

# **“Instant Bassoon Player – Just Add Water!”**

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## **Embouchure Formation**

- Having students whistle, or attempt to whistle, is an excellent way of forming the basic embouchure for the bassoon.
- Hooded sweatshirt/drawstring purse example also works well.
- Pull the corners of the mouth towards the center of the face, making the opening as round/oval as possible. The jaw will be slightly dropped.
- Insert soaked reed so that the red part of the lips almost touches the first wire.
- The goal of the bassoon embouchure is to gently hold the reed with equal pressure from all sides of the mouth, not just “north and south”.
- Equal pressure from all sides of the mouth allows the reed opening to be at its maximum, which is the ideal for the majority of bassoon playing.

## **Crowing the Reed**

- Place the tip of the tongue on the tip of the reed, then, release the tongue letting air into the reed.
- If the reed is properly soaked and adjusted, a mix of three frequencies will occur producing a single pitch (see Tonal Spectrum Diagram).
- These frequencies can be isolated by first blowing a slow air stream and then slowing increasing it. The longer that these three frequencies last with a fast air stream, the more balanced the reed is.
- For the vast majority of bassoon playing, all three frequencies are desired. The exceptions are the extreme low and high registers of the instrument.
- If the student can only produce a high pitch on the bassoon reed, then either the bassoon reed is poorly adjusted, or the embouchure is too linear in design.
- Once the student can produce a crow with all three partials, have them sustain that crow for several seconds.
- Once they can sustain the crow, have them move the reed back and forth in the mouth but still sustain the crow. This will show them how loose their embouchure needs to be.

## **Exercises on the Bocal**

- Insert the reed on the bocal and have the student make a sound. It will be some type of a “B” or “C”.
- This is a wonderful opportunity to introduce articulation concepts on the bassoon without actually holding the instrument.
- For the vast majority of tonguing on the instrument, articulation is done on the tip of the reed with the tip of the tongue.
- “One taste bud on the reed!” Many beginning students use way too much tongue tissue to articulate, which will eventually compromise their tonguing speed and variety of articulation styles.
- Have the student demonstrate legato and separated styles. It is also very important to have them not let anything get in the way of their air.
- Once they can accurately demonstrate all of these skills, it is time for the bassoon!
- Habits to avoid – “breath” tonguing, anchor tonguing, excessive jaw movement
- Elements of a fast single tongue: fast air, straight tongue, using tip of the tongue

## **Assembly**

- Proper position of wing/tenor joint
- Proper position of long joint
- Linkage between long joint and bell – low Bb key
- Insertion, care and transportation of bocal out of the case

## **Posture (seated)**

- Seat strap versus neck strap
- Different designs of seat strap
- Use of crutch in right hand
- Seat strap is placed at the front third of the chair
- Back is supported by the back of the chair
- Feet flat on the floor or crossed at the ankles
- Instrument is across the body
- Bassoon is at proper height when the reed touches the space between the player’s chin and lower lip
- The player should be looking slightly downward at the instrument

## **Beginning Sounds**

- Begin with second space C in the bass clef, and gradually introduce the pitches D, E and open F. If the first C is flat, have them firm up the embouchure a bit.

- Remember, this is an 8 foot tube – have them take in some air!
- Once those pitches are mastered, extend the range downward to low F.
- Having quality pedagogical material is CRITICAL to the success of every bassoon student!
- The best book for introducing the bassoon is the *Method for Bassoon* by Julius Weissenborn, edited by Doug Spaniol. GET IT!!!!!!

### **Tuning**

- Tuning is primarily accomplished by: a good reed, a properly adjusted instrument, a properly fitted bocal to the instrument, proper breath support, a cushioned embouchure and the size of the oral cavity
- Moving the bocal does nothing for the intonation of the instrument
- The intonation tendencies of the bassoon are actually quite predictable, and with practice and a tuner can be learned very efficiently.
- Pedal Bb to F below bass clef: Sharp (Ah vowel) Most open reed aperture
- Low F to A on top of bass clef: reasonable stable with a few exceptions noted below
- A on top of bass clef to second ledger line E: Flat (Eee vowel)
- Second ledger line F to third space C# (treble clef) – Sharp
- High D and above: Flat (can close the aperture of the reed)
- If the overall pitch of the instrument is flat or sharp with these adjustments, finding a new bocal will be the best solution.

### **Tone Production /Vibrato**

- Development of a quality “straight” tone is key to a student’s success
- Use of long tones with a tuner
- Progressive vibrato exercises

### **Advanced Techniques:**

#### **Flicking/Venting**

- Use of the octave (flick,vent) keys is critical to mastery of the bassoon!
- Use on a, b-flat, b, c and d
- These keys are used when these notes are tongued, slurred up to, or slurred down to
- Exception – when these pitches are approached from a 1/2 hole note, no venting is necessary
- Thumb motion is fluid with specificity to the particular key
- Practice tongued and slurred octaves (see sheet)
- This technique is presented very well in the Weissenborn/Spaniol text.
- When you have students approach this technique, insist that they use it!!!!!!

## Specific Technical Issues

- Use of 1/2 hole
- Resonance key on fourth space G
- Resonance key on e<sup>1</sup> and above
- Fingering for eb
- Fingerings for c#<sup>1</sup>
- Fingerings for f#<sup>1</sup>

## Instrument Selection

- Renard 41, 222, 220, 240, 260
- Moosmann – M22, M24
- Used instruments
- Miller Marketing
- Midwest Musical Imports
- Charles Double Reed Company
- Forrests Music
- Kirker Bassoon Repair (great prices on new horns!!!!)

## Bocal Selection

- Fox 3/Moosmann/Heckel/Puchner/etc. 2 are the same length – A = 440
- As the numbers go up or down, add/subtract 2 cycles. Ex: Fox 2 – A=442
- When finding a bocal for an instrument, try a Fox C 2 as a starting point. If the student, horn or reed is playing a bit flat it will correct the problem.

## Instrument Care

- BUY A BOCAL BRUSH
- Wing joint and boot joint swabs
- Paint brush
- Humidifier
- Vacuum case once a month
- Pivot screws – bicycle grease
- Long screws – lightweight oil
- Keep the instrument in the case!

## Bocal Care

- Regular use of a bocal brush
- Take care of the bocal tip and hole in the notch
- Do not clean out the hole in the notch!!!

- Do not put the bocal tip in the wing joint!!!
- Transport the bocal with the tip in the bell!!

### **Reeds**

- Proper care and storage – a sturdy box that will allow the reeds to completely dry
- Avoid touching the blades with the fingers
- Tools needed for basic adjustments: sandpaper, plaque, pliers, files (Swiss cut or diamond) and/or a reed knife

### **Random Thoughts and Observations**

- Periodic maintenance is critical for a bassoon to work properly
- Consider starting a cd library for every instrument – modeling
- Take advantage of articles and resources now online
  - Music and the Bassoon – Kristen Wolfe Jensen – U. of Texas
- Take advantage of resources in your area – bassoon teachers are lonely!! ☺
- A small investment of time can pay huge dividends for your ensemble

### **Great Resources for Bassoon Players**

- Barrick Stees – Co-principal Bassoon, Cleveland Orchestra
  - Website and Blog
- Music and the Bassoon – Kristen Wolfe Jensen – U. of Texas
  - Guided videos for beginners
- Miller Marketing
  - Moosmann Bassoons, Bassoon Reeds, Used Instruments
- Charles Double Reed
  - Fox Bassoons, Used Bassoons, Bassoon Reeds
- Vidger Bassoon Reeds – great reeds!
- West Double Reeds – great reeds!
- Clark Double Reeds – great reeds!
- Forrests Music – instruments, reeds, equipment
- Midwest Musical Imports
  - New instruments, used instruments, great reeds!
- Fox Products – “Lets Play Bassoon”
  - GREAT FINGERING CHART!!!!!!!!!!!!