

Clarinet Articulation

Conceptions, Misconceptions, & Solutions

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Tonal Development of Articulated Passages

I. General Principles

- A. The emphasis with beginning students should be on the development of a good, uniform slurred (legato) tone quality (as high in range as possible) before tonguing is stressed.
- B. There should be no sympathetic motion of the jaw, throat, or chest when slurring or tonguing. The facial “look” of the embouchure should have the same appearance in all registers and articulations. The use of a mirror is very helpful in checking for any unwanted motion.
- C. The airstream is constant in all types of articulations, from the most connected (slurred) to the most detached (staccatissimo).

II. Exercises for the Development of Tonal Uniformity

- A. Matched (uniform) quality on a repeated note:



- B. Matched quality of scale-wise notes:



- C. Matched quality on wider intervals:



D. Matched quality in all registers:



III. Voicing - What happens?

- A. Low register: tongue is flat in the mouth, mouth cavity is larger, throat cavity is smaller, "hah" syllable recommended
- B. High register: tongue is higher, more arched, and forward; mouth cavity is smaller (taken up by raised tongue); throat cavity is larger; "hee" syllable recommended
- C. Emphasis should be placed on a relaxed, "natural" feel throughout the full range

IV. Undertones - What causes them?

- A. Improper voicing. Try starting problem notes above the staff (for practice only) with the breath ("hee"). Later add "d" for a "deeh" syllable for the attack.
- B. Airstream too slow.
- C. Embouchure not formed correctly before blowing. Bottom lip usually too loose.
- D. Reed too soft.

V. Summary of the most common faults related to poor articulated tone quality:

- A. Not enough airspeed to support tongued notes.
- B. Moving the embouchure, jaw, chest; or too much of the tongue when articulating.
- C. Voicing not appropriate for the register being played.
- D. Too much tongue surface against too much reed surface.

Clarity and Style in Articulation

I. General Principles

- A. All notes consist of three parts – beginning, duration, and ending; the traditional terms “attack and release” seem to contradict their definitions
- B. The tone quality of the duration should remain constant and not vary with changes in length; a short note should have the same quality as a long note
- C. The clarity of beginnings and endings should remain constant
- D. The duration of a note is determined by the length of time that the tongue remains away from the reed
 - 1. Good clarinet articulation is achieved by the manner in which the tongue is withdrawn from the reed, thus freeing the sound
 - 2. The higher the pitch, the less the amount of separation that is required between pitches
 - 3. The louder the pitch, the less the amount of separation that is required between pitches
- E. The amount of separation is the key to style
- F. The character of beginnings (attacks) is determined primarily by the amount and/or speed of air that is released, and not by the force or weight of the tongue weight

Clarity and Style in Articulation (cont'd)

II. The Use of the Tongue

A. Beginnings (attacks)

1. The active motion of the tongue is the backward stroke; the forward stroke serves as a preparatory motion
2. The tongue rests lightly against the reed – not pressing the reed, but only dampening it. Lightness is the most important concept in clarinet articulation
 - a. tongue placement
 - 1) tip of the tongue to the tip of the reed
 - 2) anchor tongue to the tip of the reed
 - b. syllables
 - 1) dAH, dEEH
 - 2) tAH, tEEH

B. Endings (releases)

1. Tone is stopped most frequently by stopping the forced exhalation of air
2. At faster speeds, endings and beginnings of notes occur more closely together, making the syllables tAH or dAH appear as tAHt or dAHd

C. Clarity in articulation patterns

1. To achieve a clear and even style of articulation, play the last note of a slurred group in the style of the note that follows
2. To eliminate an uneven articulation, emphasize the first note of a slurred group

D. Tongue speed

1. The tongue must be light and relaxed
2. Concentrate on withdrawing the tongue from the reed; blow the tongue away