

## Sound Advice By Phillip O. Paglialonga

*Improve your clarinet section's sound with these helpful hints.*

Tone is one of the most important aspects of any clarinetists' musicianship. It won't matter how good your technique or intonation is if your tone quality is poor. A well developed tone will not only help your students stand out amongst their peers but will improve their intonation and projection as well.

There are obviously many factors that play a role in creating a beautiful clarinet sound. However, if one were to single out the most important component it would have to be **air speed**. Generally speaking, the best clarinet sound comes from a fast moving, focused stream of air. However, it is important to underscore the fact that it is the air speed that is critical and not necessarily the volume of air.

Whenever talking about increasing air speed it is important to realize that you really are concerned with two distinct areas: the amount of air being exhaled and the position of the tongue inside of the mouth.

### *Maximizing Air*

As nearly every band director knows, a good inhalation is an essential ingredient to a fine sound. By completely filling the lungs with air on the inhalation one is able to maximize the amount of air available to put through the clarinet upon exhalation.

The most important aspect of proper wind flow is good posture. The best posture comes when we are standing to our maximum height, like a marionette being held up by a string. While seated in a chair one should strive to 'stand while seated' so that the upper body is in the same position as when standing. Then simply bring the clarinet up to the mouth and play the instrument. The clarinet should always come to us instead of having us go to the clarinet.

In addition to using good posture it is also necessary to breathe diaphragmatically rather than simply using chest breathing. The best way to learn to breathe in this manner is to lie flat on your back on the floor. Place one hand on your stomach just below your rib cage and your other hand on your upper chest. Breathe in slowly so that you feel your stomach move outwards towards your hand, while keeping the hand on your chest still. Next play a slow scale on the clarinet while lying in this position being sure to breathe from the diaphragm. After getting used to this sensation return to a normal seated position to play, but strive to breath from the diaphragm.

Another useful exercise to learn how to take a full breath is to completely exhale all the air in your lungs. After doing this hold your breath for a few seconds and then exhale any air that remains before holding the breath again for a few seconds. By this time your body should be demanding that you take a breath. When you do allow yourself to inhale, notice the rush of air into your lungs. This is the feeling of a good breath.

### *Tongue Position*

When playing the clarinet the tongue should remain in a high, relaxed position. On the clarinet it is not necessary to 'voice' every pitch, which actually tends to upset both tone quality and intonation. Instead the air should travel in a consistent, focused stream towards the reed without moving the tongue. (The only exception to this occurs when articulating, where the tip of the tongue lightly interrupts the vibrations of the reed.)

To find the correct tongue position, say 'shh' as though you were telling someone to be quiet. The sound is similar both in terms of quality and consistency to the sound of a large waterfall. When playing the clarinet one should feel simply as though he is saying 'shh' and moving his fingers.

There is a simple test you can perform to see if you are playing with the proper tongue position. Play a middle-C and then without changing anything add the register key followed by the side-A<sup>b</sup> key. If you are playing with the proper tongue position three distinct pitches will sound without any embouchure or tongue alteration (C, G and E). Often times I will have the student play the middle-C while allowing me to add the register key and side-A<sup>b</sup> key for them to ensure no embouchure or tongue manipulation is occurring.

By working on the basics of air flow and tongue position students will find many aspects of playing the clarinet will suddenly become easier. But more importantly the sound they produce will have better tone, intonation and projection.

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