

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

Beginners Instructional Series

Clarinet

Clinician:
Leigh Ann Dixon

55th Annual Convention/Clinic
San Antonio, Texas
2002

Forward

The Texas Bandmasters Association has a long and honorable tradition of providing unique educational conventions with superb opportunities for professional growth. For over fifty-four years the association has served as an agent for improving instrumental music education in communities throughout the Lone Star State.

Over the last six years the Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Instructional Series have provided exemplary strategies to improve classroom music instruction and student success. This year the clinics start again with the Beginner Instructional Series. Our clinicians are chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in our state. They also represent a wide diversity in geographic locations and school sizes.

The clinics that are scheduled this year include Oboe, Clarinet, Saxophone, Euphonium, Horn, and Snare Drum. Each of these sessions will have a handout presented during the clinic. The handout will contain valuable instructional methods and classroom organizational techniques.

We appreciate the time and efforts invested by these clinicians to prepare and produce these clinics. Special acknowledgement is appropriate for TBA Past-Presidents Jim Hagood, Bob Brandenberger, Mike Olson, Bob Parsons, Charlotte Royall and Arturo Valdez III whose hard work and commitment made this educational series such a colossal success.

This series is respectfully dedicated to all band directors, past and present, for their invaluable contributions to the education of young people through the band medium.

Ronald Ferguson, President
Texas Bandmasters Association

Leigh Ann Dixon

Leigh Ann Dixon is a graduate of Jackson vile High School where she was under the direction of Val Rose. Miss Dixon received her BA and MA in Music Education from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. She is in her 18th year as woodwind instructor for Nacogdoches ISD, where she has assisted Jim Hagood and Glynn Wells. Miss Dixon is a member of TBA and TMEA.

Clinic Description: *This clinic will cover the fundamentals of teaching beginning clarinet. Topics will include finding which students are best suited for the instrument and discussion of embouchure, breathing, hand position, fingerings, reeds and equipment.*

SELECTION OF CLARINET STUDENTS

Look for students with a flat, pointed chin. An overbite is better than an underbite. If the students have a large or a very thin lower lip, this can cause some problems. Students with very small hands and fingers may have problems covering the tone holes.

ASSEMBLY OF INSTRUMENT

I recommend having students place the horn case on the floor in front of them (make sure the case is right side up!). This will keep them from dropping the horn out of their laps. While soaking the reed in the mouth, have the students grease the corks. Emphasize to them not to put on too much cork grease. When putting the two main joints of the clarinet together, make sure to press the ring of the second tone hole and align the bridge keys. Try to keep from putting pressure on the post and keys. If corks are greased properly, this will make assembly easier. Make sure students keep hands on the two joints they are putting together. For example, when putting on the bell, make sure the other hand is on the bottom joint and not the top. When putting on the reed, students may either loosen the screws and slide the reed down or place the reed on and **carefully** put the ligature down in a manner that will not break the reed. Remind students to handle the reed by the sides and bottom and try not to touch the tip. Look at the reed and make sure it is even with the top of the mouthpiece (only a thin black rim of the mouthpiece is showing). I tell the students to make sure the ligature is below the section where the reed changes texture, but not to let it go to the bottom of the mouthpiece.

Common mistakes in assembly:

1. Bridge keys are not aligned
2. Reed up too high (will make the reed too hard).
3. Reed down too low (will make the reed too soft).
4. Ligature up too high or down too low.
5. Tightening ligature screws too tightly.

EQUIPMENT

The best choice is a good intermediate wooden horn. Hard rubber mouthpieces are preferable. I like the Vandoren 5RV and 5RV lyre. I have had students do well with both of these mouthpieces. I usually recommend the lyre for younger students. Most of my students continue with this mouthpiece throughout high school.

I start students on LaVoz Medium or Vandoren 2 1/2 strength reeds. By 2nd semester, I will move students to a Medium Hard LaVoz or a Vandoren 3. Reed strengths vary between brands. Vandoren makes a chart (included on back page) that shows how the different strengths relate to each other. Once a student gets a good sound on a reed, do not let them go to a softer reed. If they start to squeak a lot or play flat, try moving up a strength. Although ligatures can

TBA Convention/Clinic 2002

make a difference, a beginner will do fine with any sturdy ligature. I have used the Luyben ligature with a lot of my younger students. This ligature allows the reed to vibrate freely and will hold up well if the screws are not tightened too much.

FIRST LESSONS -EMBOUCHURE

I like to start out with the mouthpiece and barrel. Tell the student to bring the jaw forward and pull the chin down and flat. They can use their hand to feel the chin pull down. It is also helpful to use a mirror and recommend that students continue to use the mirror at home. Tell them to make the lip like a tight covering across the bottom teeth. Do not tell them to roll in their bottom lip unless they are not getting the bottom teeth covered at all. Work very hard not to get too much bottom lip inside of the mouth as this causes many problems. Tell the students to place the top teeth on the mouthpiece. Watch this very carefully as many students will try to make both lips do the same thing. Have them wedge the mouthpiece firmly into the mouth (up toward the top teeth). This does not just mean to put more mouthpiece in—it must be firmly wedged up toward the top teeth. At this point, tell students to open up the corners of the mouth to get a breath—then bring in the corners toward the mouthpiece. The mouthpiece should be at about a 40 degree angle. The reed should only touch the lip and not any part of the chin. I hold the instrument for them at first to make sure it is at a proper angle and wedged firmly into the mouth. After they have a concept of how the mouthpiece should feel in the mouth, I let them try it on their own. I make sure before they leave each day that they understand how to hold the mouthpiece and barrel on their own so they can practice correctly at home. I go through this process everyday until they are secure. The mouthpiece and barrel should produce an F#. It is good to check this with the tuner. You can also have them match pitch with someone who is in tune. Many times I find that students who are having trouble playing in tune will do better if I play with them. This not only helps them to find the pitch, but usually gives them more confidence and causes them to play with faster air.

Common problems with embouchure:

1. Top teeth not touching the mouthpiece.
2. Not enough mouthpiece in the mouth (tell them to put the bottom lip farther down on the reed).
3. Not wedging the mouthpiece firmly into the mouth.
4. Too much bottom lip rolled inside of mouth.

FIRST LESSONS-BREATHING

Tell students to get a deep breath from the bottom of the lungs. Don't let them move the shoulders. There are many different breathing exercises that can be done such as: putting the hand on the abdomen and feeling the air push out against the hand.; taking a piece of paper and making it go out as far as you can for as long as you can; having students bend over and slowly stand as they inhale—then exhale.

TBA Convention/Clinic 2002

Make sure they focus the air out, as if they are aiming for a target in front of them. Emphasize that the air column is a small, fast air column. An illustration I use is blowing up a raft or a beach ball. I use this because they focus the air through a small opening and will try to go as long as possible on one air stream.

Common mistakes:

1. Not opening up the mouth for a breath (breathing through the nose).
2. Not taking deep enough breaths.
3. Too wide of an air column.
4. Aiming the air down instead of out (students will be more likely to try to aim the air down after the entire horn is assembled).

FIRST LESSONS—TONGUING

After several days of working on producing the sound, I begin to have the students tongue four quarter notes. Tell them to say “La” and to use the part of the tongue right behind the tip to touch right beneath the tip of the reed. Students should understand that this is an up and down motion. Make sure the jaw does not move and that they are just moving the tip of the tongue (not too much tongue movement). Make sure (as with any instrument) that there is just one air stream and no gaps between notes. Sometimes if a student has difficulty tonguing, I have them try saying “da” instead of “ta”.

Common Mistakes:

1. Jaw movement
2. Using too much tongue instead of just using the tip.
3. Not connecting notes (using the air instead of the tongue).
4. If a student has too much bottom lip rolled in, the lip will get in the way of the tongue—watch for this.

EXERCISES FOR MOUTHPIECE-BARREL WORK

I. Start the class by checking each student individually. Then have everyone do the following exercise:

EVERYONE PLAY FOR FOUR COUNTS REST FOR FOUR COUNTS (point to soloist during the rest)—SOLOIST PLAYS FOR FOUR COUNTS —REST FOR FOUR COUNTS (give constructive comments during rest)— EVERYONE PLAYS (keep repeating as long as you wish).

TBA Convention/Clinic 2002

Try to have everyone play as a soloist before the end of the exercise. Use the four count rest to point to soloist and give comments on things they can work on for improvement (this same exercise works with four quarter notes replacing the whole notes once they learn to tongue). Then if time allows, go back around the room and check each individual again and give special attention to the students who had problems during their solo. Emphasize how important it is for the student to go home and work in front of a mirror on their specific problem.

II. Time students to see how long they can hold out a note with a good sound. Encourage them to go for at least 20 seconds (they will have to work their way up to this).

III. Once the students begin to tongue—you can play rhythms and have them repeat the rhythms back to you.

IV. Have students evaluate each other. If they can see another student having the same problem they are having, they can better visualize the problem when they are playing.

FIRST LESSONS—FULL INSTRUMENT

After a couple of weeks on the mouthpiece and barrel (providing everything is going well), we then put the instruments together. This is a very crucial point because students who have been doing everything perfectly will suddenly become distracted by the entire instrument and can develop bad habits. For this reason, I still continue to work on the mouthpiece and barrel at the beginning of class everyday for a good while (a month or two) after the students are playing with the entire instrument assembled. In addition, at various points in the year, I will work with the mouthpiece and barrel if I feel their embouchures need attention.

I have students hold their right hand in normal position (first 3 fingers over the tone holes and pinkie over F/C key) and hold the barrel with the left hand. Do not allow students to look down at the instrument. Students should hold the horn at about a 40 degree angle (this may vary from student to student) and be reminded to wedge the mouthpiece into the mouth. It is very common for students to squeak a lot at this point. Many times you can slightly adjust the angle of the horn or put a little less reed in the mouth to fix this problem. Do not let them make any major changes to stop their squeaks. They need to keep trying to do things correctly and work through their squeaks.

HAND POSITION

The hands should stay naturally curved and come into the horn at an angle. The right thumb should touch the thumb rest close to the thumb nail. Make sure not to let the students use the side keys of the bottom of the top joint as a rest for the hand. The first three fingers of the right hand are above the tone holes and the right pinkie

TBA Convention/Clinic 2002

is over the F/C key. The left thumb should be in a 2 O'clock position with the top part of the thumb over the register key. When the left thumb is not pressing down a key, it should stay directly over the thumb and register keys and not rest on the wood. The first 3 fingers are over the tone holes and the left pinkie is over the EIB key. Both hands should be in a C shape as if holding a ball.

Students should use the fat part of the finger to cover the tone holes. The pinkies should stay in front of the horn and not wrap behind or under keys. As soon as students begin to use the A key, make sure they rock the index finger back and forth from the E key to the A key (don't let them pick up the finger). They need to use the side of the finger by the first knuckle to press the A key. When playing Ab, they should also use the side of the finger by the second knuckle. When going from the upper to lower register, rock the thumb on and off of the register key and do not pick up and put down or slide the thumb.

Students often have problems keeping the tone holes covered at first. The ring finger of the right hand is the one that most often gives them problems. Tell them to scoop the finger into the hole from the bottom. They need to understand that when they move the pinkies, the other fingers tend to move with them. They need to work to move the fingers independently of each other. They also need to keep fingers close to the keys.

Common mistakes:

1. Right thumb touching the thumb rest too far away from thumb nail.
2. Left thumb too far down (where it can't rock back and forth to register key).
3. Left thumb resting on wood when not in use.
5. Pinkies behind or underneath keys.
6. Trying to put tips of fingers into holes instead of fat part of finger.
7. Fingers too straight—not curved.
8. Fingers coming up too high away from keys.

ALTERNATE FINGERINGS

By the end of the first year, students should know the chromatic fingerings for low B natural/top line F# and first space F# (See page 7 for fingering). Also, teach first line Eb as D plus the bottom side key (on top joint fingered with side of right index finger) as the regular fingering. Using the left hand sliver key can cause problems for beginners.

UPPER REGISTER WORK

As students go into the upper register, don't be afraid to let them play loud. When they become confident, then start trying to get them to play softer in the upper register. Try to have them match pitch with you or with a student who is playing in tune as they work their way up the horn. If possible, try to get students to play a high D above the staff (or higher) by the end of the year. They need to (at the least) go to a high C above the staff.

Common mistakes:

1. Not putting fast enough air across the reed.
2. Having the tongue too flat in the mouth (students should think of an "ee" position for the tongue).
3. Not wedging the mouthpiece up into the mouth.

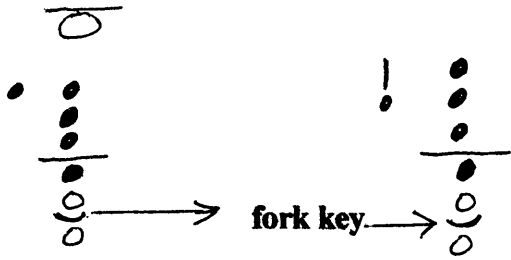
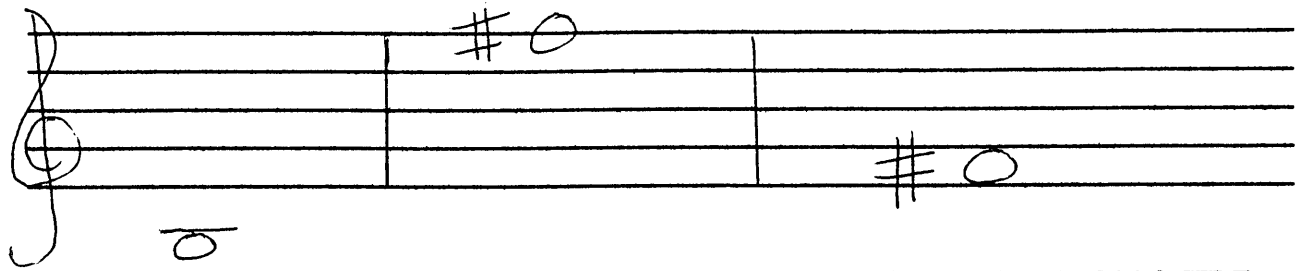
As students go into the upper register, if they are having any embouchure or breathing problems, these will become magnified; therefore, try not to wait too late into the year to get into the upper register. This will be easier if you have like instrument classes with only clarinets. If you have other instruments in addition to clarinets, you may be more confined to the book you are using.

You may use exercises similar to the ones on page 7 to help upper register work (these types of exercises are most likely in your book, but you may want to use additional materials to start earlier). I try to get into the upper register as early in the second semester as possible.

BASIC CARE OF THE INSTRUMENT

Emphasize the importance of running a swab through the clarinet after each use of the instrument (turn the clarinet upside down). Try to give students enough time at the end of class to clean their horns so they will get in the habit of doing this every time. Reeds should not be left on the mouthpiece! Reeds should be dried out on a flat surface (reed guard) so they will not warp. Make sure from the beginning that students understand how each piece of the clarinet fits in the case so they will not do any damage to the instrument.

CHROMATIC FINGERINGS



THUMB + BOTTOM 2 SIDE KEYS (top joint-played with right hand index finger)

UPPER REGISTER EXERCISES

use left pinkie

use right pinkie

Handwritten musical notation for upper register exercises. The first staff shows three measures with notes on the second line, second space, and third line, each with a slur and an arrow pointing to the note. The second staff shows three measures with notes on the second space, third line, and fourth space, each with a slur and an arrow pointing to the note. The second note in the second staff has a sharp sign (#).

TBA Convention/Clinic 2002

GROUP A B C D
PERIOD 1 2 3 4

FINAL PLACEMENT _____

**NACOGDOCHES BAND DEPARTMENT
BEGINNER EVALUATIONS**

Year _____
Band Test _____

Name _____

Instrument Check

Address _____

FLUTE	1	2	3	4	5
CLARINET	1	2	3	4	5
SAXOPHONE	1	2	3	4	5
TRUMPET	1	2	3	4	5
FRENCH HORN	1	2	3	4	5
TROMBONE	1	2	3	4	5
BARITONE	1	2	3	4	5
TUBA	1	2	3	4	5
PERCUSSION	1	2	3	4	5
OTHER	1	2	3	4	5
BAND CODE	1	2	3	4	5

Physical Features

Facial _____

Fingers _____

Comment _____

Parent's Name _____

Home Phone # _____ Serial Number _____

Homeroom Teacher _____

