

## Clarinet

### Assembling the Instrument

1. Have students take instrument cases to another area of the room and set the cases flat on a table. If no table is available, students should put cases on the floor and sit or kneel beside their instrument.
2. Instruct students to gently open the case with the handle below the opening.
3. Students carefully remove each section of the clarinet (except the bell) one section at a time and grease each cork with cork grease. It is best to demonstrate this to the students before having them proceed. Be careful that they 1) do not use too much cork grease, 2) do not smear it on other parts of the clarinet, and 3) wipe off their fingers after they are done. No more class time should be taken to grease corks. From this point on greasing corks is something students do at home.
  - Note: If time permits, this step could be completed by the instructor before students come to class. This saves valuable time during the first lesson and students can be taught this procedure in the next 2 or 3 lessons.
4. Students remove one reed from their reed case and let it soak in their mouths.
5. Keeping the reed soaking in their mouths have students gently pick up the lower joint and hold it in the left hand, palm up, keys up.
6. Using the right hand, students pick up the bell and gently push and twist the bell onto the lower joint. Set the lower joint and bell down with keys facing up.
7. Students now pick up the upper joint and place it in the palm of the left hand with the keys facing upward. Using the third finger depress the ring key on the second tone hole. This raises the bridge key. Pick up the bell and lower joint with the right hand. Making sure no keys are depressed with the right hand, students gently push and twist the two sections together without allowing the bridge key to “collide” with the lower joint. Check the bridge key on each instrument for proper alignment.
8. Holding the partially assembled clarinet in one hand, add the barrel by gently pushing and twisting.

9. Students now remove the mouthpiece cap and add the mouthpiece, making sure that the open face of the mouthpiece aligns with the thumbhole. The larger end of the ligature is slipped gently over the mouthpiece (it should not be tightened down at this point). Replace mouthpiece cap.
10. Students now carry the instrument to their seats. Do not allow students to "dangle" their clarinet off to the side. The clarinet should be carried perpendicular and in front of the student's body to avoid damaging the instrument.
11. Remind the students to be patient and not try to play the instrument. They will be very excited at this point and it is easy for them to lose control.
12. Once seated, students remove the mouthpiece cap, take the reed from their mouth and slip the thick portion of the reed under the ligature. Align the reed so it is straight and almost even with the top edge of the mouthpiece (If the reed is gently pressed against the mouthpiece only a very slight rim is visible). The ligature is on the stock (below the carved part of the reed). Students tighten the ligature screws. These screws only need to be tightened enough to hold the reed in place. Be sure students do not over tighten.
13. Each instrument and reed must be checked by the instructor before proceeding.
14. Gently replace the mouthpiece cap to prevent reeds from drying out.
  - Note:
    - i. Because of the complex nature of assembling the clarinet, the instructor must be sure to demonstrate each step in the process; moving slowly and systematically, watching and helping students throughout the entire procedure.
    - ii. The corks on new instruments tend to fit very tightly. Students may need help fitting parts together.
    - iii. Students will need reinforcement of this procedure at each successive class or short cuts will be taken and instruments will be damaged and/or reeds will not be soaked.

### **Finger Exercises**

1. Students slide out to the edge of the chair, sit up tall, and put feet flat on the floor.

2. Instruct the student to rest the clarinet on the right knee and left shoulder.
3. The right-hand thumb is placed under the thumb rest at the point where the skin and the finger nail meet.
4. Have each student place the left thumb on thumbhole at 2 o'clock with the fleshy part covering the tone hole and tip of the thumb in position to operate the register key.
5. Next, the student places the first three fingers of the left hand and the first three fingers of the right hand on the appropriate tone holes. Hands must be curved in a natural C position (no claws) and fingers flat to cover the tone holes completely. Fingers should not be leaning against side keys. The fleshy part of the fingers must sink into the tone holes. Check each student to be sure the hand position is correct. Make sure the "little" fingers are not tucked under the clarinet but resting on the low F (right side) and low E (left side) keys.
6. With the clarinet supported by the right knee and left shoulder students lift all 6 fingers and the left thumb slightly off the keys. Then in rhythm, have students replace fingers one at a time --Thumb 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, right pinky (on the low F key), left pinky (on the low E key). Do this exercise very slowly many times. Insist that students stay with you as the fingers are called off. Check students carefully to make sure that hand and finger position is correct. Students can and should watch their fingers while doing this exercise to see as well as "feel" the correct position.

### **Producing a Sound**

1. Students remove the mouthpiece with the barrel from the instrument being careful not to disturb or damage the reed. Set the body of the clarinet down carefully with keys up so students can work on the mouthpiece & barrel alone. Remove the mouthpiece cap.
2. Students remain on the edge of the chair, back straight, feet flat on the floor.
3. Ask students to stretch their bottom lip slightly over their bottom teeth as if saying the sound "voo". Pull the chin down and flat. This is not a natural position and some students will need help with this concept.

4. Students to take their thumb (nail side down) and insert about one half inch into their mouth, pushing the fleshy part up against the top teeth. The mouth should then close around the thumb without collapsing the chin. This is the basic embouchure.
5. Individually, take each mouthpiece and place about one half inch into the student's mouth. Be sure the mouthpiece is against the top teeth, a small portion of the red of the lip is over the bottom teeth and the chin is down and flat. The head is neither up or down, but looking straight ahead. Do not let go of the mouthpiece. Ask the student to close his/her mouth around the mouthpiece. While holding the mouthpiece push it gently up against the top teeth and instruct the student to blow fast air through the mouthpiece. A rather high pitch should sound (Concert F#). If there is no sound ask the student to pull her/his chin down and away from the mouthpiece, keeping the chin stretched (you may need to pull the chin down with the index finger of your right hand). Once the student can get the correct sound, have the student try the same procedure without your help.
6. After each student has completed the above procedure, have the entire group sustain the pitch for 4 counts followed by 4 counts of rest. Repeat this several times. Be sure to take time to help those students who are having difficulty. Always maintain a steady, audible pulse once the students begin playing the whole note, whole rest exercise.
7. Instruct students to reassemble the instrument. The reed will need to be inspected again to make sure it has not been moved in the process.
8. One at a time place the mouthpiece in each student's mouth. The student should not have his/her hands on the clarinet at this point. The clarinet is angled down at approximately 35 degrees. The embouchure is the same as above. Ask the student to blow into the instrument the same as before. If everything is correct, the pitch produced will be a G (concert F).
9. Instruct the student to hold the clarinet using the right-hand position learned earlier but with the left hand holding the barrel making sure the mouthpiece is gently pushed up against the top teeth. Ask the student to blow fast air into the horn with no fingers down. The pitch produced should again be a G.

10. Repeat this procedure with each student. Check that the chins are down and flat, and mouthpiece is up against the top teeth.
11. \*Note: It is possible to tell if the mouthpiece is secure against the top teeth by trying to gently wiggle the mouthpiece in the student's mouth while she/he is playing. If the mouthpiece wiggles the mouthpiece is not secure, if the whole head moves the mouthpiece is secure.
12. Always remind the student to push up against the top teeth. Pushing down will close off the reed and cause the student to squeak or get no sound at all.
13. Having the left hand holding the barrel allows the student to push up against the top teeth for the open G. This helps embouchure formation greatly in the first few weeks. Once the embouchure is secure it is a simple habit to break.
14. Constant and consistent reinforcement of these fundamentals at each class will be necessary if students are to develop proper playing fundamentals.

### **Disassembling the Instrument**

1. When the lesson has ended students replace the mouthpiece cap and return quietly to their instrument cases.
2. Students remove the reed and return it gently to the reed case.
3. The clarinet is disassembled in the reverse order in which it was assembled (reed comes off first). Have the students swab out each section before placing it back into the case. The weighted end of the swab should enter the larger end of each section and be pulled out through the smaller end.
  - Note: Chamois swabs are often found in student line clarinets. These tend to be very thick and must be cut down before using to prevent them from getting stuck in the clarinet. If one should get stuck, do not force it; take it to the repair shop. Using a cotton or silk swab is a much better alternative.
4. Once the first 3 steps have been completed, students return to their seats. Review a few of the main points of the lesson, encourage them to practice 10 minutes two times each day and give each student a copy of the first lesson *Reminder Sheet*. Compliment them

on what they did well, reinforce problem areas. Make sure they know when and where the next class meets. Dismiss students in an orderly fashion.

### **Extra Considerations**

1. Start all students on the same type and strength of reed (LaVoz medium soft is an excellent reed for beginners). This not only helps young students have consistency in their playing but also helps the teacher in diagnosing and solving performance problems.
2. Do not be too quick to move students to a stronger reed. Although a harder reed will help the sound, using a harder reed too soon will cause the chin to collapse. Students should play on a medium soft reed until the chin is firm and not in danger of collapsing. This can take two to three years.
3. Make sure students always have 4 good reeds. Students should rotate these reeds daily and when not in use keep them stored in a plastic or metal reed case. Insist that students keep these reeds on their music stands during every band class. This way they can change reed during class if one seems to be wearing out or if one becomes cracked.
4. Encourage beginning students to purchase a good high quality mouthpiece before starting the clarinet. Not only will it produce a better sound than a stock mouthpiece but will also make the instrument respond easier, thus increasing the likelihood of success in the early stages.