

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

BEGINNER INSTRUCTION SERIES

"... STUFF THAT WORKS! "

Bb CLARINET

Shelly Van Doren
CLINICIAN

48TH ANNUAL CLINIC
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
1995

Foreword

Teachers unselfishly helping teachers in a fiercely competitive setting is a tradition as old as Texas' school bands. In that tradition, the Texas Bandmasters Association is sponsoring a series of clinics on beginning instrumental teaching methods, presented by some of Texas' premier music educators during the 1995 and 1996 TBA Conventions in San Antonio, Texas. These master teachers, chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in the State, represent a wide diversity in geographic location, as well as, in teaching situations.

A session will be presented on six band instruments each with a companion handout. In these handouts, you will find teaching methods, and classroom organizational skills which are used successfully in today's schools. These clinics represent some tried and true ways of teaching, along with fresh new ideas, all with one common denominator: this is *"STUFF THAT WORKS!"*

We acknowledge the efforts of the clinicians who prepared these booklets and, who also presented a clinic session. In addition we acknowledge the help and advice of Past TBA Bandmasters of the Year, Mel Montgomery, of Nacogdoches, and J.R. McEntyre, of Odessa. We also thank the many teachers from around the State who have shared their "secrets" for this project.

This series is respectfully dedicated to the legions of band directors who have gone before us and who have built the music education program that is unique in history: TEXAS' BANDS. Representing the best of this tradition was the 1990 President of TBA, the late Malcolm Helm, whose example and teaching inspired and challenged all of us.

Jim Hagood, President, Texas Bandmasters Association

SHELLY VAN DOREN

Van Doren, a graduate of West Texas State Univ., is a 3-year All-State clarinetist from Odessa High School. While attending W.T.S.U., she was principal clarinetist under Dr. Gary Garner and performed in the Symphonic Band, Orchestra, and Wind Ensemble. Upon graduating with a degree in Music Educ., Van Doren took a job as Assistant Director of Bands at Crockett Jr. High School in Amarillo. In '89, she accepted the position of Assistant Band Director at Haggard Middle School in Plano, where she worked for two years with Ken Valliant. After teaching at Haggard, Mrs. Van Doren was named to her present position of Director of Bands at Schimelpfenig Middle School. While under her direction, the SMS Symphonic Band has won several awards and has been named Honor Band finalist.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

for

Teaching Your Beginning Clarinet Class

by Shelly Van Doren

Contents: Clarinet Wish List
High Note Tips
Identifying Potential Clarinetists
Proper Assembly of the Clarinet
Exercises to Build Tone, Tonguing and Technique

Compiled July, 1995

CLARINET WISH LIST

Goals for Middle School Clarinetists:

1. Know the difference between a **pretty, focused sound** and a uncontrolled, “spread” sound. (If their sound is **not** good, they need to know how to fix it!)
2. Be able to **cross the break SMOOTHLY** and without “exploding” or playing louder when they do this.
3. Play **high octave notes focused** and refined **without** allowing these notes to “stick out” or be any louder than other notes. (High notes will automatically be louder because of the high **frequency**.)
4. **Be able to tongue the style that the music demands.** This includes legato, light staccato, heavier detached notes, and harder tonguing when needed. (I suggest that you start with legato, and always teach students to SLUR before introducing tonguing.)
5. **Play technical passages without adding any extra notes** (“blips”) in between. Many students are not even aware that they are doing this!
6. **BLEND IN** to the sound of your band.

HIGH NOTES--UGH!

There are probably not many things about teaching beginning clarinet class that **are** as **headache-inducing** as introducing the high octave. It is not only difficult to teach--it is NOT FUN to listen to your students learn it! However, it is very important and you need to remember that your students will only be able to do what you expose them to. Those high notes will never develop and will never sound good unless you make them **DO IT--A LOT!** Individually, in small groups, in bigger groups, etc., etc. **Here are some things that I have discovered.**

1. When your students play high notes, the **voicing inside their mouth** has to be correct. (See 1st handout also.) Continually tell them to raise their tongue and think “EE”--the higher the note, the higher the tongue. If this is not happening, the sound will usually be very FLAT.
2. **Students should have an open throat for a pretty sound.** Many young clarinetists confuse a firm embouchure with a rigid body and a tight throat. Try to teach your class from the very beginning to RELAX (within reason!) and think "AAHH" for an open oral cavity. As you begin to teach high notes to your class you might notice more squeaking, especially when they tongue. (The trick in the high octave is to tongue very quickly/lightly and stay away from the reed.) In addition to this, however, **a tight, closed throat could ALSO cause squeaking.**

3. **Tonguing** in the upper register is a real challenge to teach well. Because the reed is vibrating faster, the tongue cannot stay on the reed as long as when lower notes are played. (see “teaching tonguing” in 1 st handout) The tongue must start on the reed and pull away QUICKLY, releasing **very fast air**. Legato tonguing in the high register is much easier than staccato, so do legato exercises with **your** class first. **When a pretty legato is taught first, you will almost NEVER have to correct slap-tonguing or tonguing too hard ever again.** This applies to tonguing in any register!

4. **Use of air** in the upper register is just as important as it is in the lower, IF NOT MORE SO. Even if the student has a good embouchure, a raised tongue, AND an open oral cavity, they will still not play **in tune** unless they are using a fast, “spinning” stream of air through the clarinet. The student will play flat and will have a poor tone quality because of an unsupported sound. Tuning in the high register of the clarinet is difficult even if you have very good players, so make sure the barrel and/or the middle of the instrument are accurately set with a tuner, and train your students to listen carefully to each other as they play. (make those sound waves STOP)

5. If high notes **won't come out**, you have to troubleshoot. If you are **sure** that the student's reed is not too soft, (if it is, probably NOTHING will come out!) have the student press gently against the top teeth and “jut out” the bottom jaw slightly. This keeps the student from dampening the reed too much with his/her bottom lip and frees up the reed to vibrate. Remember that the higher the note, the FASTER the reed needs to vibrate; lower notes respond MUCH easier for this reason. As the student plays higher notes, the reed becomes much more sensitive to how it is handled, and this is when problems such as “biting” or clamping down on the reed become more obvious. (You also can tell **instantly** if the embouchure is not firm enough—it won't be a secret! !)

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL CLARINETISTS

There are many types of students that can be successful on clarinet, but you as the director need to look for a few essential attributes when choosing a student for this instrument.

1. Look for fairly straight upper and lower teeth. Because of the firmness of the clarinet embouchure, very crooked teeth or braces could impair the child's ability to sustain the proper mouth position. (A perfect example of this would be the student with protruding front teeth. Because of the "pressure" on the top teeth from the mouthpiece pushing slightly outward, this would NOT be a good choice for this student.)

2. See if the student has the ability to form the embouchure. Some students, when asked to "firm up" the muscles around their mouth, just can't seem to do it. If you continue to try this again and again and the corners of their mouth are still loose or if they can't keep their cheeks from puffing out, try to steer them to an instrument with a more **supple** embouchure (such as flute) on which they might be more successful.

3. Always look at the hands and fingers! If the student has very small hands and/or small, thin fingers many problems will arise from this. The student will most likely not be able to **cover the holes** of the clarinet completely, which causes "squeaks" or notes that don't come out at all. Another problem with small hands is that when the student tries to reach the "pinky keys" they will pull the **other** fingers off of the keys, resulting in MORE squeaks. A third problem is holding up the instrument. The right thumb bears a lot of the weight of the clarinet, and the smaller student may get into bad habits such as putting the bell of the horn between his/her knees to hold it up. (Watch your class carefully for this!) With all the above problems, the student will become extremely frustrated because he/she is not able to do what the rest of the class can do. You can alleviate this by choosing their instrument accordingly.

4. Can the student show you a BIG, fast air stream? Have the student "hiss" (you demonstrate first) so you can show them how much air the clarinet uses. This is important with any wind instrument, of course, but for a really focused clarinet sound, FAST AIR is crucial. Students with asthma or bronchitis will always have more of a struggle, but they CAN be successful.

5. (General) Profile of a clarinetist. If it is obvious to you that you have a smart, studious, (quiet?), rather **serious** student sitting in front of you, and the other components previously discussed are present, the chances are good that this student could be extremely successful on clarinet. (This description would obviously fit other instrument choices also!) However, it does take a lot of self-discipline and PRACTICE to maintain the clarinet embouchure AND to be able to play the difficult passages expected of clarinetists.

6. Boys VS. Girls? There has always been a certain "stigma" about clarinet ("it's a girl's instrument", etc.) to some boys, BUT it has been my experience that it helps to educate the parents and help THEM avoid perpetuating the "clarinet/flute" myth. I tell my parents and students that when boys play these instruments, they usually do very well and many times exceed the accomplishments of the girls in the class. It would be very valuable for all of us if we could begin to change the unfortunate trend of "boys play this", "girls play that". In my beginning clarinet class this year, I had a ratio of about 2 boys to every 3 girls, which is much better than in the past.

PROPER ASSEMBLY OF THE CLARINET

If the student does not put their instrument together CAREFULLY each day, unwanted adjustment repairs can result over a period of time. Here is the proper way to teach your class to put their clarinet together.

1. Make sure the students have cork grease. If the instrument is NEW, the corks will have to be greased frequently--about every other day, until the student can put it together easier. Be careful that they don't over do it, or the joints will slip on and off **too** easily.
2. Place the bell of the clarinet onto the cork of the bottom joint (the joint with only 1 cork). They should avoid touching or pressing on the silver keys and long silver rods as they are delicate and get out of adjustment easily.
3. Take the top joint (the joint with two corks) in the left hand and hold the bottom joint (attached to the bell) in the right hand. The way to tell how they connect is to find the 4 silver side keys that are next to the cork on the top joint--this is the cork that fits inside the bottom joint. On the top joint, gently press down the silver rings around the holes to raise the **BRIDGE KEY**. The bridge key **MUST** be raised to fit over the corresponding silver "foot" at the top of the bottom joint. (If it is not, the student could easily bend this key.) **Keeping the bridge key raised**, carefully connect the top and bottom joints of the clarinet by twisting and pushing together **GENTLY**. The bridge key should fit exactly over the foot joint when assembled. Again, **AVOID BENDING THE KEYS OR RODS** out of adjustment.
4. At this time, place the mouthpiece on the barrel **AND THEN** add this combination to the rest of the instrument. Be sure to tell your students to **wait** to put their reed and ligature on until the full instrument is together, or at least until the barrel and mouthpiece are together.