

The Oboe – looking after the instrument

Routine care and maintenance

Before playing:

Warm up the instrument by holding the top-joint and bottom joint (with the holes pointing down) in your hands 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.
- Use Oboe mops or a small silk "pull-through" to swab out the top-joint and bottom-joint of the instrument and then if possible leave the instrument to "air" on a stand for 5-10 minutes after playing if possible 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:

- 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 (if you feel competent) use a precision screwdriver to gently check none of the screws that hold the keys are working loose.
- If the pads become sticky use (Yamaha) pad cleaning papers to clean the pads: -dab a little meths 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 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 (of student Oboes)

It is often during assembly that the instrument gets damaged so it's worth checking that your method of assembly does not put undue strain on the mechanism.

1. Ensure the tenons are greased with cork grease.
2. Grip the upper end of the bottom joint with your left hand taking care not to bend the long side keys (the "feather" keys); then grip the bell in your right hand so that your palm rests on the key holding it shut; now carefully twist the bell onto the bottom joint - if you are holding the two pieces correctly then the metal extensions from each joint ("bridge" keys) should not touch each other during this process; while still holding the two pieces align the barrel hinge of the Bell key with the barrel hinge of the lowest key on the bottom joint.
3. Grip the top joint with your left hand so that the side with no holes is laying in your palm and your fingers are holding the rings/plates shut (check that the bottom most key is closed); grip the lower end of the bottom joint with your right hand so that your palm is holding the bottom key cups shut; now carefully twist the bottom joint socket onto the top joint tenon - if you are holding the two pieces correctly then the bridge key(s) from the bottom joint should not touch the top joint keys during this process; while still holding the two pieces align the joints (usually so that the spine of the ring/plate keys on each joint are in a straight line).
6. Finally insert the reed into the top joint with a twisting motion and align it so that a flat side is in line with the ring/plate keys.

Cases and case covers

Oboes are easily damaged and an instrument case that holds the Oboe snugly 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). Case covers are useful if you need to carry a stand or sheet music.

Instrument stands

Some players find the hassle of assembling and dis-assembling the Oboe can prevent them practicing. If the Oboe 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.

During performances it is best for the player to keep hold of the Oboe (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 until 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 actually the instrument is at fault. Test your Oboe with the following exercises, in all cases you should be able to play the notes without squeezing the keys hard or blowing hard: G# to F#; holding LH little finger Eb open play Low C; Low C to B; Low C to Bb.