

# The Clarinet

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# ANTHONY MCGILL

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# Pedagogy Corner

by Phillip O. Paglialonga

## HELPING DAPHNIS AND CHLOE RECONCILE

**F**ew orchestral excerpts elicit as much fear in clarinetists as the passages from Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloe*. Indeed, both the opening and closing sections of the *Second Suite* provide technical issues that take careful thought and practice to master.

In this article I would like to focus on the opening of the second suite, specifically the passage found between rehearsal numbers 155 and 158. This passage depicts a sunrise and is often used in auditions to demonstrate effortless technique and control of the instrument. The following step-by-step process is what I suggest my students use to master this excerpt.

### STEP ONE: LONG TONE WARM-UP

The first thing I always suggest to people wanting to refine this excerpt is to begin using this passage as a long tone warm-up each day. Simply play the excerpt several times, extremely slowly, to begin each of your practice sessions. Take care to play at the printed dynamic, and in a true *cantabile* manner. Make the legato seamless and always strive to make the most beautiful sound possible. Play extremely slowly and be sure not to make any note mistakes.

Also spend time each day playing each bar slowly in reverse. I find practicing difficult passages such as this in reverse can help solidify the technique and build more security.

The longer period of time you are able to use this as a long tone warm-up the better, ideally doing this daily over the course of several months.

### STEP TWO: ISOLATE EACH INTERVAL

Next, turn your attention to the evenness of the sound. Start by alternating the first two notes (G–E $\flat$ ) slowly, and listening closely to how the two tones relate to each other. Try to notice which tone is naturally more full and resonant. Then, try to create more resonance in the less resonant tone so the two completely match. This will likely involve blowing or voicing slightly differently on the less resonant tone. Always equalize the two notes by increasing the resonance in the less resonant tone, rather than dulling the more resonant tone.

When you feel the first interval is well matched, move on to the next interval (E $\flat$ –F). Work through each subsequent

interval the same way until you have played through all of the intervals in the passage. Though simple, this exercise will help you homogenize the sound, which will help your end product be both smoother and warmer.

### STEP THREE: DAPHNIS AND CHLOE ETUDE

After they spend a few days just practicing the first two steps, I generally will have students practice a simple etude I wrote. I was inspired to write this etude after practicing some of the work of Eugene Gay,<sup>1</sup> which I found particularly helpful in building effortless technique and concentration.

This etude starts with the now familiar long-tone version of this passage, then

The image shows musical notation for 'Example 1'. It consists of two systems of three staves each, labeled A, B, and C. The first system starts with a 'slowly' tempo marking and a '1' above the first staff. It features a long-tone exercise with notes G, E-flat, and F. The second system starts with an 'a tempo' marking and a '2' above the first staff. The third system starts with a 'slowly' tempo marking and a '3' above the first staff. The fourth system starts with an 'a tempo' marking and an 'A' above the first staff. The notation includes dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*, and articulation like slurs and accents.

Example 1

the music splits into three lines (A-B-C). First decide a random order, say B-A-C, in which you will perform these three lines (see *Example 1*). So, for this pattern, you would play: 1 - B - 1 - A - 1 - C, 2 - B - 2 - A - 2 - C and so forth. Start by choosing a somewhat slow tempo for the *a tempo* sections, being sure that it is played with absolute precision, then, gradually increase the tempo of this section as your ease increases.

Also practice this in other varied patterns, such as: 1 - B - 2 - C - 3 - A. By varying the order each time you practice this exercise you will also develop your concentration.

#### STEP FOUR: PRECISE BEGINNINGS AND TAPERED ENDINGS

Once you have the notes securely under your fingers, one of the most difficult aspects becomes how you begin the initial tone of each entrance. Too often, the first note speaks late or with an accent. To prevent this, practice initiating the tone by playing just the first two or three notes. Fully form your embouchure before you begin to play, and try to start the air before the tongue releases.

Next, practice the endings of each passage where the flutes enter. Try to hand-off the line to the flutes mentally by creating the same type of tone they will enter with. Be absolutely sure you do not place an accent on the last note, or play the last note too loudly.

#### STEP FIVE: VARIOUS GROUPINGS

Finally, practice the passage in a variety of mental note groupings, being sure that in each variation it is absolutely even.

- 1 4+4+4
- 2 6+6
- 3 1+2+2+2+5

Think of these groupings of notes, but try not to show the grouping in any way to the listener.

#### The Left-Hand D $\flat$ Key

One of the issues you will quickly discover practicing this excerpt is that the left-hand D $\flat$  key in the first measure is often not depressed in time. An old trick used to avoid this problem is to wedge an old reed under the mechanism so that the key

### Helping Daphnis & Chloe Reconcile Phillip O. Paglialonga

Molto lento e dolce

*pp sempre*

come prima

stays depressed automatically. Though this technique is effective, I am not too fond of it as it gives you an additional item to worry about at an audition. Instead of focusing on playing and remaining calm, you have to make sure you have your old reed with you in order to play this excerpt. Instead, I suggest practicing this passage while keeping the left hand D $\flat$  key depressed the entire time with the left pinky. Not only does this resolve this issue, but it also provides an anchor to secure your hand position as you play this passage.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

It is important to realize that although you must work through a variety of technical exercises to get this passage absolutely clean, when playing this in context there is a certain amount of flexibility. For this reason, I suggest practicing the entire passage with several different recordings to feel the elasticity of the line.

It can also be helpful to practice in an exaggerated *bel canto* style with an excessive use of rubato. This sort of practice will help prevent the end product from feeling metronomic or stilted.



This passage will always be difficult, but spending some time practicing it in various ways can really improve your performance. ❖

**ENDNOTES**

1 The book I find most interesting and helpful is his *Etudes-Recapitulation de technique journaliere* (Leduc). I would recommend it highly to any serious clarinetist.



*Texas and pedagogy coordinator for the International Clarinet Association. His book, Squeak Big: Practical Fundamentals for the Successful Clarinetist, has garnered significant praise from leading clarinetists around the world. More information about him is available online at www.SqueakBig.com.*

**ABOUT THE WRITER**

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**ICA ANNOUNCEMENT**

**2022 Young Artist Competition**

**Coordinator:** Diane Barger – [presidentelect@clarinet.org](mailto:presidentelect@clarinet.org)

**Application Deadline:**  
**Sunday, April 1, 2022**

**Repertoire:**

- *Sonatine* for clarinet and piano – Valerie Coleman
- *Chromatic Fantasy* for solo clarinet – J.S. Bach (edited by Stanley Hasty)
- *Sonata in E♭ Major, Op. 120, No. 2*, for clarinet and piano (all movements) – Johannes Brahms

**Prizes:**

**First prize** – \$2500 USD and a professional clarinet to be announced.

The ICA will also present the first prize winner in a performance on the evening orchestra concert at its 2023 conference.

**Second prize** – \$1000 USD

**Third prize** – \$500 USD

Visit [www.clarinet.org](http://www.clarinet.org) for full competition rules and application details.

**ICA ANNOUNCEMENT**

**2022 Research Competition**

**CALL FOR PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS**  
**ClarinetFest® 2022**  
**Reno/Lake Tahoe, Nevada, USA**

**Coordinator:** Jane Ellsworth ([jellsworth@ewu.edu](mailto:jellsworth@ewu.edu))

**Deadline: January 15, 2022**

The ICA solicits proposals for research presentations (such as papers or lecture-recitals) on any topic related to the clarinet.

**Prizes:**

First place – \$1000 USD and

publication in *The Clarinet* journal  
Second place – \$500 USD

Visit [www.clarinet.org](http://www.clarinet.org) for full competition rules and application details.