

# From Squeak to All-State

(Mass Producing Incredible Clarinet Prodigies from Scratch!)

## INTERMEDIATE CLARINET MASTER CLASS

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION CLINIC

2004



PRESENTED BY  
**Jodie Rhodes**  
and  
**Tan Truong**

- I. Review (what should be happening at the beginner level)**
- A. **Recruiting:** When looking for the ideal clarinet player, there are a couple of key physical features to look for:
    - 1. ten fingers
    - 2. no extreme overbite or underbite
    - 3. no huge lips
    - 4. a natural, flat chin (ask the child to scratch their chin as if they have a really bad itch – it should immediately flatten)
    - 5. somewhat aligned teeth
  - B. **Embouchure/Air Development:** This topic should be addressed daily with the developing student.
    - 1. proper breathing and use of air should be practiced everyday
    - 2. mouthpiece and barrel should hit an F# on the tuner (to high – biting, to low – not firm enough into the top teeth)
    - 3. chin must be flat, bottom lip acts as cushion only and must only slightly cover the bottom teeth (you should see pink on both sides of the reed)
    - 4. Note Bending (Eeeehh ahhhhh eeeeh ahhhhhh eeeehh) is a good way for children to hear how dropping their jaw changes their pitch and allows for flexibility in pitch in the future.
  - C. **Hand Position:** It is important to get the fingers moving as soon as possible (even if the students don't know exactly what note they are playing) (see exercise # 1 – Arpeggiations)
  - D. **Articulation Drill (see exercise #2 – Articulation Drill):** Tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed. Choose whatever syllable you believe is most effective so that the student understands how to tongue in the same place every time.
  - E. **End of Year Goal:**
    - 1. Tone production
    - 2. All twelve major scales (full range) with an intro to arpeggios.
    - 3. Chromatic scale (full range)
    - 4. Excellent reading skills
    - 5. Excellent practice habits

**II. Intermediate Clarinet**

- A. **Fundamentals:** It is essential that some sort of regimented daily drill is exercised as much as possible to continue to develop and fine tune the essential fundamentals of playing clarinet. Weekly sectionals are an excellent time to reinforce these fundamentals and show them how to incorporate a daily drill into their practice habits.
- B. **Continued Technique Building:** In any technique building exercise, be sure that students are able to “say it and play it.” It has been noticed that when many students begin reading notes in the upper register of the clarinet, they may identify as the lower register – just adding the register key. For example, they may call a fourth space E an A (below the staff). Be sure they name all notes while fingering at the same time.

1. Scales: Practicing scales in scale rhythm is not enough. Students who play the scales in creative ways will find themselves playing more accurately and tenaciously at auditions on both scales and music. Scales, exercises or variations of scale patterns such as thirds are excellent ways to practice. One scale exercise that is good to use is the 5 Note - The *Shur Two Tongue Two* method of practicing. It enhances articulation and dexterity and should be performed in all keys. (see exercise #3- 5 Note Scale Study)

*Recommended Study:*

*Foundation Studies for Clarinet based on Carl Baermann  
Method For Clarinet : Book 3, expanded and edited by  
David Hite.*

*Celebrated Method for the Clarinet by H. Klosé, Revised and  
Enlarged by Simeon Bellison.*

2. Chromatic Scale: Naming and fingering this scale, with special attention to hand position, is the best way to practice. (in triplets). Use a 7 note exercise starting at low E to A# then A# to E, etc... *name the sharps going up and flats going down.* Then play it (see exercise #4 – Seven Note Study). The next step is the Octave in triplets *Then play it.* Practice the octaves in similar fashion. Make sure to stretch the downbeat of every triplet when saying it and playing it. This will give the triplets a pulse and keep the fingers stable. When going across “the break” be sure to keep the left hand wrist from rotating out of position on G to A#. Extra air support on A# is necessary for good legato across “the break” Important considerations: (use the fork and front keys at all times)  
*Suggested Music: Circus Grand March (Entry Of The Gladiators) by Fucik*

3. Arpeggios and Thirds: Proficiency on Arpeggios and thirds translates into dramatic improvement in the understanding of music structure and technique. Arpeggios must have musical direction in practice and every note must have direction of sound. Start slowly with Half notes and quarters, then with quarters and eighths, then dotted quarter and sixteenths, etc... Specific details concerning “which pinky to use and where” is notated in the exercise handout (see exercise #5 – Major Clarinet Arpeggios). The philosophy behind the selected fingerings comes from keeping the coordination in one hand, therefore enhancing speed and precision. Alternate fingerings are also determined by the notes around them and there is no greater exercise in helping students understand this concept than the arpeggios and thirds.

- III. **Preparing for Region Band Auditions:** The majority of the time, region band etudes are a variation of scales, chromatics, thirds and arpeggios. If the students have a strong foundation of these exercises, the etudes are no problem. A suggestion is to always count the slow etude with the eighth note receiving the beat and after the knowledge base is there, have them read it and “feel” it as written. On the fast and technical etudes, show them ways to break it down and practice the etude. Give students a reasonable amount of music that they are responsible for in sectional and then hold the student accountable by testing them on that material in next weeks sectional.
- IV. **Problem Solving the Bad Clarinet Sounds:**
- A. Alternate fingerings: Many notes on the clarinet have certain tuning tendencies or a non-clear tone. The following chart shows particular fingers that can be added or subtracted in order to make a note sound better (see exercise #6 – standard alternate fingerings).
- B. Squeaks and Squawks:
1. Check Reed Placement and condition
  2. Check mouthpiece placement (too much mouthpiece can cause squeaks and too little mouthpiece typically means the student is having to “bite” the mouthpiece to produce a sound because the reed cannot vibrate properly. Biting of the mouthpiece can cause wrong harmonic voicing.
  3. Hand position errors: Watch the “ring fingers.” These two fingers are typically the cause of most squeaks. Often, when the student uses their pinkies, the natural tendency is to pull the ring fingers off the tone holes if proper hand position is not being used. Also, watch for an accidental pressing of the side E flat key with the right hand and/or the throat tone G sharp key with the left hand.
- C. Too Spread/Too Stuffy/Too Spitty:
1. Too Spread: Check embouchure. A spread sound can often be the result of a non-firm embouchure with too much mouthpiece. Also, be sure the student is using the appropriate reed strength. Finally, check air usage. If too much air is being uncontrollably used through the horn, a very open, spread sound is the result. However, a student with this tendency may be a possible candidate for bass clarinet in the future.
  2. Too Stuffy: This may be caused by too little mouthpiece or poor reed conditions. An old and worn-out reed tends to lose its vibrancy and can sound very stuffy.
  3. Too Spitty: “Vacuum” A water logged reed can be cleared by vacuuming the reed, taking the reed off and wiping the backside off on your pant leg, swabbing the mouthpiece, or ironing out the reed.

**D. Improper Noises resulting from poor Key Alignment:**

1. **First space E flat (right side) key:** If notes begin to squeak immediately below Open G, it is typically due to the side E flat key that bends under the key above which results in the proper loss of sealing.
2. **Third line B key:** If an alternate B cannot be played, it typically means the Crow's foot is out of adjustment. It could be bent too low, the cork could be missing, or the cork could be worn from general wear and tear.
3. **Throat tone G sharp and A Key:** As student play down the horn from an Open G to a Low E and the notes from Middle C to Low E begin to squeak, it usually means the adjustment screw is too tight. The adjustment screw is found on top of the A Key and can usually be turned one complete rotation in the counter clockwise direction to remedy the problem.
4. **Third Line B and C Sharp:** Often, there will be no response in this area of the clarinet (or squawking will occur) if the B key is bent underneath the C sharp key.
5. **Bridge Key Alignment:** Notes from 1<sup>st</sup> line E down to low E have little to no response if the bridge key is not lined up properly, bent, or missing the cork (or the cork is worn down due to wear and tear).

**E. Reed Maintenance:** In a typical box of reeds, less than 50% are in ready to play condition. Here are a few ideas to improve the playing conditions of reeds.

1. Polish the back of the reed on a flat surface
2. Flatten (or "iron" – with your thumb) the reed
3. Place pressure on the reed with your thumb to remove excess water trapped in the grains of the reed.
4. Properly store reeds: Place on flat glass to prevent warping. In more humid climates, place reeds in a Tupperware container or Ziploc Bag.
5. Rotate Reeds: Have students play on several reeds – not just one reed at a time until it wears out.
6. Establish some sort of reed inventory system.

#### F. Clarinet Maintenance

1. **Swabs:** Silk or microfibre swabs can be purchased through a variety of music stores for around \$10 – 15.00. These swabs tend to pull the water out of the horn most effectively and typically do not get stuck inside the clarinet. The inside of the clarinet (when effectively cleaned on a regular basis) should look like a table-top; smooth and polished.
2. **Key Oil:** For beginning to intermediate students, the keys should be oiled once a semester. For the more advanced students, it is essential to oil the keys once a month for proper response and movement of keys.
3. **Wood:** Use an almond or high quality bore oil on the wood and apply sparingly with a Q-tip. Clean between the keys, tenons and key holes with a Q-tip and a minty alcohol. Always be very careful never to get oil on the pads.
4. **Key Polishing:** Try “Never Dull” or “MAAS” polishing materials. They can be purchased at any Wal-Mart type store or an auto parts store. Always buy a separate swab for clarinet maintenance.