

Advice to Parents of Talented Young Clarinetists

Stanley Geidel

Editor's Note: The advice given in this article could really be applied to parents of every beginning musician!

One of the most common dilemmas faced by parents of talented beginning clarinetists is the issue of what to do to best help their child advance on the clarinet. Although the specific answer to this question is of course dependent upon the individual student, there are three general ideas that will surely benefit all young players. These ideas are good equipment, good instruction, and a good musical environment.



Good equipment

Parents always want to know when to purchase a fine new instrument for their child. However, for beginning clarinetists, there is something even more important in the way of equipment, and that is the clarinet mouthpiece. A fine mouthpiece can do wonders for a child's progress and, in the early years of playing, will yield more tangible results than the acquisition of a fine instrument.

Fortunately, purchasing a fine student mouthpiece is affordable and easy. Many well-known

mouthpiece manufacturers produce a line of student mouthpieces of very high quality. These mouthpieces are inexpensive and readily available. A superior student mouthpiece will deliver improved responsiveness,

will better accommodate reeds, will play well in tune, and will assist in the production of a much-improved sound. With these benefits comes a marked improvement in attitude;

success breeds more and more interest. Student mouthpieces are often available even from master mouthpiece makers such as David and Jean Hite or Clark Fobes, as well as from the major manufacturers such as Vandoren. A quick search on the internet will reveal a number of sources for these mouthpieces. Given the affordability and great benefits of fine student mouthpieces, I strongly recommend this to all parents as one of the best things you can provide for your young beginner.

Good instruction

Personal instruction is a must for talented young players. Surprisingly, many parents do not know how to locate a fine teacher. My advice: call the nearest university or college. Most institutions of higher education have a music department on their campus. Many have full-time or part-time clarinet teachers in residence. Some of these teachers accept private students in addition to their college teaching load. If not, the college instructor can usually recommend one of their own current students as a teacher for your child. Don't fail to do this, and be sure to do it sooner rather than later. Learning good playing habits on the clarinet is challenging, but unlearning bad habits that arise from lack of proper instruction is much, much harder.

Good musical environment

There are many things you can do as a parent to help your child grow musically, even if you can't play a note on the clarinet. Make your household a musical one. Here are just a few ideas:

- Purchase some fine recordings of classical clarinet music and encourage your child to listen to

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them. Play them during dinner, or sit down and listen to them with your child.

- When your child is in the car with you, keep your car radio tuned to the local classical music station. Perhaps this eventually will be preferred over the local rock station!
- Take your child to hear an orchestra now and then. If your community doesn't have an orchestra, make a day of it and take your child to the nearest community that does have one.

Alternatively, consider making a family trip to hear one of the many great professional orchestras in our country. Odds are, there is a truly wonderful orchestra within driving distance of your home.

- See if the local college or university offers any music performances that are open to the public, and take your child to these events. These recitals and concerts can be a great opportunity for your child to experience fine music.
- Ask your child if he or she will play music from their weekly lesson for you.

No need to offer opinions, just a simple expression of appreciation will tell your child you are interested in their musical progress.

- Expose your child to all the arts. A fine painting, good theater, and a dance recital can inspire a young musician.

Don't push too hard... Just offer the above items as ordinary parts of your family experience. Interest will usually follow opportunity.

Speaking of not pushing too hard, this is a rather important tenet of fostering interest. Provide the right environment, and let your child's interest grow on its own. Don't overly press your child, or the results may turn out to be the opposite of what you are seeking.

Conversely, I don't think it is entirely a contradiction

to require your child to attend a concert with you every now and then, especially if it is an event attended by the entire family. Find a balance here... be encouraging without being demanding. Let them be children—ideally, children with parents who are interested and involved, not suffocating and competitive. Remember: the goal here is to instill in your child a life-long love of music. You may find that the care and feeding of this process builds the same love and appreciation of music in you.

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