

American Band College, June 2010

“A NO-NONSENSE APPROACH TO STARTING AND SUSTAINING HIGH SCHOOL BASSOONISTS”

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Introduction

- A. Giving the Student a Positive Experience most important.
- B. Why you need bassoons in your band.
 - 1. The tone color and timbre distinctiveness of the bassoon as a solo instrument.
 - 2. Adds to the depth of the woodwind section.
- C. Some bands do not have bassoons because the directors feel unqualified to start a student bassoonist.
 - 1. Many elements of playing bassoon are similar to those involved in playing other woodwind instruments.
 - a. Know two woodwind fingering systems; F bassoon, C all others
 - b. The bassoon is just like any other woodwind with an extension.
 - c. Similar fingering to lower octave of clarinet, or flute, saxophone and oboe but down a fifth.

Part 1: Getting Started

I Recruitment of Bassoonists

- A. Choosing the correct student to play the bassoon is most important.
 - 1. Student should be intelligent.
 - 2. Student should be able to work well independently.
 - 3. Try to find a student who has an interest in serious music.
 - 4. Saxophone and Flute students make good transfers to bassoon.

5. Size of student, especially fingers usually not a problem
- B. Arguments to convince students to play the bassoon.
 1. Opportunities to play solos.
 2. Appeal to competitive instincts.
 3. Better chance of being accepted into honor groups, such as All-State.
 4. To be able to play in an orchestra.
 5. Be able to get individual help.
 6. Bassoon is a good instrument for students who want to double.
 7. Appeal to any altruistic qualities (for the good of the ensemble).

II Equipment

Besides bassoon, bocal and a free blowing reed, need seat strap and crutch.

A. Bassoon

1. Need to spend approximately \$3000 to \$7300 for a new student model
2. No need for extra keys or rollers.
 - a. Do not need the following keys: High E Key, High D Key, Ab-Bb Trill Key
 - b. Only the following rollers needed: On Low C# & Eb keys and on F & G# Keys
3. Do not discard an old bassoon, no matter how bad it looks; have a qualified repairman look it over.
 - a. Even a broken tenon is repairable.
 - b. Considering the cost of a new bassoon, even if \$1500 is spent, a good investment.
4. Places to find used bassoons.
 - a. eBay
 - b. Ask local repairman
 - c. Mail order discount stores such as: The Woodwind, Taylor Music, Wichita Band Instrument, Midwest Musical Imports (specialize in double reeds)
5. Some names of good used bassoons.
 - a. European: **Kolert**, Adler Sonora, Puchner, and Moennig.
 - b. American: Fox, Selmer, Conn
6. New bassoons
Fox; Renard Models 220, 240; **I recommend Renard 220**;
Takeda

B. Bocal

1. Very important part of the bassoon, like any part close to vibrating source
2. A Number 2 best for students (Fox CVX #3)
3. Discard if dented, bent, or does not hold vacuum.

C. Seat Strap

1. Best for student bassoonist.
2. Neck strap will work, but you need to watch finger and hand position with young students.

D. Crutch.

1. A must; it is the best way to achieve good finger and hand position.
2. Gives student another balance point, so makes bassoon feel more secure.

III Reeds

A. Student must have a responsive reed.

B. Where to obtain bassoon reeds.

1. Find a professional bassoonist to make reeds for you.
2. eBay
3. Look on Internet
 - a. Use search engine, search bassoon reeds
 - b. Look at www.bassoon.com

C. Most reeds from large commercial reed making firms are too hard.

- 1 Flatten the first wire to make reeds easier to play.
 - a. With pliers, press top and bottom of wire closest to the tip of reed.
 - b. This decreases the structural arch and closes the tip.
2. Good commercial reeds: Leshler and Emerald
 - a. Commercial reeds, look for "Smile"
 - b. Beware of commercial reeds with wires or wrapping too loose.
- D. Most reeds are broken or split; few wear out.
 1. Teach students to take care of reeds.
 - a. Keep reed in mouth when not playing.
 - b. When in rehearsal, with bassoon across chest, watch for stands, etc, behind you.
 - c. Be careful not to break reed on lip or teeth.
- E. Have the student use a plastic reed for the first three to six months.
 1. These reeds are usually responsive, easy to "crow".
 2. These reeds are not easily broken.
- F. Purchase reed making book and let an older student learn how to adjust reeds.
 1. The following are excellent reed making books:
 - Bassoon Reed-Making: A Basic Approach* by Christopher Weait
Published by McGinnis and Marx
 - Bassoon Reed Making* by Mark Popkin and Loren Glickman
Published by The Instrumentalist Co.

IV. Choosing a Method Book

- A. What makes a good method book?
 1. Needs to be progressive, yet remain at each level long enough.
 2. Exercises well written.
 3. Contains many exercises on technical problems.
 4. Contains duets at the level of student.
- B. I recommend the following:
 - Rubank, Elementary Method: Bassoon, by J. E. Skornicka,
 - Weissenborn: Method for Bassoon, Cundy-Bettony edition
 - Bassoon Student by Henry Paine, from the Student Instrumental Course, Belwin
 1. Rubank, Elementary Method, good for Elementary and Middle School beginners.
 - a. Easy to obtain
 - b. Exercises are well written.
 - c. Contains exercises in both flat and sharp keys.
 - d. Contains many duets and a few trios.
 2. Weissenborn: Method for Bassoon, good for 8th grade and above beginners, and as supplement.
 - a. Not as easy to obtain as the Rubank series.
 - b. Not as progressive in rhythm and difficult key signatures.
 - c. Contains many exercises in both flat and sharp keys.
 - d. Duet at the end of each lesson with an easy and advanced part.
 3. Supplemental Studies
 - a. First Book and Second Book of Practical Studies by Paul McDowell published by Belwin
 - b. Studies and Melodious Etudes for Bassoon by Henry Paine (Advanced Intermediate) Belwin
- C. For students transferring from another instrument, I recommend the the Rubank, Intermediate Method.
 1. Progresses quickly, this might be a problem because of high register
- D. Comments on Full Band Methods.
 1. Problems with the fingering charts

- a. Some incorrect fingerings given
- 2. Not enough exercises on technical problems.
- 3. Do not stress peculiarities of the bassoon.
 - a. Half-hole technique
 - b. Whisper key
- 4. For the most part, only uses flat keys
- 5. Must supplement full band methods with Weissenborn or Rubank Series.

Part 2: Starting the Student

I Assembly

A. Assembling the bassoon

- 1. Place Wing Joint into Boot Joint
- 2. Place Long Joint into Boot Joint
- 3. Place Bell into Long Joint.

B. Possible problems

- 1. Always twist joints together.
- 2. When putting bocal into wing joint, nib can rip off whisper keypad.
- 3. Bridge key mechanism
 - a. This determines adjustment of whisper key; if not put together correctly, Low E key will not close Whisper keypad.
 - b. Bridge key can get bent.

C. These items done by student where case is kept.

- 1. Bocal not in bassoon as of yet; place in bell until in seat, not in wing joint.
- 2. Reed in mouth; safest place.

D. Finish assembling the bassoon, (these items done at seat).

- 1. Place bocal in wing joint.
- 2. Place reed on bocal.

II Preparing the Reed

A. Soak reed for 2-3 minutes in clean, warm water.

B. Reed maintenance

- 1. Reed must dry out between playing; no airtight reed cases.
- 2. Clean with warm tap water every 3 or 4 playing days.
- 3. Draw pipe cleaner (smooth type) from stock end out through the tip.

III Preparing to Play

A. Place seat strap on front of chair.

B. Body and Bassoon Position

- 1. Student must have correct body posture.
- 2. **Bring bassoon to you.** Never go to bassoon.
- 3. Incline bassoon slightly to the left.

C. Arm, Hand, and Finger Position.

- 1. Natural, relaxed finger position.
- 2. Wrist should be straight, so right arm must be slightly away from body.
- 3. Fingers arched slightly.

IV Forming Embouchure

Do not be too anal about embouchure; most work if Bocal plus Reed equals a C

A. Drop lower jaw.

B. Slightly draw the lips toward center of mouth.

1. Similar to whistle.
 2. Whistling is good practice for this step.
 3. This will roll some of the lip over the top and bottom teeth.
 4. Be careful not to roll too much lip over the teeth.
- C. Pull lower jaw back to increase the overbite.
- D. Place reed in mouth; Top lip should be about an 1/8 of an inch from first wire.
- E. Place lips on reed; slight, but equal pressure from all directions

V Producing the First Tones

- A. Form embouchure
- B. Breathe correctly
- C. Crow Reed, Air/Embouchure Balance
1. The crow is sound made when all the pitches are produced simultaneously.
 2. **Requires a very loose embouchure and an open throat.**
 3. If a single pitch is sounded, embouchure is too tight.
 4. Takes practice to produce a crow; many students cannot do this at first.
 5. Good practice for correct “feel” of embouchure.
- D. **Reed on bocal, bocal not on bassoon, should produce a flattened C**
1. If pitch higher than a C, embouchure is too tight.

VI Producing the First Scale

- A. Start student with open F2; add a finger to produce E, then D and C.
- B. Produce F scale, Descending, with B Natural, add Bb fingering a few minutes later.
- C. Tongue open F2; **Ask student if touching the Reed with Tongue**
1. Tongue placement; **Tip to Tip**
 2. Tongue Movement; **Up and Down**; only the tip of the tongue should move.
 3. Touch Reed with as much force as necessary for articulation, not too hard.
- D. Usually only three reasons why notes do not respond for beginning bassoon students:
1. Fingers; incorrect fingering or not covering the finger holes.
There is a wide spread between the second and third fingers of both hands.
 2. Embouchure; usually too tight.
 3. Reed Opening; usually too close, open with pliers on sides of reed at first wire.
- E. Produce B using the C fingering. (Bocal now on bassoon)
1. Finger C in staff, slowly drop jaw to lower pitch a half step to B Natural.
 2. Drive pitch back up to C natural with the air support.
 3. Good practice for correct embouchure/ air support balance.
- F. Possible outcomes
1. Student cannot produce E natural with I in LH, Eb is produced;
not a problem at this time
 2. Student cannot crow; not a problem at this time
 3. Student produces a rakes tone quality; not a problem at this time
 4. Student cannot produce a Low F1; not a problem at this time
 5. Students are usually flat at this time; if playing consistently sharp,
go back and keep working with bocal alone.
 6. Student produces small, pinches sound, work with bocal alone,
B with C fingering exercise

Part 3: Sustaining Bassoonists

I. After the First Lesson

- A. Stress Fundamentals.
 - 1. Correct breathing.
 - 2. Good posture.
 - 3. Correct rhythm.
 - 4. Keep reviewing Crowing, and Reed with Bocal exercises.
- B. Stress air support and loose embouchure.
 - 1. Bassoon is a **Wind** Instrument.
Air/Embouchure Balance; Bassoon can be played with a tight embouchure and very little breath support, but the sound is inferior.
- C. Stress peculiarities of the bassoon, "The Five idiosyncrasies of the bassoon"
 - 1. Whisper key
 - a. Opposite of an octave key, used in low register
 - b. Used from low F to Middle G#
 - 2. Half-hole technique
 - a. Tone hole under first finger of left hand is partially closed
 - b. Used on all notes in middle octave beginning with letter G (G, Gb, G#)
 - c. Always close whisper key when used half-hole, this is because half-hole is another octave key.
 - 3. Flicking or venting
 - a. To help the response of slurred leaps.
 - b. For the following middle range notes: A2, Bb3, B3, C3, D3
 - 4. Right thumb is not a balance point.
 - 5. Extension Fingerings
 - a. The opening or closing of keys on the extension far from the first open tone hole.
 - b. These keys are essential to the tone color and intonation of these notes. For example, the addition of the Low D key to the C#2 fingering.
- D. Stress Intonation.
- E. Play duets with student.
 - 1. Any instrument will do.
 - a. Playing duets encourages student.
 - b. Duets help develop good intonation.
 - c. Duets help develop good rhythm.
 - 2. Use duets in Weissenborn or Rubank Trombone Duets
- F. Encourage students to learn fingerings from
Low Bb to High Bb, A three-octave range.
- G. Develop the air release
 - 1. In general, double reed players use air release, single reed players a stopped release.

II Suggestions to Keep Bassoonists Progressing

- A. Suggest solos and ensembles.
 - 1. This is the key to keeping the student interested.
 - 2. As soon as possible, place in a trio or quartet.
- B. Suggest recordings of bassoonists to student.
- C. Play with Smart Music or Music Minus One records.
- D. Take private lessons.

1. Offer private lesson scholarships to student bassoonists.
- E. Use Peer Tutors.
 1. An older more experienced student can be a big help to a beginning bassoonist.
 2. The older student can play duets with the younger student.
- F. Have a beginning bassoonist "sit in" with a beginning band method class if the student has a study hall during that time.
- G. Perform a band or orchestra piece which contains a bassoon solo.
- H. Play duets with student.
- I. Stress work on scales.
 1. Scales are tools of the trade.
 2. Student should learn all 12 major scales as soon as possible.

III What Student Bassoonists Can Do During the Summer

- A. Start a small ensemble that meets in the summer.
- B. Bassoon student can play duets with an oboe student.
 1. For example, 40 Progressive Melodies in the Barret Oboe Method.
- C. Attend summer camp.
- D. Work on All-State audition music.
- E. Work on scales.

IV Why Student Bassoonists Quit

- A. Lack of Progress
- B. The student who transfers from another instrument is a stronger musician than he/she is a bassoonist. There is a need to make music as soon as possible or student will get frustrated.
- C. Student gets frustrated with reeds.
- D. Student gets frustrated with fingerings.
- E. Student gets frustrated with band bassoon parts.
 1. Again, small ensembles important.
- G. Expense
 1. Reeds can be costly if too many are broken
 2. A bassoon can be a large investment of a quality instrument is not available from the school

Addresses

Fox Products Corp.
 P.O. Box 346
 South Whitley, IN 46787-0347
www.foxproducts.com

Charles Double Reed Co.
 P.O. Box 2610
 Conway, NH 03818
www.charlesmusic.com

Ann Hodge Double Reed Supplies
 10823 Boysenberry Court
 Waldorf, MD 20603
www.annhodge.com