

The Clarinet – looking after the instrument

Routine care and maintenance

Before playing:

- Warm up the instrument by holding the barrel in one hand and the top-joint in the other hand for 4 or 5 minutes, **do not warm the instrument by blowing into it** – this will just cause condensation problems as well as initially distorting the tuning.

After playing:

- Remove the reed from the mouthpiece and put it in its holder; remove the mouthpiece from the barrel and place a mouthpiece mop in the mouthpiece to soak up any moisture; put the ligature back onto the mouthpiece and then fit the mouthpiece cap on (this routine will prolong the life of the reed and help prevent deposits forming in the mouthpiece, however if this "chore" prevents the player practicing then leave the reed on the mouthpiece).

- Use a "pull-through" to swab out the barrel, top-joint, and bottom-joint of the instrument and then if possible leave the clarinet to "air" on a stand for 5-10 minutes after playing to prolong the life of the pads.

- If the instrument has to be packed away often without being left to air then place "pad savers" in the top and bottom joints - they will soak up the moisture left in the instrument.

Cleaning the instrument:

- Once a month leave the mouthpiece standing upside-down in mouthwash for 30 seconds and then wash out with soapy water - this will clear away any calcium deposits that have built up (take care to avoid wetting the cork on the tenon too much).

- If dust or fluff does gather on the instrument then gently brush it away with a shaving brush.

- Occasionally polish the keys to prolong the life of the plating. Use a silver cleaning cloth (for silver plated keys) or a brass cleaning cloth (for nickel plated keys).

- Once a month use a precision screwdriver (if you feel competent) to gently check none of the screws are working loose.

- If the pads become sticky use (Yamaha) pad cleaning papers to clean the pads: - dab a little Methylated spirits onto the paper with a cotton bud, place the paper under the key pad, hold the key lightly closed and pull the paper through; now that the pad is clean place a sheet of (Yamaha) powder paper under the pad, hold the key lightly closed, and pull the paper through.

A safe method of assembly

It is often during assembly that instruments get damaged so check that your method of assembly does not put undue strain on the mechanism. Outlined below is a safe method of assembly.

1. Ensure the tenons are adequately greased with clarinet cork grease.
2. Grip the bottom-joint in your right hand with the holes facing you (grip at the tenon end avoiding the keys if possible or alternatively grip so that your palm rests on the bottom two keys holding them shut).
3. Grip the top-joint with your left hand so that the side with no keys is resting on your palm and your fingers are holding the ring keys down.
4. Carefully twist the bottom joint onto the top-joint tenon - if you are holding the joints correctly then the two metal extensions from each joint (the "bridge" keys) should not collide during this process; while still holding the two joints align them so that the "spine" of the ring keys are all in a straight line.
5. Grip the middle of the bottom-joint with your left hand so that your fingers arch over the long side levers and press on the ring keys. Grip the bell with your right hand and twist onto the bottom tenon (if the bell has an insignia align this with the front of the instrument).

6. Insert the mouthpiece into the barrel with a twisting motion (if the barrel has an insignia align this with the back of the mouthpiece). Fit the reed to the mouthpiece using the ligature - make sure the reed is on evenly so that the arc of the reed tip matches the mouthpiece tip.
7. Grip the top of the top-joint with your left hand (or alternatively grip in the middle with your fingers on the ring keys as in stage 3) and twist the barrel (with mouthpiece and reed attached) onto the top tenon until the reed is in line with the thumb keys.

Cases and case covers

Clarinets are easily damaged and an instrument case that holds the Clarinet is essential. The keys will be bent if the instrument can move in the case while being carried. Nothing else should be kept in the case unless there is a specific compartment for it (or it can fit in the bell). Clarinet case covers are useful if you need to carry a stand or sheet music.

Clarinet stands

Some players find the chore of assembling and dis-assembling the Clarinet can prevent them practicing. If the Clarinet is placed on a stand after playing it can be left assembled and it will drain properly (although it is vulnerable to being knocked over). If the stand is to be kept at home, buy the largest possible because this will be the most stable; if the stand needs to be used at performances as well as at home, then a smaller stand that fits inside the case, case cover or perhaps the bell, might be better.

Children might be better off placing the instrument under their bed (remove the bell and rest the instrument with the holes pointing upwards), the instrument won't drain effectively but it might be played more often and it won't get knocked over.

In performances it is best for the player to keep hold of their clarinet (rather than place it on a stand) with the holes facing upwards and the instrument tilted down, doing this will help the instrument drain and also keep it warm so it stays in tune.

Servicing the instrument

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: the quality of tone diminishes; the instrument becomes less responsive; the tuning becomes unreliable. Eventually something major goes wrong and the instrument becomes unplayable and in need of considerable repair.

Players often blame themselves for the poor sound they produce when really it is the condition of the instrument that is causing problems. On clarinets the first indication that an instrument needs servicing is usually when the player starts having problems playing across the break (from throat Bb to B or C).