

The Clarinet

Vol. 48 • No. 4
September 2021



INTERNATIONAL
CLARINET
ASSOCIATION



Elsa LUDEWIG- VERDEHR

Brazilian Elements in the Copland *Concerto*
Clarinet Works of John Mayer
The Clarinet in Hungary Part 2
Marks Music

Pedagogy Corner

by Phillip O. Paglialonga

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE DIFFICULT TIMES AHEAD

September is a time for new beginnings for many of us. The start of a new school year after the summer months brings a spirit of optimism and enthusiasm. Even for those of us who are not somehow connected with a school, this time usually bestows a certain energy.

In large part because of my position at the University of North Texas, I see a number of people throughout the year who are either considering pursuing some sort of graduate degree after some time off or who have been out of school for a time wanting some fresh input. I find it interesting how many people in

this situation tell me that they feel lost or that they are having doubts about even continuing their quest for a job as a clarinetist. Invariably, I ask a lot of questions in these situations and try my best to help however I can. After seeing this scenario play out again and again, I began to reflect on what I could do to prepare my students for this day that so many of them may face.

One of my strong convictions as a teacher is that my job is to prepare students for the world they will encounter and not to try to force them to recreate my own path. Furthermore, I think it is always better to be a good teacher for

tomorrow, instead of for today.

I remember vividly being a high schooler and announcing to my family and friends my desire to pursue a career as a clarinetist. Nearly every person, without fail, told me about how difficult this path would be and how so few would ever earn a living. In my youthful arrogance, I think that I brushed it off and thought only of the accolades that had gotten me to that point.

In hindsight, I do not think I understood what was so difficult about this path I was embarking upon. I thought the difficulty was learning how to play in tune, or perhaps how to cleanly execute *Daphnis and Chloe* under pressure. And though I do think it takes a considerable amount of work to master any of these technical feats, the more I watch young clarinetists, the more I realize that most people who want to perfect these skills can if they stick with it long enough.

In my mind the biggest hurdle facing those wanting a career as a clarinetist is finding the will to keep pursuing it. In the wonderful podcast “That’s Not Spit, It’s Condensation,” one guest referred to this as the “war of attrition.”

Now, before I go any further, I should point out that I think that a lot of people start down one path, but later discover a route that suits them better. I think this is wonderful, and nothing gives me more joy than when one of my students finds their true passion.

Indeed, in my studio I try to instill the value that we all can be successful and that



Yamileth Perez

To help stay motivated I listen to music and watch operas. Sometimes, we are so involved at work and with issues at home that we get burnt out and forget to make a special time for simply listening to good music.

– Yamileth Perez, Universidad de Costa Rica

In my teaching and my own practicing I always attempt to focus on the process and not the end result. This means focusing on things one can control (daily practice, work ethic, meeting short-term goals) and deemphasizing things one cannot control (audition results, other people’s opinions). I think this method builds resilience but still allows us to be honest about the challenges of the music world (and life), rather than resorting to sugarcoating or wishful thinking.

– Peter Cain, National Symphony Orchestra (Washington, D.C.)



Peter Cain

My job is to prepare students for the world they will encounter and not to try to force them to recreate my own path.

we should celebrate each other's success. Furthermore, I would like to think that if you can play basketball as well as Michael Jordan, it is only a matter of time before someone finds you and asks you to play for their team. Though it is difficult to perform at a high level, those who can consistently play exceptionally will find a place eventually.

Teachers and mentors have a responsibility to prepare students to be successful, and that work needs to begin at the start of that journey, not the end.

CREATING HABITS

We are what we do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

– Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*, 1926 (often misattributed to Aristotle)

Most of my friends and colleagues who have found their place in the field have some sort of daily routine that they started in their student days. The exact routine varies from person to person, but in the best cases reinforces one's core approach. My own routine lasts almost exactly an hour and is something I do religiously every day. Rarely does a day pass that I skip my routine. Indeed, even on the day I got married I did my full routine!

The habit of practicing the same basic routine each day helps keep us grounded musically. Creating a habit also eliminates the need to *think* about what must be done, and instead gets us to *do it* immediately.

When I speak to people who are struggling and questioning if they can even be successful, one of the first questions I ask is about their daily routine. More often than not the answer is that they used to have a routine, but got bored with it and decided to change it a little bit. Thus, the routine was never established and days of missed practice sessions ensued.

Consequently, I think it is critical to establish a daily routine that reinforces one's musical values. Though I think at times this

may feel monotonous, it is critical to one's long term success as a musician.

A MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

One exercise I will be doing this fall with my studio will help prepare them to face the difficult days ahead. The exercise is simple, and will seem silly or unnecessary when done at the start of one's journey, but in the darker moments may be the thing that keeps you going.

Get a stack of blank note cards and print the following prompts on one side, and your thoughtful answer on the reverse:

- 1 What do you love about playing the clarinet?
- 2 What would you say to yourself when you don't want to practice?
- 3 When you are frustrated, what do you need to remember?
- 4 What would you say to yourself when you work hard, but still fall short?
- 5 What inspires you to pursue your goals?
- 6 What encouragement would you offer yourself when you are in a particularly bad place?
- 7 Where can you look for inspiration when you sorely need it?
- 8 What would you tell yourself when you feel like you can no longer be successful?
- 9 What encouragement would you give yourself when it seems like everyone around you is successful, but that you keep falling short?
- 10 What would you say to yourself when you aren't even sure what or how to practice anymore?

I think this simple exercise can be a powerful one. Having this deck of notecards tucked away for those dark days



Stephanie Zelnick

What has been amazing to me in this tumultuous time has been the fortitude of our students and their passion for the craft of music and playing the clarinet. Though we have had to make major changes to how we have approached performance and pedagogy over this last year, we have also embraced innovations and new modalities. Through it all, it has become clear that music will survive this pandemic, like we have past historical events, and will emerge even stronger than before.

– Stephanie Zelnick, University of Kansas

Implementing flexible lesson times and encouraging students to learn outside the classroom environment can help students get motivated again. I find that some students learn better away from a rigid lesson schedule, so giving them more flexibility can help them discover their best time to learn. I also encourage students to be more creative by developing other skills, like making a short video clip about teaching or playing clarinet. For others, I find that when they participate in online clarinet masterclasses and competitions their motivation is renewed.

– Yos Vaneesorn, Royal Bangkok Symphony Orchestra and Chulalongkorn University (Thailand)



Yos Vaneesorn

We all can be successful and we should celebrate each other's successes.

can be a helpful reminder of what you need to get back on course.

I would encourage you to create your own deck of cards and to leave several blank cards in the stack. When you have a big victory, accomplish something important, or otherwise are on a high, take the time to add more cards to your stack. You can re-use one of the prompts again, or you can just write yourself a new prompt. Using your clear thinking and enthusiasm to help yourself when you hit your deepest lows is a powerful tool that should not be ignored.

CLEAR, ATTAINABLE GOALS

Clearly defining your professional goals and plotting a path towards improvement is an essential ingredient. I usually try to take inventory of where I am at professionally just before the new school year begins. I look at every facet of what

I do professionally and then try to assess what I do well and in what areas I could improve. I look at every component that is a part of what I do and evaluate it honestly and objectively. I include items like performance, teaching and written scholarship, as well as areas that contribute to what I do like equipment and promotional materials. My hope is to figure out how to best utilize my time in the next year to maximize improvement. Having done this now for over a decade, I can say too that reflecting back on where I was versus where I am now is incredibly encouraging.

I think that it is important to write things down and to reflect carefully and honestly. After a year of pursuing improvement in one area, I take incredible joy when that thing that was a liability for me has become a strength.

For me this sort of approach is essential to continued growth. In my mind each day is an opportunity to make things better than they were before. Real accomplishment is built on tiny improvements that happen incrementally. As long as you move forward, you are guaranteed to get yourself closer to your ultimate goal.

In closing, I would like to say that I chose to write about this topic because I think sometimes we lose sight of the bigger picture. Maybe your goal was never to play the clarinet professionally, or maybe you have found another path along the way that brings you fulfillment. Just remember that the key to achieving your goals is not waiting for you in a practice room. Yes, you should absolutely work on improving your intonation and your technique, but just be careful you are also buttressing yourself for the difficult days ahead. ❖

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Pink, Daniel H. *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York: Riverhead Books. 2009.
 The Bulletproof Musician – www.bulletproofmusician.com
 That's Not Spit, It's Condensation – www.thatsnotspit.com



Michele Gingras

I like to use techniques from self-help/business books such as: *Who Moved my Cheese* by Spencer Johnson. In order to be successful, one must not only adapt to change but *see it coming* so that innovative plans of action can be set in motion well enough in advance. I spend a lot of quality time getting to know each and every student so that their unique backgrounds, interests, skills, talents, and dreams can be just the thing that makes them forge a place in this competitive profession.

– Michele Gingras, Butler University

I encourage students to bring joy into daily practice by keeping the “play” in playing the clarinet similar to the way a child plays with toys. Revisit a favorite solo piece, etude, chamber piece or figure out a popular tune you love and play it! Listen to great players and music that inspires you. Similar to practicing yoga, players must accept where they are with the instrument each day and stay positive in their practice and push forward with small steps. Staying mentally and physically healthy is essential to boosting motivation and success.

– Julianne Kirk Doyle, State University of New York at Potsdam



Julianne Kirk Doyle

ABOUT THE WRITER



Phillip O. Paglialonga is associate professor of clarinet at the University of North Texas and pedagogy coordinator for the International Clarinet Association. More information about him is available online

at www.SqueakBig.com.

Don't miss an issue of *The Clarinet!*
 Renew your membership online at www.clarinet.org