

The Bassoon – looking after the instrument

Correct assembly and dis-assembly of the Bassoon is the most important measure the player can take to protect the instrument.

Assembly

The long keys and levers on a Bassoon are extremely vulnerable, and can easily be bent during assembly. When assembling and dis-assembling the instrument it is important to avoid touching the keys. Ensure the tenons are greased with cork grease before assembly, not only does this make the assembly easier, but because over time the tenons tend to distort from a circle shape to an oval shape, the cork grease helps make the joints air-tight.

1. Assemble the bell and long-joint: hold the bell in your left hand above the Bb key but with your fingers holding the key closed; hold the long-joint with your right hand in the area of the joint locking pin (or around the D key guard); work the two joints together with a twisting motion.
2. Assemble the wing-joint and the bottom-joint: hold the wing-joint in your left hand gripping the "wing"; hold the bottom-joint in your right hand with your thumb and fingers gripping the metal sleeve at the top of the joint; work the wing-joint onto the bottom-joint and match the concave side of the wing-joint so that it follows the curve of the socket for the long-joint.
3. Fit the long-joint into the bottom-joint: rest the bottom-joint on a surface (such as the floor or a chair) holding it vertical with the thumb and fingers of one hand gripping the metal sleeve at the top of the joint; hold the assembled bell and long-joint in your other hand (gripping the metal sleeve of the bell) and push the long-joint down into the bottom-joint until it is fully home and the joint locking pin can be closed (you may need to slightly twist the long joint into position for the joint locking pin to locate properly).
4. Lastly fit the hand rest, insert the crook (align the crook so that when the crook is operated the crook pad will rest on the octave bush on the crook) and fit the reed.

Dis-assembly

When taking the instrument apart keep it upright to prevent water running into the pads. Never lay the assembled instrument down or across your lap - even when resting during a performance.

Reverse the assembly procedure, as follows

1. Remove the reed, crook, and hand-rest.
2. Swab out the crook with a commercial brush cleaner or swab; use a nylon fibre (from a broom) to clean the Octave hole in the crook (never use a pin or needle).
3. Remove the long-joint and the bell in one piece (gripping the metal sleeve of the Bell) and lay them to one side because they do not need to be swabbed out, instead concentrate on keeping the wing-joint and the bottom-joint upright.
4. Separate the wing-joint and the bottom-joint- remembering to keep each joint upright until they have been swabbed out.
5. The wing-joint has a lined bore (but not all the tone-holes may be lined) and to prevent water collecting in the tone-holes it should be swabbed out immediately after playing with an appropriate cloth pulled down from the socket to the tenon.
6. The bottom-joint always has the narrow bore lined and sometimes both bores are lined. After playing, it is important to tip out any water that has gathered in the "U tube" at the bottom of the joint. If only the narrow bore is lined, then tip the water out holding the joint so that the water runs along the side of lined bore (avoiding the tone-holes); if both bores are lined it is better to tip the water out along the wider bore (again along the side avoiding the tone-holes). Use a swabbing (wooden) rod to finally swab out the narrow bore.
7. Now separate the long-joint and the Bell and pack them away in the case

Provided the Bassoon is correctly assembled and disassembled, it is best to pack the instrument away after each playing session rather than leave it propped in a corner, this is for two reasons. Firstly, unlike other woodwinds, a Bassoon cannot be left to "air" – it will not drain properly - it is necessary to get rid of the water that has collected in the bore, particularly in the "U tube". Secondly, again unlike other woodwind instruments, Bassoons are made from Maple. Maple is a relatively soft wood that distorts easily; this distortion occurs mainly at the tenon/socket joints– it is therefore more important that the cork on the tenons retains its "springiness" to help form an airtight seal. If the Bassoon is left assembled then the corks lose their springiness.

Warming up the instrument

It is impossible to warm up the instrument the same way as other woodwind instruments can be warmed up; instead just warm up the crook – hold it in your hands for a couple of minutes until it is warm, **do not warm the crook by blowing into it** – this will just cause condensation problems as well as initially distorting the tuning.

The instrument case

An instrument case that holds the Bassoon snugly is essential. The keys will be bent if the instrument can move in the case while being carried. Do not lock the long-joint and short-joints together when they are in the case (unless you absolutely have to due to the design of the case) - if the case is dropped the joint lock is likely to break from one or other of the joints. Cork grease, cleaning rods, and swabs are required to be kept in the case; nothing else should be kept in the case unless there is a specific compartment for it.

Maintenance, repair, and servicing

Occasionally oil the mechanism using instrument oil in a needle dispenser. If dust or fluff does gather on the instrument brush it away with a shaving brush.

The instrument should be serviced regularly to ensure it is operating correctly. The pads, corks, and felts on the instrument (and also the adhesives which keeps these items in place) deteriorate over time. On older or poorer quality instruments the mechanism itself starts to wear and keys can become loose or jammed. Usually such deterioration is gradual and the player subconsciously compensates by blowing harder and pressing harder on the keys. Without servicing the deterioration continues until something major goes wrong and the instrument becomes unplayable and in need of considerable repair.

Bassoons are particularly prone to leaking pads especially on the bottom joint. Unique to Bassoons are "compound tone-holes" where one pad is covering more than one hole - these pads need regular checking by a repairer. Also, whereas other wooden woodwind instruments are made of very dense and stable Rosewoods (such as African Blackwood) Bassoons are made of much softer Maple that is vulnerable to water damage and is a lot less stable.

Players often blame themselves for the poor sound they produce when actually the instrument is at fault.