

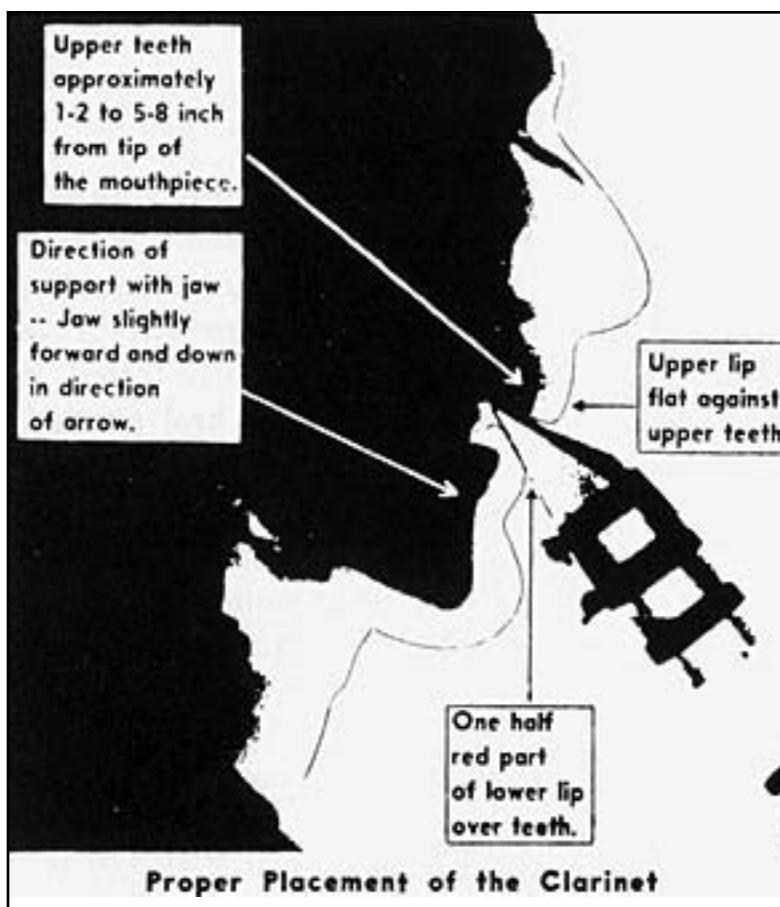
The Clarinet Embouchure

Dr. Edwin C. Kruth

The clarinet embouchure is one of the most widely misused and misunderstood aspects of clarinet playing. Over a period of years, I have had many opportunities to study young clarinetists, both beginning and advanced. I have observed a number of common faults, which, with careful understanding and treatment, could be remedied to produce promising clarinetists, whereas these students are having difficulty in producing even a semblance of a clarinet tone. These faults can never be corrected by specific studies, long tones, etc. The whole difficulty stems from the basic question of how the instrument is put in the mouth.

Develop Good Habits Early

The problem of concept is of maximum importance; but even with this in mind, a student can progress only so far unless he is able to produce his preconceived idea without the hindrance incurred in certain basic mistakes that retard his progress, regardless of how much time he spends with his instrument. The errors in the formation of the embouchure tend to fall into a number of distinct categories that are extremely difficult to remedy after the student has formed certain habits in which the wrong muscular action is involved. On the other



hand, if correct habits had been developed in the beginning, these students would find the development of tone production a relatively simple phase of their technique.

Some Common Errors

A few of the common errors are:

- Bunching the muscles in the lower lip and attempting to control the reed by biting, especially in the upper register;
- Extreme pull from the corners of the mouth;
- Rolling the lower lip too far over the teeth;

- Puffing the cheeks;
- Neglecting to rest the mouthpiece firmly against the upper teeth; and
- Holding the instrument at an incorrect angle, causing the lower lip to rest too close to the tip of the reed.

The fundamental principles of the clarinet embouchure are illustrated in the figure. Note the chin is flat and pointed. The muscular support around the mouthpiece is applied equally from all sides, which requires conscious muscular effort

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against the sides of the mouthpiece. The seemingly contradictory muscular action at the corners of the mouth serves only to assist in controlling the lip and cheek muscles. Approximately one-half of the red part of the lower lip is placed over the lower teeth.

I have found that much of the difficulty in tone production is due to the student placing his upper teeth approximately one-half to five-eighths of an inch on the mouthpiece. By instructing the student to move his lower jaw outward and downward on the reed, the tone will greatly increase in quality.

The idea of the support from the lower jaw is by no means the prime factor in the support of the reed. This comes mainly from the pucker of the muscles in the lips. The forward and slightly down method simply moves the cushion of the lip further out on the reed, allowing for more freedom and eliminating the thin “pinched” tone.

Another important aspect of the embouchure, as illustrated, is the pressure against the sides of the mouthpiece. If this support is constant, it will eliminate air leakage around the sides of the mouthpiece and help to promote a balanced register from the bottom to the top.

The Correct Concept

To achieve the concept of the embouchure the student first should be instructed to blow a thin intense stream of air at the palm of his hand. This technique helps to give the basic muscular formation of the facial mask. Secondly, the instructor may place his finger on the red part of the student's lower lip and have the student gently push his lower jaw forward against the instructor's finger in the

direction in which the support is desired, i.e., slightly forward and down. When this concept is correct, the student holds the clarinet—fingering 1st line E—and the instructor grasps the mouthpiece. Place the mouthpiece and reed in the student's mouth with the portion of the thumb between the first joint and tip under the reed directly against the student's lower jaw just below the lip. The instructor may also check the pressure of the mouthpiece against the upper teeth, which is exerted by the student's right thumb against the thumb rest, and the pressure against the reed by the lower jaw.

The reed is controlled by a combination of muscular support (around the reed) and a slight forward pressure of the jaw. The clarinet is to be held at a 30-45 degree angle from the body. The support against the upper teeth is extremely important and should be constantly stressed from the beginning. Another factor to be carefully checked is the tendency for the beginning student to roll the upper lip over the teeth when placing the mouthpiece in the mouth.

Use A Mirror

The use of a mirror will facilitate a constant check on the basic fundamentals and help to “set” the embouchure correctly. Beginning students should be kept in the low register, between embouchure is natural and comfortable. Usually a period of two months of constant study is sufficient to develop the “feel” of the embouchure.

I am confident that if clarinetists and teachers who have embouchure problems will experiment with the above ideas, many of their embouchure problems will be eliminated.

Professor Edwin C. Kruth was the Coordinator of Instrumental Music and Director of Bands at California State University, San Francisco. He is a member of the American Bandmasters' Association and the College Band Directors' National Association. Recognized for his many literary contributions in the field of instrumental music, his articles have appeared in numerous national periodicals. This is a reprint from the archives of the Leblanc.

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