

Clarinet Role Change: from section player to soloist

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The clarinet section of the wind band is generally the largest section in the ensemble and is sometimes referred to as the “violin section of the wind band.” In an orchestral setting, clarinetists take a different role – as soloists – which requires an amplified skill set. Here are four suggestions for making that happen.

1. Expand dynamic range

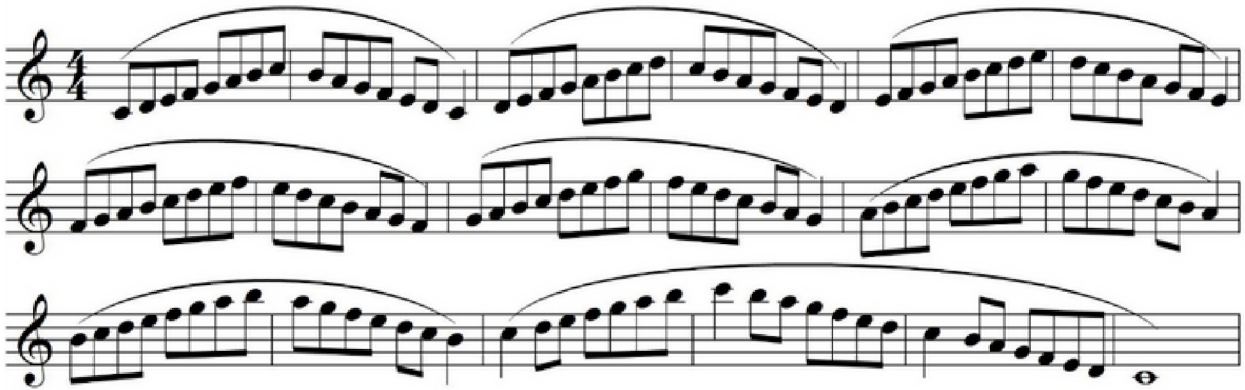
- Clarinetists will need to develop confidence and control throughout a wide dynamic range.
- Practicing a ‘clarinet specific’ exercise addresses the unique acoustical characteristics of the instrument and provides a way to develop this skill.
- Slurred register shifts, as in the exercise shown below, allows players to practice a wide dynamic range (pp to ff) throughout the full range of the instrument and focus on tone quality, pitch, and seamless interval connections.
- Determine your volume ‘limits’ to prevent the tone quality and pitch from deteriorating.

(Larry Combs) from Daily Workouts – www.clarinetcity.com

The image shows a musical score for a clarinet exercise. It consists of eight staves of music. The first staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'f' (forte) and a slur over the first two notes. The second staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'p' (piano) and a slur over the first two notes. The third staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'f' (forte) and a slur over the first two notes. The fourth staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'pp' (pianissimo) and a slur over the first two notes. The fifth staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'pp' (pianissimo) and a slur over the first two notes. The sixth staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'pp' (pianissimo) and a slur over the first two notes. The seventh staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'pp' (pianissimo) and a slur over the first two notes. The eighth staff begins with a dynamic marking of 'pp' (pianissimo) and a slur over the first two notes. The exercise is in 4/4 time and features slurred register shifts across the dynamic range.

2. Develop technical fluidity and control in all key signatures

In order to perform more difficult music, students must have excellent technical skill and control throughout the full range of the instrument in all key signatures. These skills are of particular concern where students are being asked to play more "soloistically". Practicing scales in a non tonic-to-tonic pattern (shown below) increases key signature awareness by sound and by sight.



from Daily Workouts - www.clarinetcity.com

- The skill set for the A Clarinet and Bb clarinet are the same.
- If the original part is for A, play it on A clarinet. Transposing an A clarinet part on Bb clarinet can complicate the key signature and tuning.

Example 3

Andantino ♩=84

in A

(p) dolce

in Bb

(p) dolce

5

pp

pp

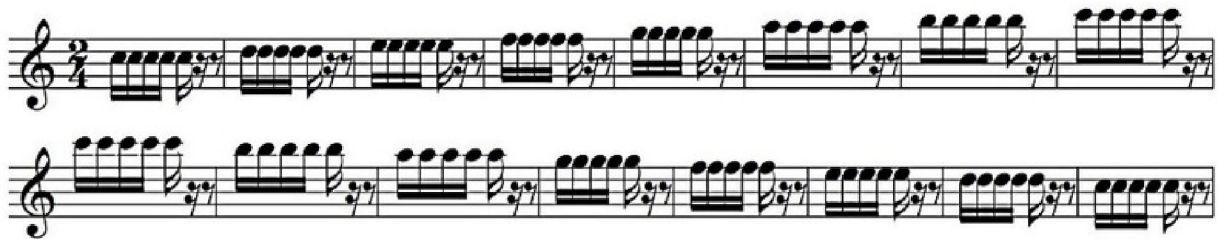
pp

Borodin - Polovetsian Dances

3. Refine articulation

- Articulation is critically important in the orchestra, particularly 'note starts' in exposed entrances.
- A focused sound is essential before articulation can be addressed.
- Many problems stem from lack of air support.
- Try playing on the barrel and mouthpiece (F#) when diagnosing articulation problems. Errors are more apparent when variables are reduced.
- Use the tip of the tongue near the top of the reed.
- Speed is directly related to the distance of the tongue from the reed. Keep the tongue as close to the reed as possible to minimize motion and produce the best sound.

Option 1



from Daily Workouts - www.clarinetcity.com

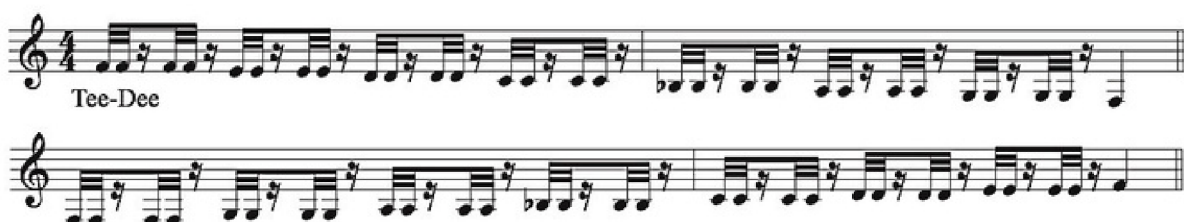
Option 2

<https://www.dansr.com/resources/32nd-articulation-and-staccato-exercises-for-clarinetists>

Articulating 32nd notes necessitates that the tongue stay close to the reed naturally because of the note speed. Follow the link above for a complete explanation on how to incorporate 32nd notes into your daily practice.



Next, apply this basic rhythm to scales that you already know. Here is an example:



4. Intonation

Clarinet has less flexibility in tuning than the other woodwinds.

- Clarinetists cannot raise the pitch with embouchure adjustments.
- Dropping the jaw and/or tongue to lower the pitch (ah) will create an unfocused sound.
- The choice may become 1) a focused sound or 2) in-tune.

Instrument quality, mouthpiece, and reed choice matters.

- A440 & A442 mouthpieces are available.
- Barrels are available in many different designs and lengths and can dramatically change the timbre and intonation of the instrument.
- Have more than one reed that responds!
- Too-hard reeds usually raise the pitch. Too-soft reeds can eliminate focus.
- A mouthpiece cap will help keep the reed protected and moist during long periods of rest.

Use a drone pitch for tuning development.

Adjustments should be made at the barrel primarily, but may also be made at the bell or middle joint if absolutely necessary.

Set drone pitch to starting pitch.
Slur everything.
Breathe only at fermatas.
Hold each fermata and listen for 'beats.'
Learn to determine flat/sharp pitch by ear, not just by sight.

The image displays five staves of musical notation, each representing a different key signature: G major, F major, C major, D major, and Bb major. Each staff is in 4/4 time and contains a sequence of notes starting with a whole note, followed by a series of eighth notes, and ending with a whole note. A large slur covers the entire sequence of notes on each staff. The final note of each staff is marked with a fermata. The exercises are designed to help the player develop intonation skills by listening for 'beats' during the fermatas.

Free Resources

12 articles about playing and teaching about clarinet here:

<https://www.dansr.com/resources/celebrating-our-female-artists-paula-corley-and-her-educational-articles-for-clarinetists-of-all-skill-levels>

43 clarinet instructional videos here:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgDFj_Bd873wqobJSBLy7ig

Book a free, virtual masterclass for any wind instrument section in your orchestra here:

<https://www.pedagogicsproject.com/>

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<https://www.clarinetcity.com/about>

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