

The Florida Bandmaster's Association Summer Conference

July 10, 2009 – 10:00 a.m.
Altamonte Springs Hilton

Developing the Basic Fundamentals and Musical Integrity of Young Oboists

Advanced Techniques

Ann M. Adams
Oboe and Music Education
Stetson University, DeLand, FL
aadams@stetson.edu

This clinic will be directed towards teachers and students alike. The focus of this clinic is to guide young oboists towards becoming confident and independent oboists and musicians. In addition, my goal is to give the band director a basic guide and course of study to assist in the development of the oboists within the ensemble.

Topics will include: Tone Production, Developing a Concept of Sound, Intonation and Blend, Vibrato, How and What to Practice, Fundamentals, Avoiding Bad Habits, Instruments, Reeds, and Methods.



Tone Development

Starting the note – Embouchure and Articulation

Place the reed in the mouth with the corners pulled in, surrounding the reed, as though you were holding a straw. Make sure the tip of the reed goes beyond the lips on the inside of your mouth. It is important to keep the teeth open to avoid closing the opening of the reed. The reed should be pointed to the back of the throat. Avoid smiling and biting. The reed should not touch the teeth, however, the lips must cover the teeth and form a cushion for the reed.

Place the tip of the tongue to the opening of the tip of the reed and begin to exert air pressure towards the reed. However, the reed will not vibrate until you withdraw the tongue. I like to think of articulation as a “release” rather than an “attack.” The alternate action of the tongue touching the tip of the reed and withdrawing from the tip of the reed is the process for accurate tonguing/articulation.

The most common errors with articulation include: stopping the air between notes, using the wrong part of the tongue on the reed, and hitting the wrong part of the reed with the tongue. Always remember to use the tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed for the most delicate and consistent articulation technique.

Tone Production, Sound, Vibrato and Control

Always start with slow scales and long tones. Each note should have the most beautiful, easy, resonant sound as possible. Each note must be in the center of the sound and in tune. It is imperative to practice long tone exercises every day and devote a great portion of your practice time to scale exercises, which will promote embouchure development and finger dexterity along with good tone production, all of which should be the continuous goal of an aspiring oboist throughout his/her career. Consistent and daily practice is imperative to improvement and it is essential to work on long tones for sonority and control.

The notes in the middle of the range are much easier for the beginning oboist to produce than the notes in the lower register. Start with the 3rd line B natural and work diatonically down. (Fernand Gillet *Method for the Beginning of the Oboe*).

Work for the most legato movement between notes. Concentrate on hand position and finger movement. Keep the air focused from note to note. Don't let the sound decay between notes. Maintain an even sound throughout the range of the instrument. First play with a full sound, **f**, keeping the same intensity from the beginning to the end and holding the note for as long as you are able. Repeat this exercise **mf**, then **p**. Always maintain the desired tone quality and intensity throughout the note. Eventually one should play these notes in long tones starting at **pp** with a crescendo to **ff** and back down to **pp** and the reverse. (Bleuzet – long tones).

Developing Vibrato

Sing with vibrato. Put your first and second fingers together and place them between your teeth to sing with an open and vibrant sound.

The Practice of Scales

The daily practice of scales enables the oboist to acquire their confidence with technique, which is essential for all musicians, but also to continue to focus on a

consistent sound throughout the range of the instrument. I think of scale practice as a long tone with my fingers moving. The same principles of tone and dynamics must be applied to the scale exercises. (David Hite *Foundation Studies Patterned after C. Baermann, Op. 63 – Scales, Chords and Intervals for Daily Practice for the Oboe*).

How to Practice

It is essential to practice with great attention to detail and accuracy. The main goal is to “Never do it wrong.” Play slowly enough to play it perfectly every time. Use the metronome to keep it slow and only increase the speed when you are confident you will not make any mistakes. Always keep a steady tempo.

1/3 of practice time on long tones, extended scales, intervals and arpeggios with rhythms in all keys (major and minor) with dynamics and various tempo markings. Exaggerate dynamics and intensity. Use a tuner and a metronome, but don't become dependant on these devices.

1/3 of practice time on etudes, technical exercises, and sight-reading

1/3 of practice time on literature

Practicing to improve technical passages and scales (Examples: Louis Bleuzet *La Technique du Hautbois – Sonorité et Mécanisme – Première partie*.)

Keep a practice journal. Keep track of what you are practicing and make a plan of what you want to accomplish. Write down your objectives and avoid aimless and thoughtless practice.

Preparing solo repertoire and for auditions. One month before your performance/audition play straight through the repertoire twice without a break. Go back to sections that need work. After practicing problem spots slowly, play through the entire piece again - under tempo if necessary. Record yourself until you are satisfied with your performance.

Always pay attention to your hand position and finger movement. Keep the fingers gently curved, relaxed and close to the keys. There should be minimum movement between the fingers and the keys of the oboe.

Posture and Breathing

Posture is very important for proper breathing and air support. An effective posture aligns the body in a straight line from the hips all the way to the head. The Alexander Technique used by many musicians talks about the importance maintaining your body in a naturally relaxed posture. The Alexander Technique is a method for improving ease and freedom of movement, balance, support, flexibility, and coordination. Hold the oboe at approximately a 45 degree angle to your body. Keep your shoulders relaxed with your arms hanging naturally. Bring the oboe to you.

It is not enough to know when or where to take a breath, the oboist must understand the technique of how to breath. The oboe is the only instrument where the player usually has a surplus of air. On the oboe you will never use all of the air you inhale in a normal breath.

Breathe through the mouth. Keep the reed on the bottom lip. Relaxed upper body and breath deeply. To demonstrate proper breathing techniques, place your hands around the lower part of your waist. Feel your entire waist and back expand as you take in a breath. There are many ways to teach proper breathing, but a very important technique that an oboist must learn to do is to exhale while playing a phrase.

First practice by taking in a breath, exhale (ah, ah, ah, ah, ahh) then play with what is left against the resistance of the reed. Play with the pressure left at your command against the resistance of the reed. (*Barret Oboe Method*)

Every oboist must master the art of the inhale/exhale process. It is important to breath (inhale or exhale) at every opportunity. Many students tend to just keep playing until they run out of air and then they do it again and again. The effect of this is that the oboist becomes more fatigued than necessary. It is essential to refresh the oxygen in the lungs. Always know where you need to take a breath and do it – plan your breathing.

“The most valuable teacher you have is yourself. Your teachers can guide you, inspire you, encourage you and find opportunities for you, but in the end, you will be what you make of yourself.” (David Hite)

Method Books

Beginning Method for the Oboe, Rubank
Advanced Method for the Oboe, Vol. 1 and 2, Rubank
Barret Oboe Method, Boosey and Hawkes
Vade Mecum of the Oboist, Albert Andraud
Gillet Method for the Beginning of the Oboe, Alphonse Leduc
Bleuzet The Techniques of the Oboe, Part 1 and Part 2, Alphonse Leduc
Sellner Method for Oboe, Book 1, 2, 3, Billaudot

Scale Books

Pares Scales for the Oboe, Rubank
Foundation Studies for Oboe patterned after Baermann, Southern Music
Oboe Scales for Reading to Improve Technique and Sight Reading, Christopher Weait

Etude Books

Selected Studies for Oboe, Rubank
Ferling 48 Famous Studies, Southern Music
Sellner Studies for the Oboe, Boosey and Hawkes
Sellner Twelve Duos, Book 1, 2, 3, 4, Billaudot

Instruments and Reeds

Quality and working instrument
Yearly maintenance by a professional oboe repair person
Adjustments – (Carl J. Sawicki, *The Oboe Revealed* or Pat McFarland, *Oboe Adjustment Guide*)

Double Reed Suppliers

Below are just a few examples of companies that specialize in double reed instruments and supplies. Reeds purchased from these companies are mostly hand made, and will be of higher quality than a mass-produced, store-bought reed.

When purchasing an oboe or English horn, I encourage you to do so from a company dedicated to selling oboes. These companies usually guarantee that each instrument has been played by a professional and checked for proper regulation. They also will be available for regular maintenance.

Robert D. Gilbert

www.rdgwoodwinds.com

OboeWorks

www.oboeworks.com

McFarland Double Reed Shop

www.mcfarlanddoublereed.com

Midwest Musical Imports

www.mmimports.com

Edmund Nielsen

Nielsen-woodwinds.com

Mark Chudnow Woodwinds

www.mcwoeboe.com

Ann Hodge Double Reed Supplies

www.hodgeproductsinc.com

Charles Double Reed Company

www.charlesmusic.com

Carlos E. Coelho Woodwinds

www.CarlosOboe.com

Forrest Double Reed Specialists

www.forrestsmusic.com

IDSr.org is the address for the International Double Reed Society webpage. This is an international organization for double reed players, instrument manufacturers, vendors and enthusiasts. It is a very informative sight for the aspiring oboist.

Brands and Purchasing Tips When purchasing an oboe – choose the best oboe that you can afford. It will save you money in repairs and adjustments. You will be amazed at the difference in sound and response in a higher quality instrument. Consult an oboe teacher for suggestions and to assist in playing the instruments.

There are 3 basic levels for oboes: Beginning (\$1200-\$2000); Intermediate (\$2800-\$4500); and Professional (\$5000-10,000). Listed are some companies I recommend. Loree, Buffet, Fox, Howarth, Rigoutat, Marigaux, Chudnow, Fossati, and Yamaha.

Wood or Plastic? A wood oboe would always be my first preference. A serious oboe student should get a wood oboe. However, they do require higher maintenance, especially for a school-owned instrument. The Fox 300 is a resin oboe that is very good for the middle school level. A professional oboe with a plastic top joint works well and avoids the cracking issue. Wood oboes need to be broken in - not just when they are new, but also if they have not been played for any length of time. If an oboe is not broken in properly, it will crack. The Buffet – Greenline is a professional level instrument made from a composite that should not crack.

What is "Full Conservatory", and do I really need it?—YES. It is an oboe that has all the keys that I think are fundamental: left F, third octave, low Bb, low Bb resonance, trill keys, etc.. This system helps keep the young player from developing bad habits.

What should I do if my new oboe cracks? Most reputable dealers offer warranties on their new instruments. If an instrument is going to crack, it will usually do so within the first year. If it does crack, get it repaired as soon as possible. The longer the oboe is played, the worse the crack will get and it will become more difficult to repair properly.

Modified or Simplified Conservatory Similar to the Full Conservatory, with the omission of some trill keys. This system would be found on beginning level oboes.

Full Automatic There is only one octave key, because the octave mechanism is automatic. These oboes don't have the side octave key. Not commonly used in US.

Semi Automatic These oboes have the side octave key. This type of system is the preferred system in the United States.

Left Hand F Key This is an alternate F key, allowing the player to go back and forth between F and Eb, D, Db, or low C.

Third Octave Key Some of the more advanced oboes now come with a third octave key. This octave key is designed to make the high notes (F above the staff and higher) speak more easily and more in tune.

Split D Ring The "D" key (third finger of the right hand) is actually two separate keys - one on the inside which is surrounded by the other. When the player plays an Eb-to-E trill, the inside part of the key stays down to stabilize intonation.

The success of your oboe students is 100% dependant on having a good quality instrument that is in good repair. My biggest frustration as a teacher is when a student tries to play on an inadequate oboe. It is also very defeating to the student. Bad reeds can be overcome, but an oboe that leaks cannot be played. Double Reed Shops – Music, supplies, and reeds

Reedmaker.com ~ providing oboe and English horn reeds

Stellar Oboe Products ~ Stellarcorporation.com oboe supplies and reeds

Weber Reeds ~ www.webreeds.com supplier of music, reeds, and supplies

Chicago Reed Company ~ Oboe, Oboe d'Amore, and English Horn reeds

MKL Reeds ~ Handmade oboe and english horn reeds for the student or professional

Edmund Nielsen Woodwinds ~ reeds and supplies for oboe and bassoon

OboeWorks.com ~ specializes in Oboes and oboe products, also good with oboe repairs

Chalres Double Reed Company ~ supplies for oboe and bassoon players

Midwest Musical Imports ~ top name brands of oboes and English horns

Forrests Music ~ instruments, reeds, tools, accessories, repairs, books, music, and cds

Mark Chudnow Woodwinds ~ MCWoboe.com Loree oboes and English horns, supplies

Sharon's Oboe Shoppe ~ Loree oboes and English horns

McFarland Double Reeds ~ Loree oboes and English horns and supplies

Gail Warnaar Double Reed Shop ~ extensive inventory of double reed music and supplies.

Stuart Dunkel ~ www.stuart-dunkel.com Double Reeds Supplies, hand-made reeds

Trevco Music ~ Trevcomusic.com complete inventory of double reed music