Chapter 34

Pedagogies for Teaching Clarinet

**Supplemental Materials: Selecting an Instrument**

**Basic Considerations**

1. *Budget*. Beginners should start on a student model instrument for the investment. A beginner may struggle more on a professional model as they tend to be finicky and carry a high price tag. You want the instrument to be well-designed and not easily damaged for the price.
2. *Wood or plastic?* Wood instruments (rosewood or the more expensive grenadilla wood) produce the best tone but are less durable because they are susceptible to all changes in temperature and will require more maintenance; The plastics used for clarinets will be ABS resin or ebonite; Ebonite is a good middle of the road choice for beginners.
3. *Keys.* Clarinet keys will either be nickel-plated or silver-plated. Other than checking to see if a student has a nickel allergy (more common that you might think) there are few differences. Nickel-plated keys will not tarnish as easily as silver plated and tend to be more durable. Most beginner clarinets will have nickel-plated keys.
4. *Thumb rests.* Some thumb rests are fixed, while more are now made to be adjustable and have a strap ring. I would consider this as a neck strap is good for all of us to take the weight of the instrument off the thumb and is a healthy way to teach instrument carriage and posture.
5. *Pre-owned or family instruments*. First and foremost, the instrument must be in tip top shape! Students using a pre-owned instrument should have checked by qualified instrument technician before starting band classes.

**2022 Examples of Beginner Models**

1. Jean Paul USA CL-300 Bb Beginner Clarinet has an ebonite body, Boehm 17 key system, nickel-plated keys
2. Medini MCT-30 has a solid rosewood body with silver-plated keys and an adjustable thumb rest. Jupiter JCL700N student clarinet is made with a resin body with nickel keys.
3. Selmer CL211 clarinet has a grenadilla wood body and silver-plated keys uses the Boehm (French) key system, with features similar to professional models and has an adjustable thumb rest.
4. Yamaha YCL-255 Standard Bb Clarinet has a ABS resin body adjustable thumb-rest featuring a neck strap ring gets a good sound and can serve as an intermediate instrument, therefore, is more expensive. Modeled after professional Yamaha models, has adjustable thumb rest with a strap ring for neckstraps.

**Mouthpieces**

*Mouthpieces should be something you select to be placed with the instrument for rental or purchase.* Just don’t settle forthe stock $20 mouthpiece in the clarinet case, because it doesn’t set the student up for success. Unfortunately, the variety of mouthpieces can be overwhelming, and the prices are all over the map. Selecting the first mouthpiece for students to start on is important and you want to be sure you don’t push the cost of the rental up too much. You will need to select from a hard rubber (more expensive) or plastic (more prone to breaking but cheaper).

The differences in mouthpieces, beyond the material, have to do with the facing (flat side or table), the window (opening of the mouthpiece) and the rails (sides of the mouthpiece on the flat side). The facing directs the distance of the reed from the mouthpiece to initiate the vibration of the reed tip against the tip of the mouthpiece. The differences among mouthpieces are found in the facings and windows. Good beginner choices currently are:

1. Pine Holly Crystal mouthpiece ($60)
2. Premier by Hite ($40-50)
3. VanDoren line mouthpieces M13 most utilitarian ($110, raises rental price however) Other choices of VanDoren mouthpieces are: B45; M30; BD5.

When students want to consider a new mouthpiece, make sure you have them test a few first before making the decision. It can be a big investment.

**Ligatures**

Ligatures simply keep the reed in place on the mouthpiece of the clarinet. They can be made of metal, rubber, leather, or other materials. Different ligatures apply a different amount of pressure on the reed to keep it on the mouthpiece and can change the tone quality. For beginners, having a ligature that is in the round is most important. If you have a stock ligature, the screw head will be on the performers right as you are looking at the mouthpiece. An inverted ligature, the screws will be on the front of the mouthpiece away from the performer and may be on the left. If you would like to select the ligature along with the mouthpiece, we would suggest the inverted ligature by Bonade, which runs about $25-30.

Considerations for ligatures:

* Type of ligature. Inverted or standard
* Price
* Material
* Personal preference!

**Reeds**

Tone and resilience are greatly impacted by reed quality – encourage alternating different reeds. Mark them with numbers and alternate playing so they rest and dry out completely thereby lasting longer (hopefully). Pays off to get more reeds all at once that will last longer than to get one at a time. Encourage students to buy a box and split with a friend – shop for prices online (recommended brands). Even in a box of reeds, there is great variance in quality and students will begin to learn what those feel like and which they prefer to play on.

Beginning reeds should be a medium soft to medium strength. This varies across manufacturers, but beginners can start on a 2 or 2.5 LaVoz or Rico/Rico Royal (see supplemental materials for comparisons of reed brands). As individual embouchures strengthen, students should move to a 2.5 or 3 (later may move higher). The student should always be able to play the reed comfortably. Weaker reeds produce a poor tone quality and switching to a stronger reed should assist students in playing with more resonance, particularly at the forte level, and with better tone. Weak reeds also produce a flabby tone and will produce flat pitches. When a reed is too hard, the student may play sharp, and the embouchure will fatigue easily, as biting to control and produce a sound will happen. A good reed at an appropriate strength will help students have a focused, consistent, characteristic tone in all registers comfortably. Just remember: *A reed that is too soft plays flat. A reed that is too hard plays sharp.*

Consider that different reed brands are slightly different in strength and cut. The numbering system for reed strengths vary (e.g., Rico #4 is much softer than the VanDoren #4). Professional clarinetists often make their own reeds from tubes of cane and hand-made reeds tend to last longer but are much more expensive. Reed comparison charts are found on nearly every music store website, but here are a few:

<https://www.wwbw.com/the-music-room/daddario-reed-comparison-chart>

<https://www.legere.com/need-to-know/strength-charts/>

<http://reedstore.com/reed-strength-chart>