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# The Clarinet

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THE CLARINET

by

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## THE CLARINET

The instrument which is now the clarinet originated in Egypt as a cylindrical tube of cane with a single beating reed. A sound generator, formed from a piece of cane was added and inserted into the larger body. Then the provision was made for a capsule of horn, of wood, or of a gourd to enclose the reed. This instrument survived into the 18th Century in North Wales and in Anglesey and was provided with a bell of cow horn at the lower end. It later became made of bone or elder wood and was provided with seven fingerholes. This early instrument was called the chalumeau. The change from the chalumeau to the clarinet took place between 1690 and 1720 due to the activity of J. C. Denner and his son who added finger keys and a speaker key. These early clarinets had the timbre of oboes rather than of the modern clarinet, probably because of the use of small reeds.<sup>1</sup>

The clarinet started coming into common use in the 1730's in Germany. Clarinet literature began to increase. By the 19th Century the clarinet was made of boxwood and had at least six keys. Intonation was poor in the low register but passable in the high register. Iwan Müller made many improvements by adding several keys. In Paris, H. Klosé produced a clarinet on Boehm principles.

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<sup>1</sup>Rendall, Geoffrey, The Clarinet (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), pp. 62-89.

The standard model has twenty-four tone holes, governed by seventeen keys and six rings.<sup>2</sup>

The low register is traditionally known as the chalumeau register. The clarinet has five pieces: bell, bottom joint, top joint, barrel, and mouth piece. The reed is clamped to the mouthpiece with the screw ligature. The player puts the uppermost half-inch or so of mouthpiece between his lips with lower lip curled back to form a cushion between the reed and the teeth. The upper teeth are placed directly on the mouthpiece. The grip on the mouthpiece is assisted by the pressure of the right thumb against the thumb rest on the bottom joint, while the sides of the mouth are puckered around the mouthpiece to keep air from escaping.<sup>3</sup>

Embouchure, the lip and facial muscles required in playing, is the heart of clarinet playing. When embouchure is working right, the way is cleared for tonguing, tone development and response. Biting should be avoided. It shortens the amplitude of reed vibration which limits flexibility of tone. Double lip embouchure is the complete encasement of the mouthpiece and reed within both upper and lower lips.<sup>4</sup> It is not used much in the United States. The lips are in complete control of the mouthpiece; therefore, the lip muscles must be well developed. The value of practicing double-lip is the transfer of its principles back to single lip. Double-lip embouchure serves as a

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Baines, Anthony, Woodwind Instruments and their History (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1943), p. 117-120.

<sup>4</sup>Stein, Keith, The Art of Clarinet Playing (Illinois: Summy-Birchard Company, 1958), p. 12-15.

gauge, indicating the tension in the hands and fingers, and impels them to relax and let go.<sup>5</sup>

It is necessary to relax. If tension is persistent, response will be inaccurate and tardy. Tension will disappear when the mind is free to roam above details, such as, note reading fingering, tone quality desired, etc.

Tone concept develops with listening experience. A student must know the kind of tone he wants before he will be able to achieve it. Good tone contains many qualities: shape, body, depth, resonance, richness, brilliance, intensity, mellowness, etc. Tone quality is determined by the number and intensity of overtones.

There are three main parts to a tone: entrance (attack), the body (duration), and the finish (release). Tonguing is a by product of two other factors: continuously moving breath and active but quietly poised lips. The basis for good tonguing is good slurring with addition of the tongue itself. Precision of response is regulated by the manner in which the tongue leaves the reed. One of the secrets of successful tonguing is maintaining continual breath flow between tongued tones. Accuracy is achieved by maintaining poise between action moments instead of letting breath support and embouchure relax. In tonguing the sole function of the tongue is to act as a valve to slant and stop air; or to cut off the tone into portions of any desired length.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 45-48.

<sup>6</sup>Willaman, Robert, The Clarinet and Clarinet Playing (New York: Carl Fischer, 1949). p. 31.

Breath is the impetus that causes vibration. The lungs must be aided from the outside by a push of power from the band of muscles around the diaphragm area. The breath inhaled is maintained there by muscular support and distributed upward at exactly the same rate it can be received into and through the clarinet. Keep breath moving and supported<sup>7</sup>

An aid in high register playing is to maintain as muscularly-poised an embouchure for low notes as high notes. The register key is pushed down and the tone overblows a twelfth. This register is called "clarion." The low register is called "chalumeau." For third register, "half-hole" the first finger hole of the left hand without moving finger from clarinet. This overblows the tone a major sixth from the second register tone.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Stein, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

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