

Inner Musicing: Making Playing Easier

by Meri Dolevski

When many musicians encounter a difficult passage, technique collapses. Breathing can become erratic, bow movements can become awkward, posture becomes constricted, and more. What musicians need to do is look for the problem behind the problem—to find easier ways of playing passages. Here are 6 strategies:

1. *Notice patterns in the music.* Many arpeggios that appear in music are based on chords, usually a three-part or 7th chord. Write the written chord name in each arpeggio, look at the starting and ending notes of the chord, as well as the highest note if different from the starting or ending notes of the arpeggio just before you are about to play it.

2. *Notice the points where you tend to become tense.* Then write the words “Relax” or “Play Lightly” in a handwriting that appears relaxed. Practice releasing the tension before, during, and after the difficult passage.

3. *Find good breathing spots.* This is especially important for wind players and singers. Sometimes playing is difficult because we don’t know where to breathe. This is particularly true when the music contains irregular lengths of phrases, so spending one or two good practice sessions finding good breathing spots, marking them, and practicing them will release the tension of where to breathe.

4. *Find an easier fingering.* Some notes on a given instrument can be played in more than one way, which is particularly true with the clarinet and bassoon. So many times when we are having difficulty with a passage is because we are not using the easiest fingering.

5. *Figure out difficult rhythms.* Sometimes we become tense because we are unsure of the rhythm. What to do? Work on solving the rhythmic difficulties away from the instrument.

6. *Find ways of making playing the instrument easier.* Right thumb hurting from holding the oboe? Consider adding a soft pad over the thumb rest. Upper teeth uncomfortable from the saxophone? Try a mouthpiece patch. Neck feeling awkward from the bassoon? Try a different bocal.

Although I am not a professional musician, I am an amateur who is serious about it. Not just performance, primarily on clarinet, secondarily piano, but also composition, music arrangement, and writing about music and teaching the occasional student. As a musician, I describe myself as a musical adventurer and explorer. My choices of performance material lean towards the rarely or never-performed clarinet repertoire. I am an avid reader on the psychological and historical aspects of music. I am often developing my own exercises and approaches to clarinet playing problems, which I may decide to publish. Most of my present income is from working as a freelance writer, editor, and from private teaching. I am finding that this gives me a desirable balance of income and time available for other interests. I have a diversity of interests outside of music. I enjoy chess, interpreting astrological & numerological charts, graphology (handwriting analysis), badminton, philosophy, and logic puzzles.