce a beautiful, light, clear articulation

1. We will talk about a method of articulation called "tip-to-tip" tonguing where the tip of the tongue (back about ¼") touches the tip of the reed
2. It is also important to begin with the tongue on the reed every time (there are a few exceptions) you begin a sound
3. We also almost always use a method of tonguing called "stopped staccato" where the air stream is interrupted briefly by placing the tongue back on the reed to stop the sound

Master Class #4 Good Finger Fundamentals & Reed Wrap-up

A. Keep your fingers in a natural hand position

1. Drop your hands to your side and fingers will curve naturally
2. Or pretend you are tossing a ball or holding an orange
3. Correct finger action is CONTROLLED RELAXATION
    a. the fingers lift and relax

b. the weight of the fingers is enough to cover the hole

B. It is also important to have an instrument in proper working order
   1. Too much spring tension will cause the fingers to have to work too hard
   2. The pads must be seated properly so the fingers don't have to work harder to depress the keys

C. The Left Hand
   1. Index finger use a rolling action from E or F-sharp to throat A and G-sharp. Be sure there is not any excess wrist or hand motion
   2. The left thumb covers the thumb hole and the register key and it must be in the proper position to do both without having to adjust the thumb

Reeds

It is important that you play the proper strength reed to match your mouthpiece. If you play on a reed that is too soft, the tone will be thin and you will lack the control necessary to play all dynamic ranges well. You will also be likely to bite and the pitch will go sharp. If the reed is too hard, the response will be poor, you will tire quickly, and the tone will tend to be flat and unfocused.

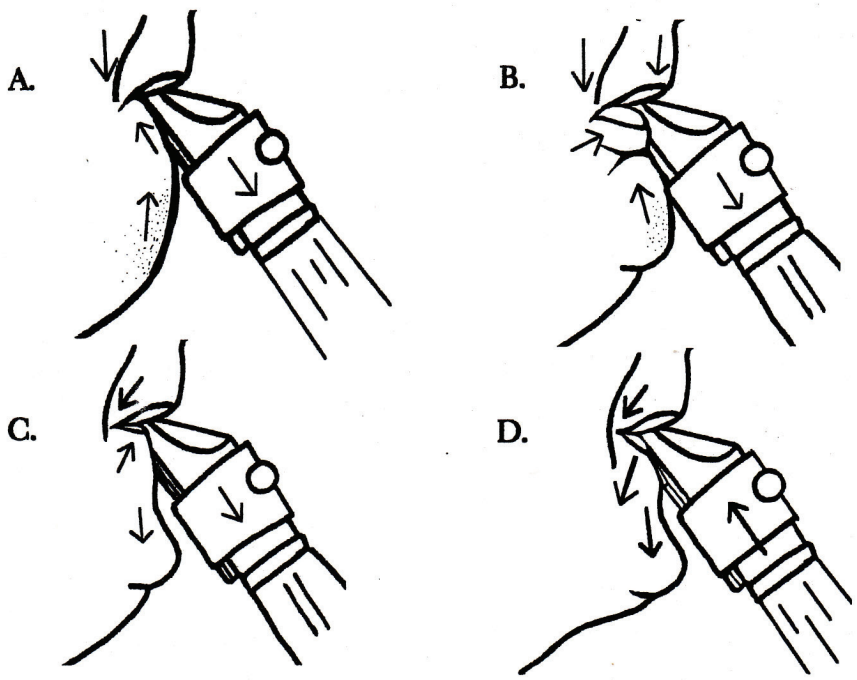
It is also important to have at least 4 reeds in good playing condition. You will want to rotate them rather than to play on the same reed until it either breaks, or is no longer playable. A small storage case is also important to keep your reeds safe (the small cases that reeds come in are not good for storage).

Try to break in your reeds over a period of several days and try not to play reeds straight out of the box. If you play a new reed for too long, it breaks down the fibers very fast and makes their life expectancy shorter. It is best to play them a little bit each day, gradually lengthening the amount of time. The breaking in process takes about a week.

We will discuss an easy method to break in reeds during this class!

Master Class #1

Example 4: Four Commonly Seen Cosmetic Embouchure Formations



Analysis:

Above are four examples of commonly seen embouchure profiles. It is important to note the arrows, since they indicate the direction embouchure energy is being exerted, which both forms the embouchure and determines how the reed can vibrate.

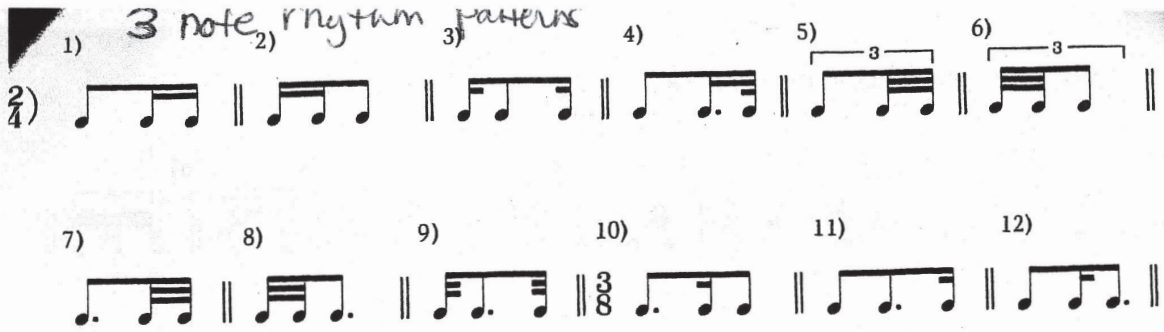
Example A shows the chin bunched with no lower lip visible. This sort of embouchure damps reed vibration to such an extent that the sound is very dull, soft and lacking in resonance. Such damping makes the production of upper clarion and altissimo tones almost impossible.

Example B shows the lower lip bulging as it presses into the reed. High register tones will probably come out, but will sound wild and harsh. Since the bunched chin is also an indication of a low/forward tongue position the upper tones will probably be flat. The commonly unstable tones of the clarinet (throat A, clarion A and high E) will probably have the tendency to crack.

Example C shows the embouchure of an inventive student. He has learned to pull the chin down to satisfy the teacher, but is still biting. The biting causes the pushing of the lower lip into the reed, which can be seen by the subtle (and sometimes "not-so-subtle") bulging of the lower lip.

Example D shows the embouchure functioning and looking correctly.

3 note rhythm patterns



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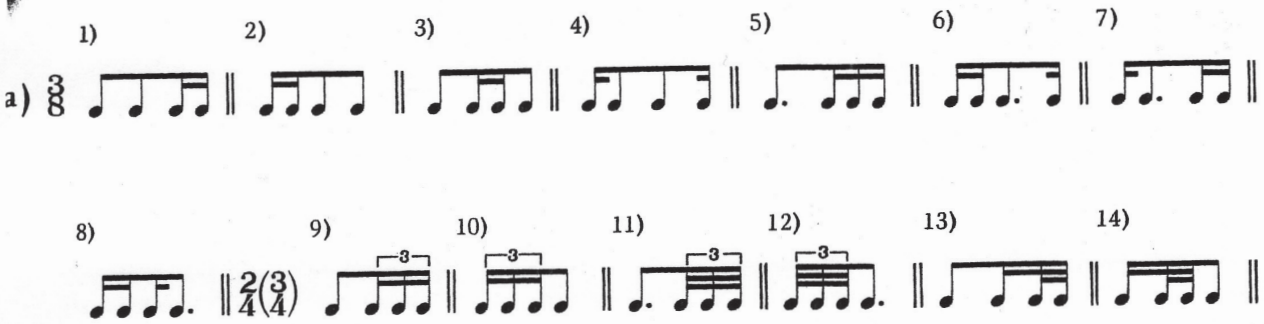
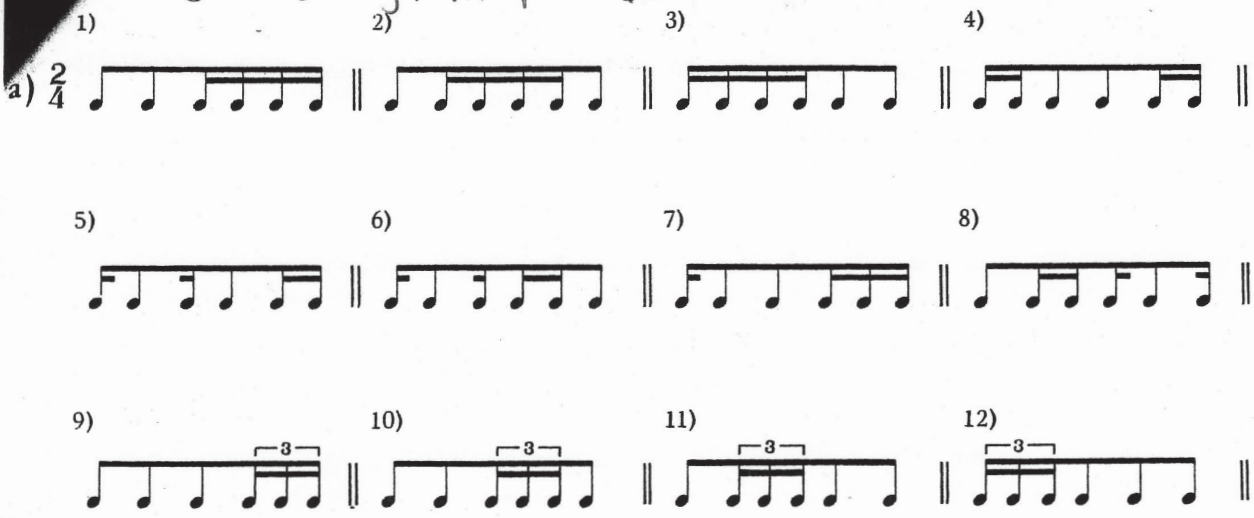
FOUR-NOTE RHYTHM PATTERNS



6 note rhythm patterns



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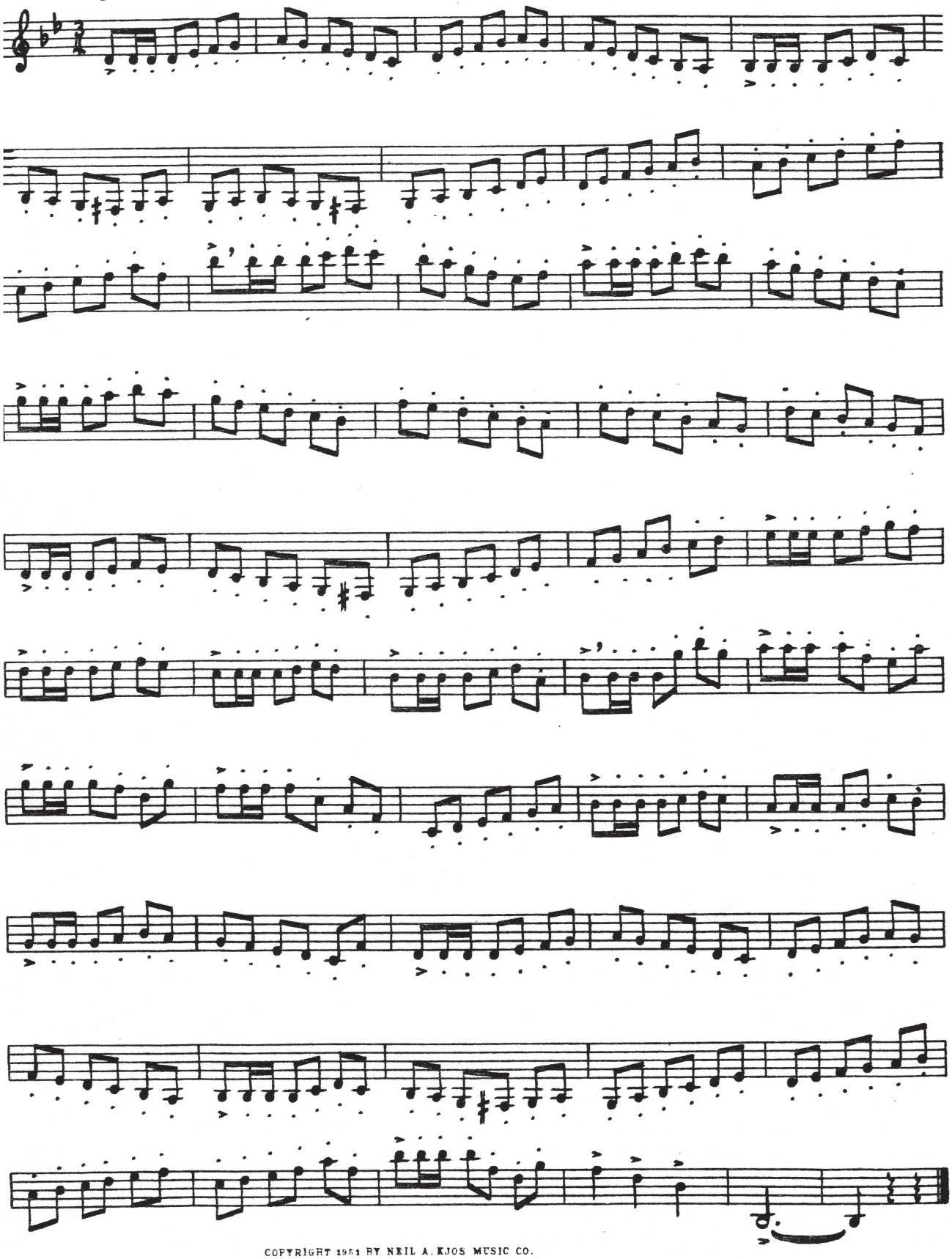
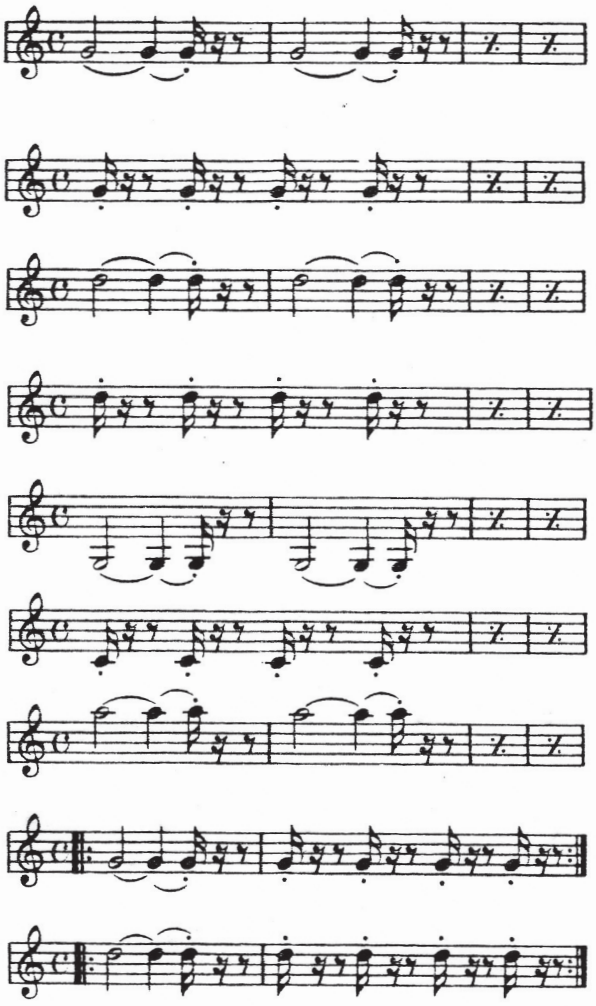
Allegro vivo (♩ =152-184)



Master Class #3

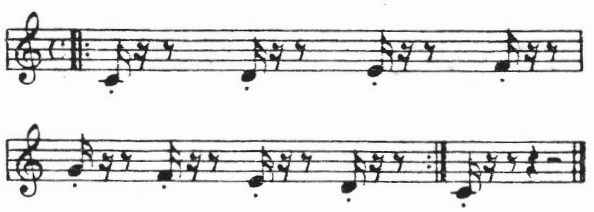
You must feel, in playing these staccato exercises, that the flow of wind, is always behind the tip of your lip in a constant pressure, EVEN when the tongue is preventing the reed from vibrating.

Routine of practice:



Repeat the above exercises for many days and keep on practicing them even after going on with further exercises. This will help you retain the basic principles of the system.

Once you have mastered the short staccato, the next step is the motion of the fingers "*synchronized*" with the motion of the tongue—in other words, the fingers must move in reverse motion of the tongue, thus preparing the next note to be played as quickly as possible after each note is played. For this, play slowly the following easy 5 notes (short staccato).

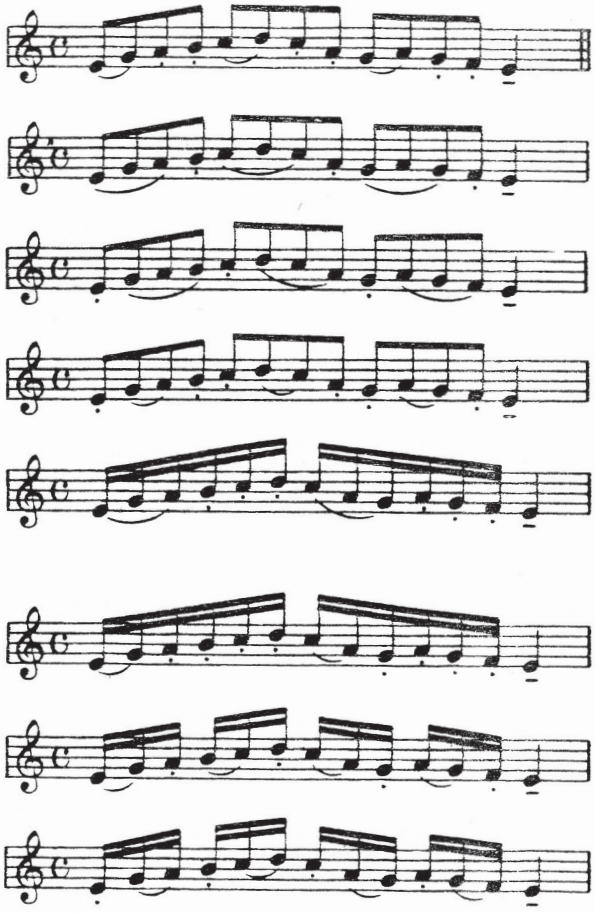


Play C, move quickly to D (do not take breath) Play D, move quickly to E (do not take breath) Play E, move quickly to F and so on.

Remember that the wind pressure never relaxes, as if you played the 5 notes legato.

Move quickly to next note but do not play it until you have to, according to the written music.

The same process is used when playing articulation of 2 notes slurred, 2 notes staccato, 3 notes slurred, 3 staccato or any other combination of articulation.



Daniel Bonade - Clarinetist's Compendium

Master Class #3

CHAPTER **3**

Method of Staccato

This chapter was written at the request of many professionals, clarinet students, and teachers, who realize the great need of definite rules for acquiring a correct way of playing staccato.

During my twenty-five years experience as a teacher, I have employed this system, which I devised myself, without having ever met with a single failure, as long as the students have the patience to follow instructions faithfully and will practice slowly.

All my pupils, many of whom occupy top positions in American Symphony Orchestras, possess a perfect staccato and an impeccable articulation.

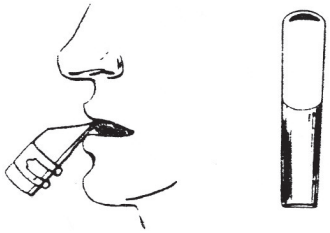
May I add that this system of finger synchronization can be applied to all wind instruments.

I have taught it successfully to flutists, oboeists, French horn and trumpet players. The method will prove invaluable to all wood wind and brass teachers.

Perfect staccato is simple if instructions are carefully followed. Keep in mind that these instructions are based on acquiring a perfect staccato at all speeds. Learn and practice slowly what is required when playing staccato fast. It can be called: SLOW SYNCRO-MOTION STACCATO.

The first requirement in playing staccato correctly is to know how and where to hit the reed with the tongue.

The very tip of the tongue should be used to touch the part of the reed just below the extreme tip thus:



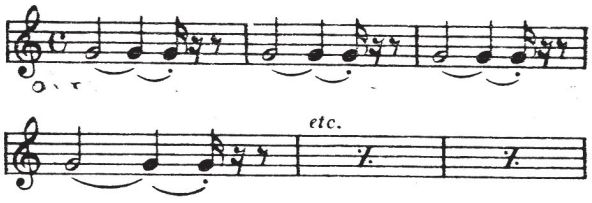
The principle of staccato is not to hit the reed with the tongue but to have the tip of the tongue *ON* the reed and move it backward and forward intermittently at different speeds as needed. Consider staccato as an interruption of legato. This will be discovered in the first exercises.

I repeat, in making staccato, the tongue moves back and forth, with the pressure of the wind always the same, as tho playing legato. The faster the interruption, the faster the staccato.

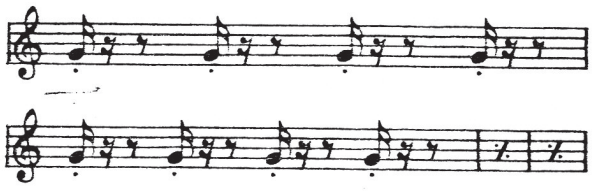
The following procedure will demonstrate fully how the system works:

First exercise:

Blow an open G—Hold it and then suddenly stop the tone by putting the tongue on the reed. Keep constant pressure of wind, although no sound comes out of the instrument. Then take your tongue *OFF* the reed. This will start tone again. Repeat same procedure several times (take breath when necessary) and continue until the tongue moves regularly.

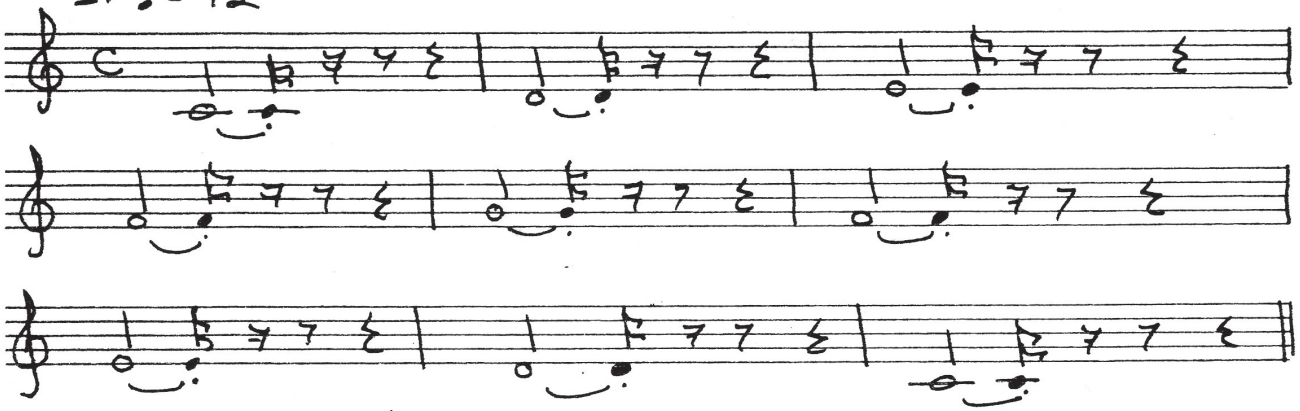


After you have mastered this exercise proceed by trying the short staccato, using the same principle. *Do not forget that in the short staccato, the tongue is always on the reed* and goes "on and off" quickly for each staccato.



Method of Staccato Routine

1. ♩. = 72



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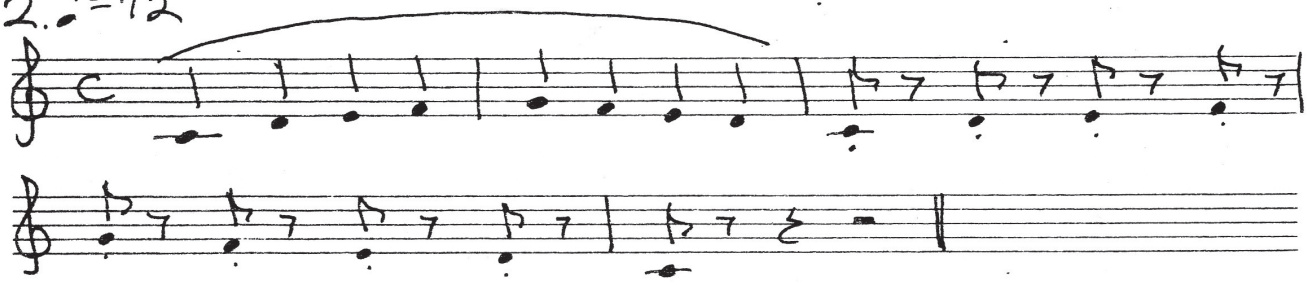
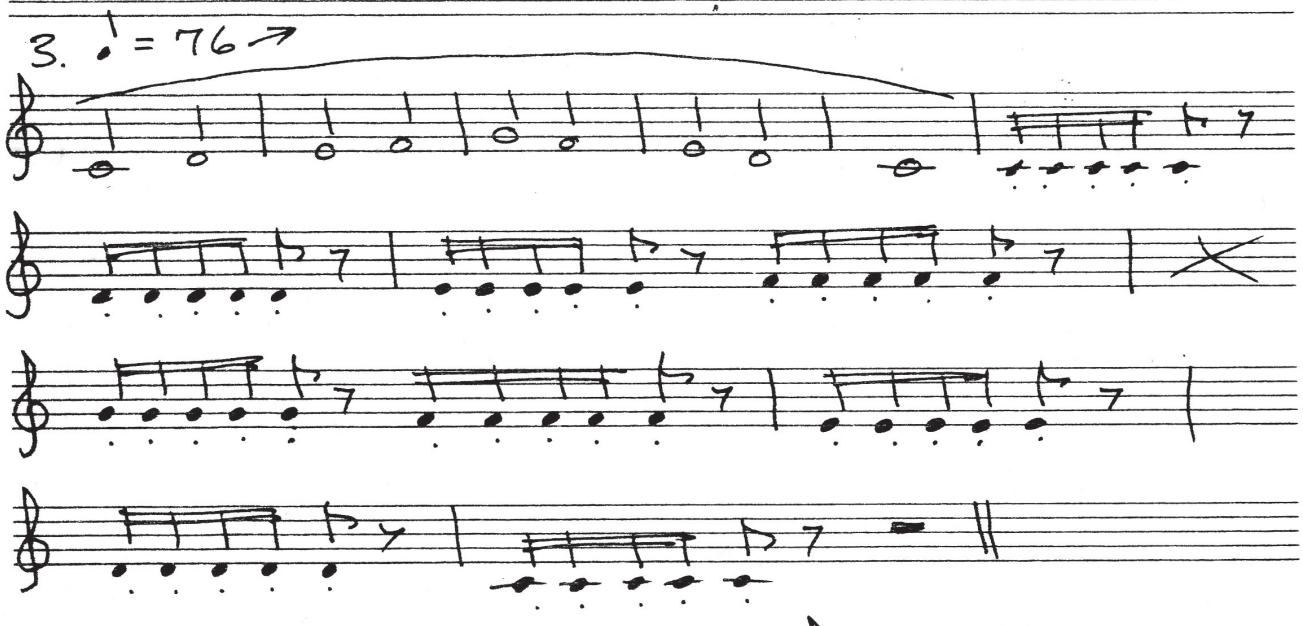
2. ♩. = 72

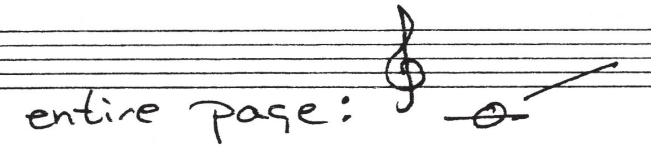


Repeat 2x as fast; 3x as fast

3. ♩. = 76 →



Repeat entire page:



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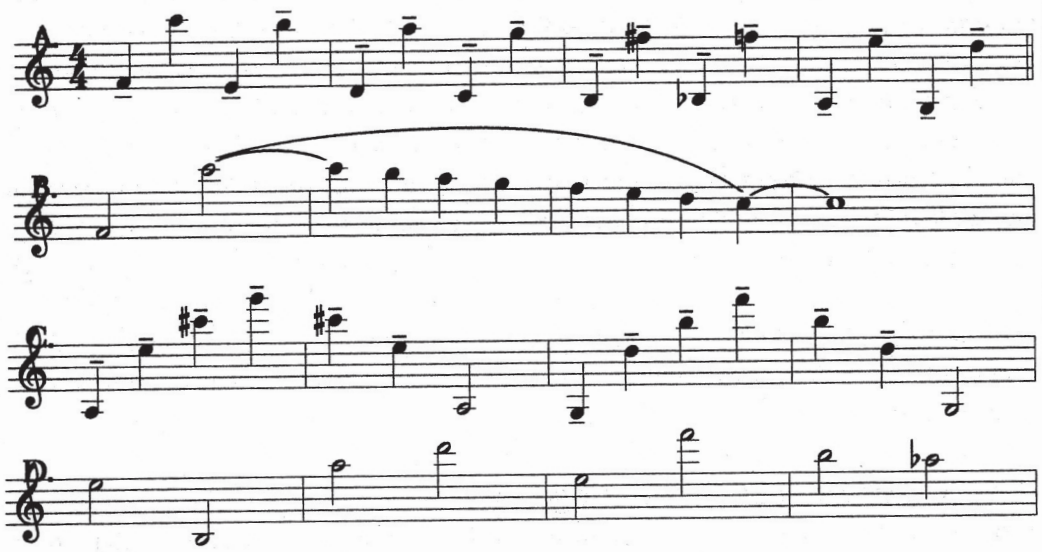
Tom Ridenour - The Educator's Guide to the Clarinet

Master Class #3

Example 4 Honks and Squeaks



Example A should be played with breath attacks and without using the register key to produce the high pitches. This may be frustrating at first, but with practice the student will learn the differentiation of air and position of the glottis to help produce each pitch. The student should not be allowed to bite to get the higher pitches.

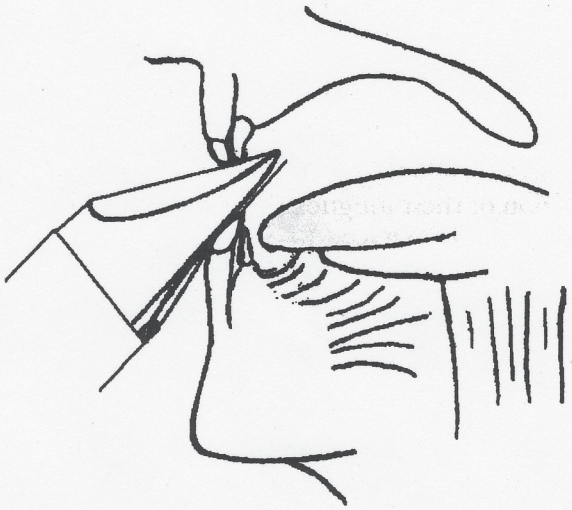
Example B should be played completely without the use of the register key. All the left hand twelfths can be played similarly.

Example C shows all of the overtones being produce while only fingering the low register pitch. The very highest tones will be out of tune without the register key, but that is not the point of the exercise.

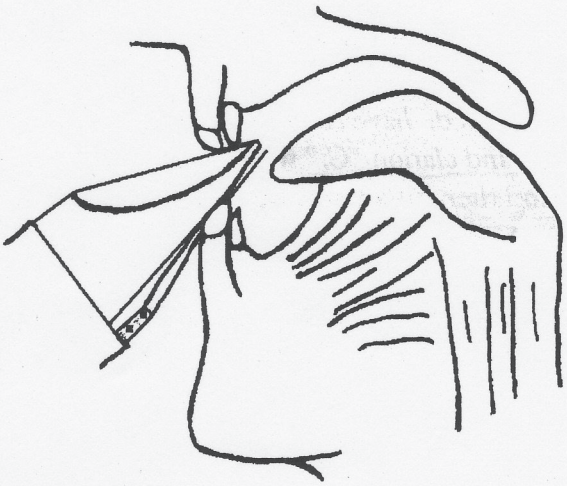
Example D tests the student's ability to accurately pick pitches out of the air. Only the low register fingering should be used for each pitch.

Master Class #3

Example 1: Comparison of Correct and Incorrect Tongue Positions

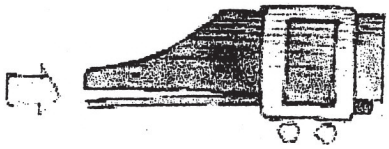


Incorrect low/forward tongue position: Notice how great the distance is between the tongue and the roof of the mouth. Also notice how the broad stream of air this position creates is directed only generally toward the front of the mouth and lacks the necessary concentration for keeping the high tones from tuning flat.



Correct high/back tongue position: Notice how the high/back position narrows the passage between the surface of the tongue and the roof of the mouth. Notice also how the air is directed right at the reed, instead of just generally towards the front of the mouth.

Master Class #4



Problem 1: Reeds warp when they absorb water

- Solution: Stabilize them with an extensive soaking/drying procedure prior to playing.
- Prevent them from absorbing too much water

Problem 2: New reeds deteriorate rapidly if played too much

- Solution: Gradually play on each reed more and more each day

1. Soaking procedure (This is one of hundreds of possible methods)
   a. Work on entire box at a time
   b. Soak in clean, tepid water for a second or two
   c. Dry off surface water, place flat side up n table. Allow to dry thoroughly.
   d. Repeat steps b and c at least 10 times
   e. The cane should look "older", greyer
   f. The more this is done the quicker the reed dries out
   g. DO NOT PLAY THE REEDS AT ALL DURING THIS PROCEDURE

2. When you are ready to try the reeds
   a. Soak butt end of reed in water for 4 or 5 minutes
   b. Soak tip end for about 30 seconds
   c. BE CAREFUL AND CONSISTENT IN HOW YOU PLACE THE REED ON THE MOUTHPIECE!
   d. Play the reed for about 30 seconds only
   e. Lightly smooth bottom of reed on flat file (Do this once only)
   f. Each day play each reed a little longer

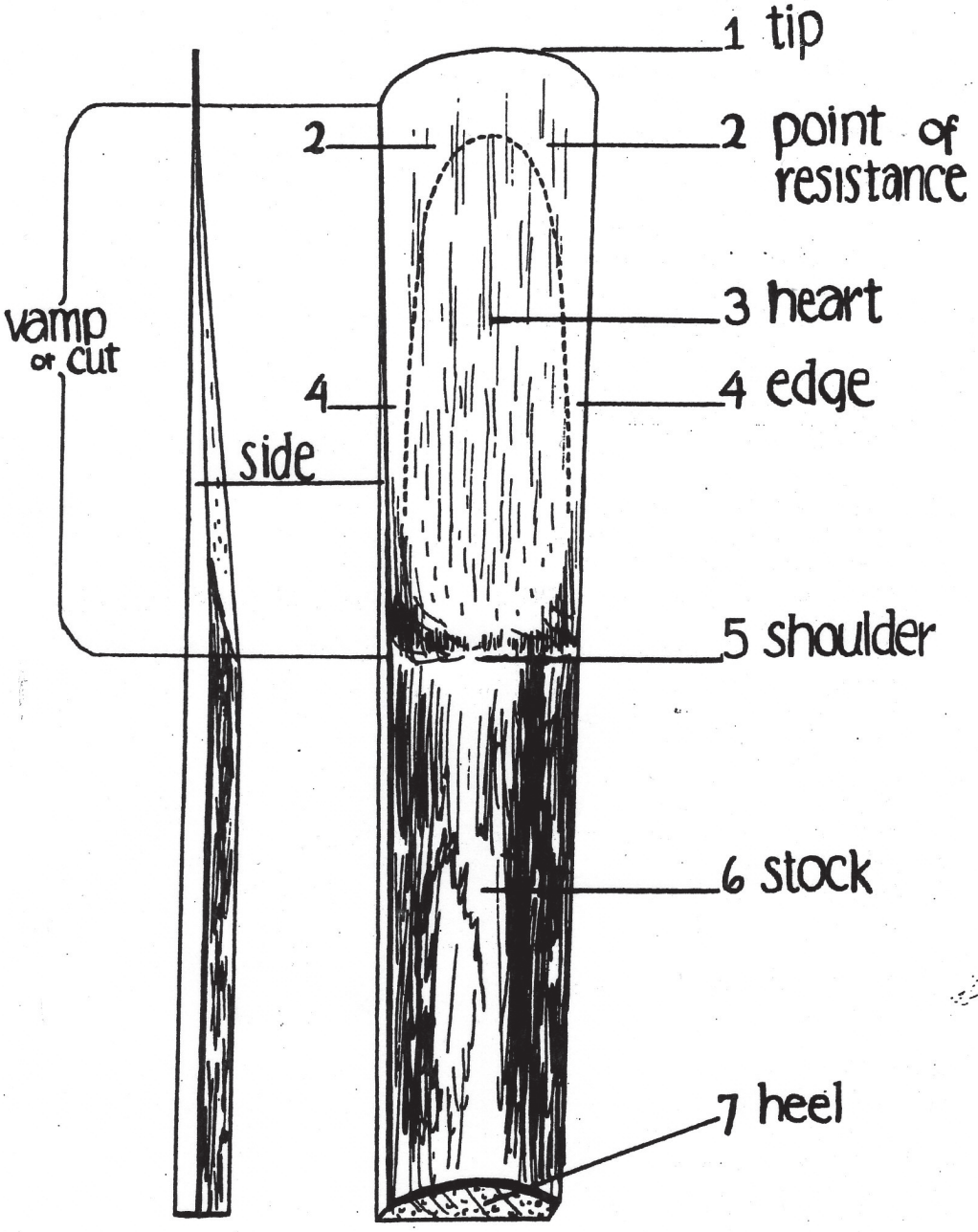
3. Adjustment
   a. Playing test for balance
   b. Reeds tend to get harder as they break in. Don't hurry the process.
   c. Balance the tip
   d. Adjust sides at back of vamp

4. Storage
   a. Store against a rigid, flat surface
   b. Control humidity

5. Suggestions
   a. Buy lots of reeds (10 boxes per year)
   b. Don't run out of well seasoned, prepared reeds.
   c. Rotate reeds (except hand made reeds)
   d. Learn to make reeds by hand

Master Class #4

Opperman, Handbook for Making and Adjusting Reeds



B♭ Clarinet reed

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