

Teacher's Guide

Love

Selmer[®]

by Paul Lehman



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Introduction

The oboe is an instrument with a long and noble history. It is descended from the shawm, which was introduced into Western Europe during the thirteenth century as a result of the Crusades. Although a number of improvements have been made on the oboe, particularly during the nineteenth century, it reached what might be considered in all basic respects its present-day form in France in the 1660's.

The oboe is a very versatile instrument. It is an expressive instrument. It is capable of a wide variety of styles, nuances, and effects. In the hands of an adequate player who has had sound instruction, it is an invaluable asset to the school band and orchestra.

Despite its reputation for being a difficult instrument, there are many respects in which the oboe is quite similar to the other woodwinds. In examining this booklet, the reader will recognize that many of the basic performance techniques of the oboe can be explained in terms of those of the other woodwind instruments, with a few minor differences or varied points of emphasis. In organizing his thinking concerning the oboe, the instructor should begin with these similarities and proceed to the dissimilarities, rather than the reverse.

This booklet is designed for the instrumental teacher who is not primarily an oboist. It is intended to help him resolve some of the difficulties he will face with his oboe students. A surprising number of the questions not dealt with here can be answered by the judicious application of common sense.

The student who wishes to know more about the oboe, particularly about its history and construction, should be referred to Philip Bate's authoritative and comprehensive book, *The Oboe* (London: Ernest Benn, 1956).

The Instrument

Selecting an Oboe

The first requisite for the beginning oboist is, of course, a good instrument in good condition. If the student's parents purchase an oboe, the teacher has an obligation to give them the benefit of his advice, inasmuch as few students or parents are qualified to evaluate an oboe. It should go without saying that the responsibility for the quality of a school-owned instrument likewise falls upon the teacher.

Unfortunately, however, the instrumental teacher often has had only limited experience with the oboe and feels somewhat insecure in making such a judgement. When it comes to determining which make to buy, he tends to rely on the opinions of his former teachers or of colleagues who are more familiar with the oboe and whose opinions he respects. This is usually a sound approach to the problem, but after deciding upon a particular make of instrument he should remember that individual oboes of the same make can vary appreciably in quality. After making a visual check of the workmanship of the oboe he is considering, the teacher then should take the instrument to a competent oboist for a playing test if he does not feel qualified to make such a test himself. In most cases a professional player or a qualified amateur can be found in a nearby city. It is well worth the small fee the teacher should expect to pay for such a service to make certain that the much larger amount representing the cost of the instrument is wisely spent.

First, the tone quality and the over-all pitch level of the instrument should be checked. Next, the relative intonation of the various tones of the scale should be examined, perhaps with the aid of a tuner, and the

uniformity with which the oboe responds throughout its range should be investigated. Finally, the instrument should be checked for tones that are weak, dull, or unstable.

The purchaser should always try to obtain as good an oboe as possible. A poor instrument is never a bargain, no matter how low the price. It is not wise to purchase an oboe without having had an opportunity to try it out.

The conservatory system, or French system, has, by now, completely superseded the military system oboe in this country. Military system oboes are still offered for sale as used instruments from time to time, but, since they are now quite obsolete, they are not recommended. A military system oboe can be identified by comparing the keywork to that shown in the fingering chart on page 33; if the two are distinctly different, the instrument may be a military system oboe.

One important decision facing the prospective oboe buyer is whether to buy the open- or covered-hole model. Open-hole oboes are usually less expensive and tend to stay in better adjustment. For these reasons, some teachers prefer open-hole, or open-ring, oboes for beginners, particularly if the school system can afford a set of covered-hole oboes for its more advanced players. Of course, it is more difficult for the young student to cover the holes of the open-hole instrument.

Professional players use the covered-hole model (which is also known as the plateau model). This instrument is better in tune and does not demand as good hand position, though whether the latter point is an advantage or a disadvantage is a matter for the individual teacher to decide. The fingerings are the same, except that on the open-hole instrument B \flat may be played with the first and second fingers of the left hand and the second side key beneath the right forefinger.

The plateau model is recommended for high school players, although the open-hole model is acceptable for younger students and beginners.

The semi-automatic octave key is the most satisfactory octave key mechanism for school-owned oboes. Such instruments have a thumb octave key that is used for E through G# and a side octave key that is used for A through C. The automatic octave key mechanism can usually be identified by the absence of the side octave key. Occasionally, however, one may find an oboe which has both the automatic mechanism and the side octave key. On such instruments either octave key may be used for any tone from E through C.

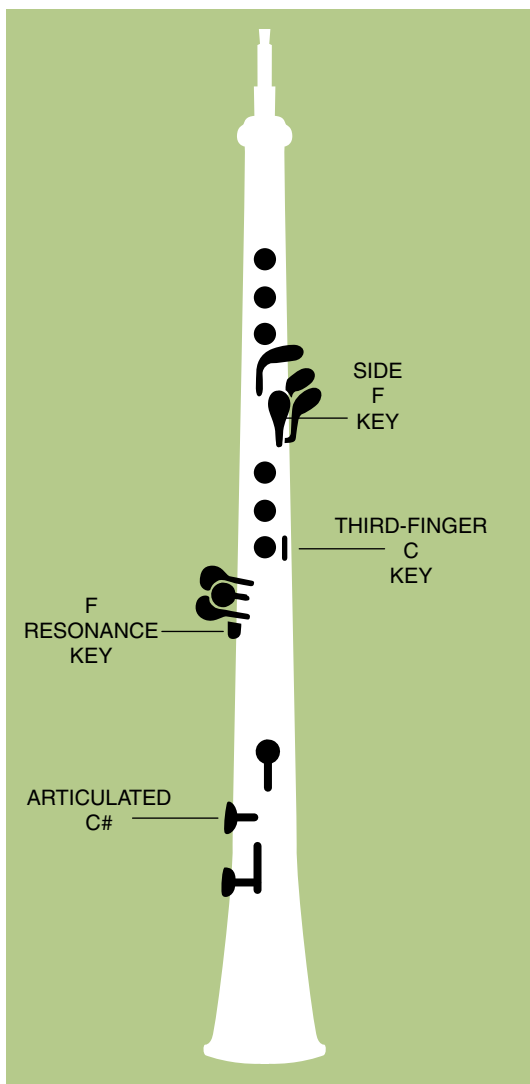
All oboes have two different vent holes (in addition to the half-hole) to aid in the playing of octaves. One of these holes is located approximately half way between the first-finger tone hole of the left hand and the upper end of the instrument and must be open for E, F, F#, G, and G#. The other, which is located near the upper end of the instrument, must be open for A, B \flat , B \natural , and C. With the automatic octave key mechanism the player uses only the thumb octave key, and the correct vent hole is opened automatically. If the third finger of the left hand is down, the lower vent hole opens; if the third finger is raised, the upper hole opens.

There are several reasons why the semi-automatic octave key is preferred to the automatic. First of all, it is less expensive. Second, although the automatic octave key works satisfactorily on the saxophone, the same mechanism on the oboe is difficult to keep in adjustment and is often out of order. In addition, the automatic octave key prevents the playing of certain harmonics, which will be described later.

Of the various optional keys and features available on the oboe, one of the most desirable is the F resonance key. More accurately described as a large vent hole than a "key," this feature provides additional resonance for the forked F and thereby makes the quality of that tone more compatible with those surrounding it. Another useful feature is the side F, or left-hand F, key. This key is used in place of the regular F key in situations that would otherwise require the forked F. The articulated C# mechanism is very desirable in order to achieve a satisfactory trill from low B to C#. The third-finger C key

will make it possible to trill from low C to C# and will simplify chromatic passages involving these tones. The articulated F#-G#, C#-D#, and low B \flat -B \natural are widely used. Another useful feature is a forked A \flat to B \flat trill.

Some oboes have a third octave key, placed above the thumb octave key, for high E and above. Several less expensive models lack the low B \flat key, which means that the range of the instrument extends downward only to



B \flat below the staff. Certain oboes have one or two holes in the bell which are not covered by pads - a practice held over from the Renaissance, when “tuning holes” were so placed to soften the quality and correct the pitch in the extreme low register of the shawm.

Care and Maintenance

The oboe is a very fragile piece of equipment that must be handled with great care. The teacher should make every effort to impress this fact upon the student from the very first lesson. The oboe possesses perhaps the most delicate and intricate key structure of any instrument, and no other instrument is more susceptible to the difficulties in response that result from bent keys, lost corks, and worn or ill-seating pads. The student should be cautioned against using excessive force in assembling the instrument because such force is likely to bend the keys. Similarly, he should be cautioned against forcing the case closed and against carrying music or other items of equipment in the oboe case unless space is provided. The case should be blocked so that the instrument fits snugly and cannot move about.

In assembling the oboe, one should grasp the bell in the right hand, with the thumb closing on the B \flat pad. The lower joint is held in the palm of the left hand, against the thumb rest, with the fingers gently curving over the tone holes, and the two joints are brought together with a slight twisting motion. The lower joint should then be transferred to the right hand and held near the bottom so that the fingers touch as few keys as possible. The upper joint is grasped in the left hand in such a way that the two bridge keys will be raised. It is important that the fingers of the right hand do not touch the F \sharp tone hole or the C to D trill key because to do so will raise one of the bridge keys on the lower joint.

Some players prefer to turn the instrument over so that they are looking at the underside when assembling the upper and lower joints. This makes it possible to see that the bridge keys are fitting together properly.

The joints should be greased regularly so that the instrument can be assembled without undue force. They should not be so well greased, however, that they are in danger of falling apart. The instrument should be disassembled by reversing the above procedures.

The bore of the oboe should be swabbed out each time the instrument is used. The traditional method of swabbing is to insert a turkey feather into each joint after the instrument is disassembled and twist it around



while moving it in and out. Unfortunately, turkey feathers are becoming increasingly difficult for the average urbanite to obtain. Perhaps the best source is the nearest turkey farm. It is not possible to use a clarinet drop swab on the upper joint of the oboe because the bore is too small at the upper end. Other types of swabs are now being manufactured which may be satisfactory provided they do not damage the bore.

New oboes are often quite susceptible to cracking. This is particularly true along the upper joint, where there are a number of tone holes quite close together. Probably the most important factor in preventing cracks, other than swabbing out the bore after each use, is avoiding sudden changes of temperature. When it is necessary to take the oboe outdoors in winter, the instrument should not be played until it has had a chance to warm up gradually. If it is played immediately, the unequal rate of expansion between the newly warmed bore and the outside surface will tend to cause it to crack. A case cover is often a good investment because, in addition to protecting the case, it provides another layer of insulation for the instrument which means additional protection against sudden changes of temperature. Abrupt changes of humidity should also be avoided, if possible.

If a crack is discovered, it should be repaired by a competent repairman as soon as possible. If left unattended, it may become larger and more difficult to repair. It may even crack through to the bore, making the instrument unplayable.

There has been some doubt expressed in recent years as to whether or not it is necessary to oil the bore. Some very competent oboists and repairmen feel that it does little or no good. Others, however, feel that the bore should be oiled every six months (more often if the instrument is new) with a good quality bore oil. The oil, which must not be allowed to come in contact with the pads, is applied with a turkey feather and the excess removed by inserting another feather wrapped in a clean cloth.

All points in the key mechanism where metal comes in contact with metal should be oiled every one to three months with key oil. Each screw should be removed, a drop of oil inserted with the applicator or with a toothpick or needle, and the screw replaced. No more than a drop should be used at a time, and any excess should be wiped off because otherwise the oil will catch dirt and slow down the action. Dust may be removed from beneath the keys and rods with an artist's paint brush.

The teacher should familiarize himself with the locations and functions of the various adjustment screws that are found on the oboe. A description of these screws and their uses is one of the excellent features of the informative and valuable book, *The Art of Oboe Playing*, by Robert Sprenkle and David Ledet (Evanston: Summy-Birchard, 1961).

A gurgling sound on tones in the second octave is likely to be the result of water in the octave hole. This difficulty may be corrected by removing the reed and lower joint, covering the end of the upper joint with a finger of the right hand, placing the three fingers of the left hand over their respective tone holes, and blowing at the top of the upper joint while opening the octave key(s). A piece of cigarette paper inserted momentarily between the pad and the hole will serve to absorb any excess moisture remaining.

The Reed

Every oboist should have a reed case in which to store his reeds while they are not in use. The plastic vials in which reeds are sold are not satisfactory for this purpose because the reeds do not have an opportunity to dry. It is absolutely essential that the reed dry completely after being played. If a regular reed case is not available, a clarinet reed box or any other small box lined with tissue may be used.

It is also essential that the reed be adequately soaked before playing. Normally a period of approximately two minutes is sufficient, depending on how dry the reed is. The reed may be soaked either in water or in the mouth of the player. A reed soaked in water will tend to last longer than one soaked in saliva, and many players prefer this method. If the reed is soaked in water, it is not necessary to leave it standing in a glass. It may be merely dipped in water and replaced in the reed case or set aside. Enough water will cling to the reed to soak it adequately. In either case, only the half-inch or less near the tip needs to be soaked.

The reed should be soaked only long enough to make it soft and pliable. It is a common fault to soak the oboe reed too long. When this happens the reed becomes waterlogged and unresponsive.

After the oboe student has been playing for a year or so, he should begin trying to make his own reeds. Reed-making is not as difficult as many people think, and it is an essential part of the training of the oboist. By making his own reeds, the student will save money, he will be provided with reeds that fit his embouchure and his concept of tone quality, and he will learn to care for and adjust reeds. A basic set of tools, consisting of a knife, a mandrel, a plaque, nylon thread, goldbeater's skin, cement, tubes, and cane, can be purchased for \$25 and up. There are a number of books available that provide instruction in reed-making, including the following:

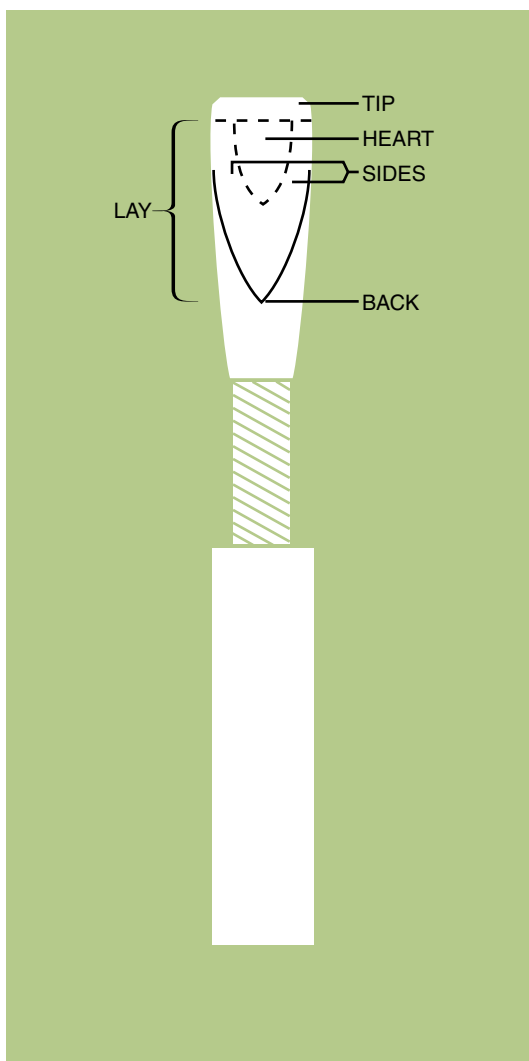
Myron Russell, *Oboe Reed-Making and Problems of the Oboe Player*, Jack Spratt; Joe Artley, *How To Make Double-Reeds*, Jack Spratt; Mayer & Rohner, *Oboe Reeds: How To Make and Adjust Them*, The Instrumentalist.

If it is not possible or practical for the student to make his own reeds, the best source of reeds is a professional oboist, many of whom sell reeds commercially. By trying several such individuals, the student may find one whose reeds fit his embouchure and his concept of tone quality particularly well.

The problem is that oboe reeds are constantly changing with regard to their stiffness and their response

characteristics. This is why it is essential for the student to be able to make at least minor adjustments. The oboist must always have several good reeds available.

The beginner should have a fairly soft reed with an opening of approximately one-thirty-second of an inch. Within obvious limits, the size of the opening can be adjusted by squeezing the soaked cane with the fingers. The amount of soaking will affect the size of the opening. When a reed is not sufficiently soaked, the tip



will tend to be too closed. When it is soaked too much, the tip will be too open.

Most students will achieve best results using a reed with a fairly long lay. Also, such a reed produces the darker quality of tone which is most preferred in this country today.

Following are a few general rules for adjusting oboe reeds (additional information may be found in the books cited above):

1. If the reed blows too hard, remove cane all over.
2. If the reed blows too easily, cut a very slight amount from the tip.
3. If the low tones do not respond, increase the size of the opening, remove cane from the sides and back, or check the oboe for leaks.
4. If the high tones do not respond, scrape around the heart, just below the tip.
5. If the pitch is flat, cut a slight amount from the tip, narrow the reed, or slip the blades sideways so that they do not meet exactly.
6. If the pitch is sharp, scrape the back.
7. If the reed is difficult to attack, thin the tip.
8. If the tone is too bright, scrape the back and sides.
9. If the tone is too dark, lengthen the tip or scrape around the heart.

Many of these adjustments will produce side effects in addition to the desired result. These side effects may require further adjustments in order to maintain the overall balance and response of the reed.

The student should be taught to care for his reeds. Cracking a reed is wasteful and almost totally unnecessary. A great many reeds are cracked as a result of striking the teeth as the oboe is placed in the mouth. Others are split by being brushed against the clothing near the left shoulder as the player lifts the instrument

to see what his fingers are doing. Still others are broken simply by rough handling.

As a reed becomes older it tends to become thicker due to the formation of deposits on both the inside and outside surfaces. The outside can be scraped lightly from time to time as necessary. The inside can be cleaned by working a chicken or pigeon feather back and forth through the reed (from the cork end) while the tip is submerged in water. The teacher should insist that girls remove their lipstick before playing. Lipstick stops up the pores of the cane and has an extremely adverse effect on reeds.

The Player

Although some teachers start beginners on the oboe immediately, in most cases it is probably a better policy to transfer a student who has studied clarinet for a year or so. Such a procedure gives the instructor an opportunity to observe the student and to determine whether or not he has sufficient talent, patience, and persistence. It is thereby possible to avoid tying up an expensive instrument for a semester or more with a student whose chances of success are slight.

Although the dental and facial characteristics of the prospective student are probably of less importance on oboe than on flute or on the upper brasses, regular, even teeth are always desirable and a protruding jaw is likely to be a handicap. Lips of average thickness will usually prove to be most suitable, while extremely thick or thin lips may cause difficulties. A very thin lower lip, in particular, is a potential source of trouble, and the student whose upper gums show prominently when he grins is likely to have difficulty in bringing his upper lip sufficiently over the teeth.

Strong, well-coordinated fingers are a definite advantage, and good manual dexterity is a distinct asset. However, it should be remembered that all of these remarks concerning physical features concern general tendencies, and general tendencies cannot be applied

without reservations to individual cases. Many well-known players do not possess the physical characteristics usually sought in beginners on their instruments. By far the most important attributes of a beginning oboist are a good ear, above-average intelligence, and exceptional musical talent.

It is also advantageous if the personality of the prospective player is suited to the role of the instrument. As an oboist, the child who is an extreme introvert is likely to cause his band and orchestra directors considerable grief. Perseverance is another important requirement, as is the willingness to work hard. The oboe is not for the careless or indifferent student.

Performance Techniques

Embouchure and Tone Production

The oboe embouchure can be described fairly simply. The student has merely to drop his jaw, place the reed on the lower lip, and then close his mouth, rolling the lips and reed inward sufficiently so that the lips cushion the reed from the teeth. Both lips must cover the teeth, but it is important to avoid any trace of biting. The lips serve merely to support the reed and control the vibration. The pressure on the reed should be the same from all directions; there should be no more from the top and bottom than from the sides. The embouchure should be relaxed and the throat should be open. There must be no air pockets in the cheeks or between the lips and gums.

The oboe embouchure is essentially different from the clarinet embouchure in that the lips should not be drawn back in a smiling position. Instead, the lips are puckered or focused about the reed like a stretched rubber band or like the drawstring on a pouch. This can be a source of difficulty with oboists who have transferred from clarinet.

The chin must be held flat and down. In this respect, the oboe and clarinet embouchures are similar. The chin should also be drawn back somewhat. A slight overbite is normal on the oboe. With the lips of average thickness, little or none of the red portion, particularly the lower lip, will be seen on the outside. However, if the lips are turned in too much, the tone will tend to be shrill and uncontrolled and the student will tend to tire easily.

The amount of reed that should be taken into the mouth depends upon the thickness of the lips. With thick lips there may be as little as one-sixteenth of an inch protruding inside the mouth, while with thin lips there may be as much as one-fourth of an inch. Due to the overbite inherent in the oboe embouchure, more of the upper blade than the lower blade will be free to vibrate inside the mouth. It is difficult to generalize concerning the amount of cane that should be seen on the outside, but no more reed than necessary should be taken into the mouth. The best way to determine the correct amount of reed to be inserted into the mouth is to experiment and find the point at which the student produces the best tone quality.

Before placing the reed on the instrument, the beginner should try to “crow” or “buzz” on the reed alone. This crow should not be a single high-pitched sound, but should be a raucous medley of many different pitches. Usually the beginner will not blow sufficiently hard and will bite the reed too tightly.

Although the oboist should work continuously to build up endurance, the beginner must often rest since his lips will tire very easily. Failure to rest sufficiently is likely to result in faulty embouchure habits. The pressure of normal playing tends to force the lips outward and cause the player to bite and pinch. At the same time, the tip of the reed is left more and more exposed. As a result, the tone begins to suffer and the player has less and less control over pitch and dynamics.

Three common faults that the instructor must constantly guard against in the embouchures of school oboe players are (1) tightness, pinching, and biting; (2) the tendency to smile; and (3) failure to keep the throat sufficiently open.

The embouchure remains basically the same regardless of register or dynamic level, although for high tones it is often helpful to direct the breath higher along the roof of the mouth. Dynamic contrast is achieved largely by varying the amount of breath used, but the support behind the breath must be constant and should never be relaxed. In playing *pianissimo* the reed may be cushioned by pursing and contracting the lips, thereby bringing more lip surface in contact with the reed. This tends to dampen some of the vibrations of the reed and thus to soften the tone. It is also helpful to drop the jaw somewhat more while playing in the low register. However, this is possible only to a limited extent because the oboe already tends to be flat in the low register and dropping the jaw will serve to make it still flatter.

It is best to begin with the tones G, A, and B in the staff. The student should be able to finger these tones and produce a good sound before he is shown the notation for them and before he is forced to concentrate on time values. Occasionally, the use of a book is postponed for several lessons. The introduction of the second octave should not come until the student has achieved reasonably good control in the first octave and is able to produce a good oboe tone. The practice of long tones is absolutely essential at this stage of the oboist's career. Most bad habits are caused by doing something too fast or too soon.

The most important single element of musical performance is tone. It is extremely important that the beginner develop as early as possible a proper mental concept of what an oboe should sound like. If possible, this should be done by listening to a fine oboe player, though sometimes a fellow student or a recording must suffice. A poor example is worse than none. A vibrant, singing tone quality with a definite core or center

should be the ultimate goal. Nasality and harshness should be avoided in favor of clarity and refinement. It is also necessary that the tone be capable of blending satisfactorily with the other instruments of the band or orchestra.

Position and Posture

While being played, the oboe is supported by the embouchure and by the right thumb, which meets the thumb rest between the base of the nail and the first joint. The thumb rest should not fall below the first joint. The angle at which the instrument should be held away from the body depends upon the extent of the player's natural overbite, but in most cases it will be between 30 degrees and 45 degrees. The position of the hands should be as natural and comfortable as possible. The fingers should not be perpendicular to the instrument, but should be held at a slight angle, as in the case of the clarinet.

It is important to remember that the keys of the woodwind instruments are built to fit the hands and, therefore, the hands need not be cramped or forced into unnatural positions in order to cover the keys. The fingers of the oboist should be gently curved and should rest lightly upon the keys. The right little finger, when not in use, should rest on the C key and the left little finger on the D# key. The right forefinger should touch the G# key lightly near the second joint, and the first finger of the left hand should rest gently against the side octave key near the second joint. There should be no excess tension in the fingers.

The six fingers used to cover the basic tone holes should never be raised more than one-half inch. The little fingers should not be raised from the keys at all except to move from key to another. Raising the fingers too high and allowing the fingers to bend inward at the first joint are probably the two most common faults of hand position found in school oboists. Both are habits that must be corrected sooner or later if the student is to acquire adequate and fluent technique.

The left thumb should rest lightly under the instrument just below the octave key. It does not help support the oboe. The function of holding the instrument must be kept entirely separate from the function of closing the keys.

When held in playing position, the oboe should not be allowed to rest on the player's knee. If the instrument is too large to be handled comfortably, the student may use



a neck strap. On many oboes a hook for a neck strap will be found behind the thumb rest, and a number of professional players use neck straps. The use of a strap relieves one of the feeling that the instrument is about to jump out of his hands.

The beginner should do at least some of his practicing standing up. Whether sitting or standing, the oboist should be very careful about hand position and posture. The director must make certain that the student's back is straight. The wind player's posture from the hips up must be the same whether he is standing or seated. The only difference between the two positions is that when the oboist is seated, his knees and hips are bent.

Breathing and Breath Support

Proper breath support and correct breathing habits are essential for successful performance on any wind instrument, but, due to the fact that the oboe responds so readily to any change in the air stream, these factors are particularly important to the oboist. It is well known that the process of inhalation consists of contracting the diaphragm, that dome-shaped muscle which separates the chest cavity from the abdomen, and causing it to flatten slightly, thereby allowing the lungs to expand. Air flows into the lungs due to the difference in pressure inside and out. The player exhales by allowing the diaphragm to relax and return to its original position, thus forcing air out of the lungs. However, the mere relaxation of the diaphragm does not provide sufficient support to maintain the constant flow of air necessary in the playing of wind instruments. The player must supplement the action of the diaphragm by utilizing the muscles of the abdomen to control the flow of air necessary in the playing of wind instruments. The player must supplement the action of the diaphragm by utilizing the muscles of the abdomen to control the flow of air from the lungs. Good posture is important in playing wind instruments because the abdominal muscles cannot function properly when they are subjected to undue tension. They must be in a state of equilibrium in order to function as they should.

The student must learn to inhale from the diaphragm and not from the upper extremity of the chest cavity. The shoulders should not be raised in taking a breath. This motion contributes nothing whatever and serves to distract attention from the action of the diaphragm. The abdominal muscles should be firm in exhaling, and the ribs should not collapse. These muscles are functional and are developed and strengthened only through use.

There is a great deal of confusion among wind players and singers concerning the subject of breathing, and a great many very peculiar theories are expressed from time to time. Some aspects of the breathing process are difficult to explain clearly to the youngster. For this reason it is often wise to avoid going into a detailed technical discussion of breathing with the beginner, especially if he is having no particular problem. He can, of course, understand what it means to “pant like a dog,” and he can see what muscles he is using in the process. The oboist should have a feeling of blowing through the instrument and not merely into it.

A word of caution might be appropriate at this point concerning the amount of breath necessary to play the oboe. Due to the small size of the oboe aperture, the instrument requires less breath than most of the other wind instruments. It requires, of course, a great amount of breath support, but the actual volume of air that passes through the oboe is relatively small. Therefore, the oboist is very often faced with the problem of getting rid of the excess air already in his lungs before he can take a fresh supply. When the director instructs the group to “breathe deeply,” the oboist may take this advice less literally than the flutist or the tuba player.

Attack and Release

When the beginning oboist is producing his first tones, the teacher ought not complicate the matter unnecessarily by insisting that he begin each tone with his tongue. The second lesson is quite soon enough to take up the problem of articulation. At this stage it is

often sufficient to tell the student to begin the tone by saying the syllable “tee.”

Despite the fact that the size and shape of the oral cavity differ from one individual to another and even fine oboe players differ somewhat in their methods of tonguing, there are a few general statements that may be made concerning the process of starting the tone. First, the student should place the tip of the tongue lightly against the tip of the reed. Second, he should blow. No sound will be produced, of course, because the tongue is still in contact with the reed, but it is essential that the breath support be present before the tongue is withdrawn. Third, the student should draw the tongue back and down quickly, as though saying “tee” or “tah.” This action is similar to that used to expel a small foreign particle from the tip of the tongue.

Some players prefer to articulate by placing the tip of the tongue just under the tip of the reed. Some prefer to twist the reed slightly and tongue in the lower corner.

In playing rapid passages, the tongue should be as relaxed as possible, and it should move no further than necessary. A “thu” or “tha” attack is usually caused by using too much tongue or by not moving the tongue away from the reed rapidly enough.

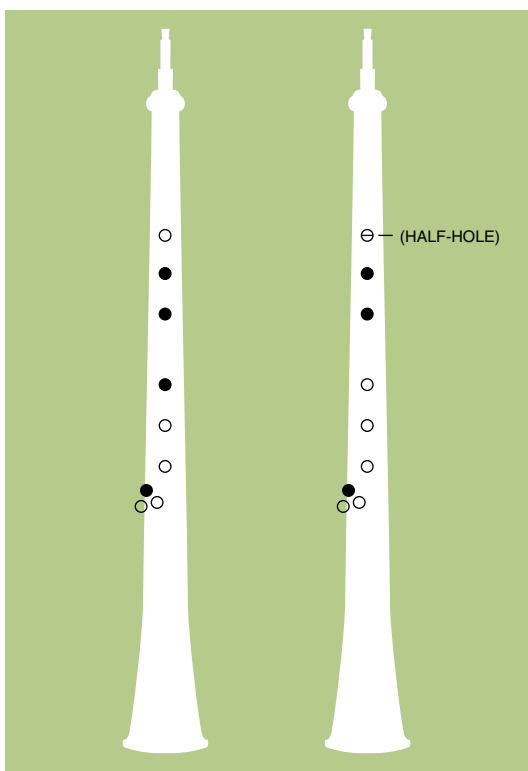
Staccato does not mean short; it means detached. Staccato concerns only the release of the tone and has nothing to do with the attack. The student should be taught to tongue without accenting. The approach of the teacher at the beginning should be essentially a legato approach.

Each tone should be released by stopping the breath or by starting the next tone. The listener must never be permitted to hear the sound of the tongue returning to the reed. The beginner should be cautioned against relaxing the embouchure before the tone has completely died away. If the embouchure relaxes before the tone stops, the result is the disagreeable sag in pitch so common in the releases of young players.

Double-and triple-tonguing are possible on the oboe, but are not practical for most players. The average school oboist is better advised to spend his time working on rapid single tonguing than on multiple tonguing.

Intonation

The low register of the oboe, approximately from the D_b down, tends to be flat in pitch. This is a characteristic of the instrument. All other pitch tendencies are considerably less reliable. The high C# and D are usually played sharp, but this is ordinarily due to excessive biting of the reed and is not a characteristic of the instrument. These tones can be played in tune without biting the reed if adequate breath support is used. The following fingerings are recommended (notice that no octave key is used):



The B \flat , B \natural , and C in the staff, as well as the same tones an octave higher, may be either flat or sharp, since they are especially vulnerable to any inconsistency in embouchure. More often they are sharp, due to faulty embouchure habits. The pitch of these tones can be adjusted somewhat by regulating the height of the pads. If the B \flat is sharp, for example, the small pad between the second and third fingers of the left hand should be set so that it does not open quite so far. This work is best done by an experienced oboe repairman.

The forked F is likely to be both flat and stuffy, especially in the second octave, and particularly if the oboe does not have an F resonance key. Both of these difficulties may be corrected, at least partially, by adding the D \sharp key.

If the oboist is sharp, he can pull his reed out slightly. This, of course, creates a sharp discontinuity between the staple (the brass tube on which the cane is fastened) and the bore of the upper joint, and is not satisfactory as a longer-term solution. It is possible to insert a piece cut from the bottom of another staple to smooth this gap, but a better solution is for the player to make his reeds a little longer. The reed should be made to play in tune when pushed all the way in. Lengthening the lay will also tend to lower the pitch.

If the oboist is consistently flat, he can trim or narrow the reed. He can also cut off a portion of the staple at the bottom, but this is not entirely satisfactory. Inserting the reed farther into the mouth will likewise raise the pitch.

The shape of the oral cavity affects pitch as well as quality. Forming the mouth as though pronouncing the vowel sound “ee” will tend to raise the pitch, while the “oo” formation will tend to lower it. The oboist can always humor the pitch up or down within certain limits with the embouchure, but beyond these limits the quality begins to suffer.

The oboe, like other wind instruments, can never be built so that it will play perfectly in tune. Eventually, the

responsibility for the pitch of the instrument falls entirely on the player. The importance of slow, careful practice cannot be overemphasized.

Vibrato

A pleasing vibrato is a necessary component of a good oboe tone. The vibrato should be unobtrusive and should be an essential part of the tone rather than something superimposed upon it as an afterthought. With some students the vibrato will come naturally, and the teacher need do nothing more than ask the pupil to “make the tone sing.” With other students a demonstration by the teacher will be sufficient. The majority, however, will need more concrete and specific instruction. Vibrato should be taught as soon as the pupil’s embouchure is established and he can produce a good sound. The vibrato produced by the diaphragm or the breath is usually the most satisfactory, although some oboists produce good results using a jaw vibrato. The practice of constricting the flow of air in the throat tends to have an adverse effect on tone quality and is not recommended.

The vibrato should be practiced very slowly at first, with the student blowing “louder and then softer” at a speed of about 88 pulses per minute. Over a period of several weeks or months the speed should be increased gradually until the student is able to play four pulses to each beat with the metronome set at 88. At each stage the rate of the pulses must be exactly even and the extent of the pulses must be equal.

Technique

Except for the motion of the tongue, there should be no movement of the embouchure while playing. The admonition “hold still” is as appropriate and as important today as when H.A. VanderCook informally adopted it as a motto for his students. The fingers should move from the knuckles, and there should be

only a minimum amount of motion at the wrists. Any excessive motion is likely to be communicated to the embouchure. Although the fingers must move quickly, accurately, and decisively, the finger pressure must be light. If it is too heavy the balance of the instrument will depend upon the number of fingers down, and a smooth legato will be impossible. The first finger of the left hand should slide or roll to the half-hole and back with a minimum amount of motion. The octave keys should be manipulated with as little movement as necessary. Fluent technique is a result of good hand position and slow practice.

Despite the fact that with the semi-automatic octave key mechanism the first vent hole closes automatically when the second one is opened, the student should be taught to release the thumb octave key when the second one is opened, the student should be taught to release the thumb octave key when the side octave key is depressed and not to use the two octave keys together. The fewer keys that are required to produce a given tone the better coordinated the student's fingers are likely to be. In slurring from the low register to the high register, the player is more likely to break a smooth legato line if he has two octave keys to depress than if he has only one.

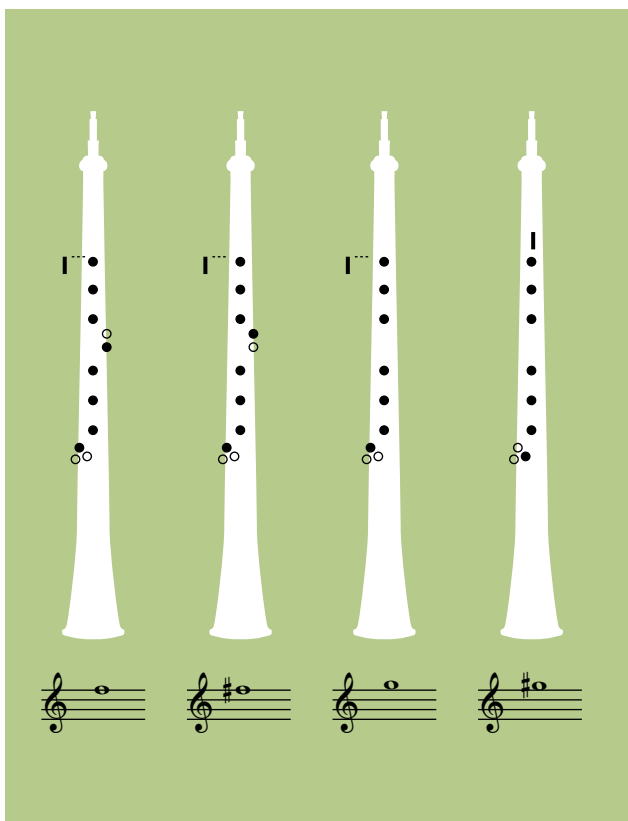
Although F is normally played by means of the F key, whenever it precedes or follows D or any other tone requiring the third finger of the right hand the F should be played with the first and third fingers. This is referred to as the "forked F" and is an essential part of oboe technique.

As every instrumental teacher knows, three of the keys played by the right little finger on the clarinet are duplicated for the left little finger in order to avoid sliding the finger between adjacent keys. The D# on the oboe is similarly duplicated, and whenever D# precedes or follows C# or low C the D# should be played on the left side. The teacher should be certain that the student is using the forked F and the left-hand D# where necessary.

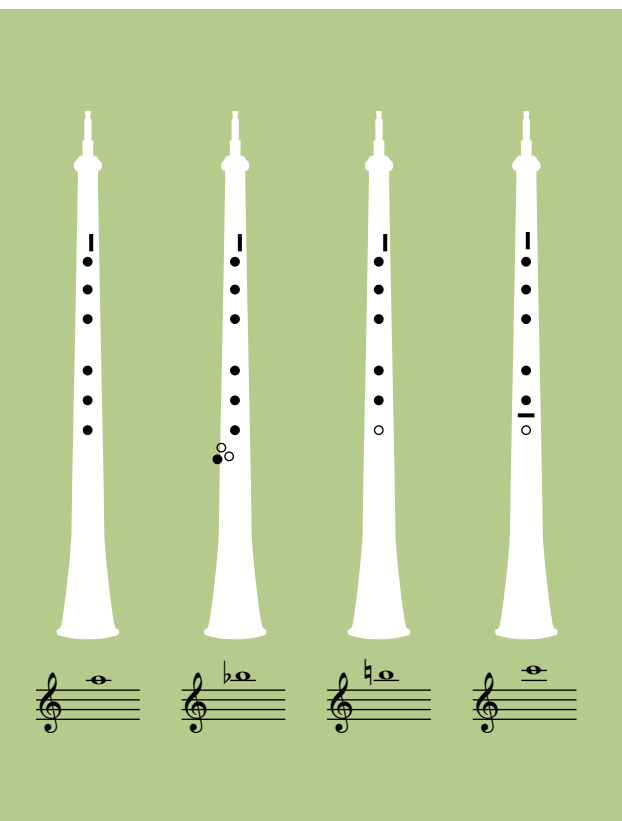
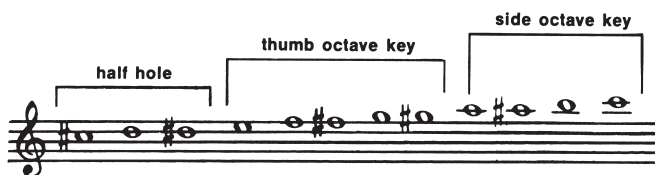
There are eight harmonic tones available on the oboe. These tones, with their respective fingerings, are given below.

In each case, the fingering is simply that of the tone a twelfth lower, with the addition of one of the octave keys. These harmonics are produced as the third partials of their respective fundamentals, and the tone quality tends to be softer, more “covered,” and more stable than if the same pitches were played with the conventional fingerings. Harmonics from G# through C are not available on oboes with automatic octave keys.

As has been mentioned earlier, the thumb octave key is used for fourth-space E through G# and the side octave



key is used for A through C above the staff. The C#, D, and D# in the staff are played with the half-hole. This means that the small vent hole for the left forefinger must be open while the plate itself is closed. This vent hole acts as an additional octave key. Students often tend to be careless about the use of the half-hole and the octave keys, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to correct such inaccuracies.



English horn technique is basically the same as oboe technique. Since the English horn reed is larger, it is necessary that the player take more reed in his mouth. The embouchure must be relaxed, and it is particularly important that the player maintain an open throat. On the English horn, the G# just above the staff is usually played with the side octave key.

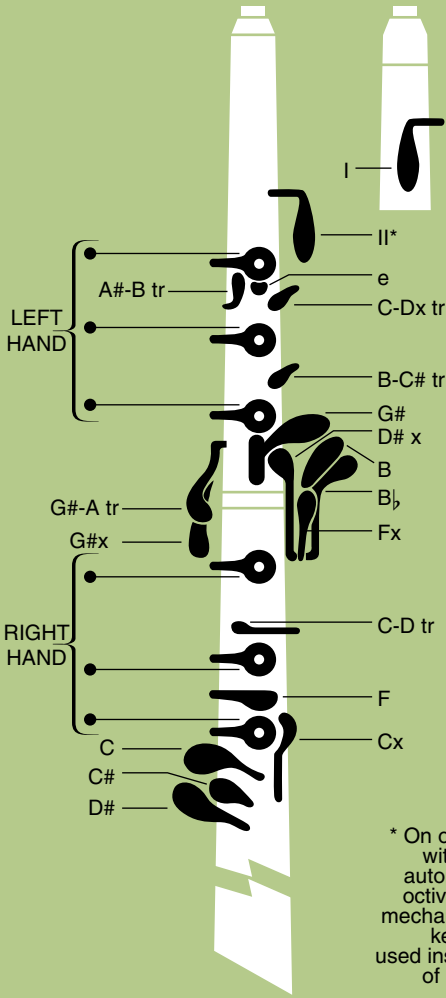
Conclusion

Every student should be encouraged to play solos with piano and to play in ensembles. Such training is extremely beneficial to any instrumentalist. A tremendous amount of solo and ensemble literature is available for the oboe, and the instructor should do everything he can to promote an active and vigorous program within his school.

The importance of regular practice of scales and arpeggios in all keys cannot be overemphasized. The instructor should be certain that the student is familiar with both the major and the minor scales and chords.

Playing the oboe, like everything else, may be done well or it may be done badly. If it is not done well, the fault may lie more with the teacher than with the student. In today's schools there is certainly no time to be wasted doing things badly. Such a program cannot expect to be permitted to remain long in the curriculum.

On the other hand, if the instrument is approached carefully and with sincerity of purpose by the student and teacher alike, playing the oboe can be a source of enjoyment and gratification to the individual throughout his life. The beginning stages are of crucial importance. If, as a result of the meticulous and patient instruction of his teacher, the student acquires a positive and constructive attitude toward his instrument and toward music, he will have come a long way toward surmounting the numerous and often difficult problems that will confront him throughout his playing career.



Notes

Notes

Oboe Fingering Chart

① Used when preceded or followed by D_b

② Used when preceded or followed by D_b or low C

⑥ Used when preceded or followed by D_b

⑦ Used (on oboes lacking the Fx key) when preceded or followed by D, D_b, or E_b

⑧ D# or D#x key may be added to improve pitch or quality

⑨ ⑩ ⑪
⑫ ⑬

⑬ Open-hole models only

⑮ ⑯ ⑰ Harmonic fingering; not available on oboes with automatic octave key

⑱ Used when slurring to or from D_b an octave lower

⑲ Used when preceded or followed by the second fingering given for D_b

NOTE: The first fingering given is the usual fingering unless otherwise noted. The sign \ominus indicates the half-hole.

- ③ Used (on oboes lacking the Fx key) when preceded or followed by D, D \flat , E \flat , or low C, B, or B \flat
- ④ D \sharp or D \sharp x key may be added to improve pitch or quality
- ⑤ Open-hole models only

Harmonic fingering

Harmonic fingering; not available on oboes with automatic octave key

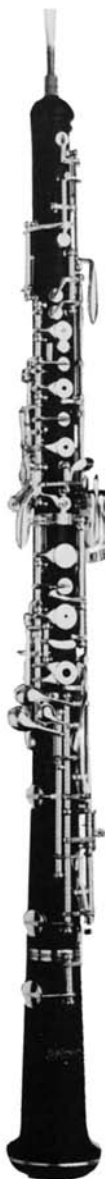
- ⑲ Used when preceded or followed by the first fingering given for E \flat ; addition of B key is optional
- ⑳ Used when preceded or followed by D
- ㉑ Addition of B key is optional
- ㉒ G \sharp key may be omitted on oboes with semi-automatic octave key

① ② Addition of D# or D#x key is optional

⑦ Occasionally, octave key I will give better results than the half-hole

⑬ Plateau models only

Selmer (USA) Oboes



104B Selmer (USA) Resonite® - High-impact plastic body. Full conservatory system - range to low B \flat , fork F resonance, A \flat -B \flat trill, G \sharp -A trill, double ring D \sharp -E and left hand C-D trill, auxiliary C, plus double ring B-C \sharp trill and left hand F.

101 Selmer (USA) - Same as 104, but with grenadilla body.

121 Selmer (USA) - Grenadilla body. Full conservatory system - range to low B \flat , fork F resonance, A \flat -B \flat trill, G \sharp -A trill, double ring D \sharp -E and left hand C-D trills, auxiliary C. Black wood shell case.

120B Selmer (USA) Resonite® - Same as 121, but with high-impact plastic body.

122F Selmer (USA) - Grenadilla body. Modified conservatory system - range to low B \flat , fork F resonance. A \flat -B \flat and left hand C-D trills.

123FB Selmer (USA) Resonite® - Same as 122F, but with high-impact plastic body.

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