

DOUBLE TALK:

OBOE AND BASSOON FUNDAMENTALS TO IMPROVE RESPONSE,
INTONATION, AND TONE

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Double Reed Challenges

- Isolating
- Fewer teachers
- Reeds
- Equipment uncertainty
- Not a marching instrument

Reeds

- Determine everything!
- There is no perfect reed
- Avoid mass produced reeds—handmade reeds are the way to go
- Normal for reeds to need adjustments
- Students should always have 3-5 in playing condition

Response

- Great responses are hard to make on double reeds
- Non-muting embouchure ideal
 - Round, whistle shape
 - Corners of mouth forward, chin flat
 - Space between teeth
- Preparation is key!
 - Out, In, Set, Play
- Supported air essential
 - "It's how firmly you hold the wind, not how hard you blow."
—John Mack
- Fast air needed
- Consider reed needs
- Low register entrances:
 - Voice low
 - Don't pinch reed
 - Go further out on reed
- Oboists—make sure instrument is in adjustment

Oboe Reeds

- Should crow a "C"
- Reeds should be broken in and scraped to adjust
- Thickness of tip and opening impact our ability to play with good response, intonation and tone
- Tests for entrances:
 - Reed alone—>weak air to strong air
 - On oboe: high C, Low D
 - Use aspirated air for each test

Bassoon Reeds

- Have wires you can use to adjust
- Squeezing first wire from the sides:
 - Lowers pitch
 - Increases resistance
 - Makes it easier to play loudly and low
- Squeezing first wire from top and bottom:
 - Raises pitch
 - Decreases resistance
 - Makes it easier to play softly and high



"Music's effects are magical, but it's not magic to create those effects."
—David McGill

Intonation

- Double reeds are pitch flexible
- Intonation tendencies impacted by a host of factors
- Dynamic extremes can lead to poor intonation
 - Forte: oboists—> blow the pitch sharp, bassoonists—>often flat
 - Piano: unsupported=flat, squeezing the reed=sharp
- If students are flat:
 - Support more
 - Use faster air
 - Check the reed (is it in tune on its own?)
 - Is the embouchure engaged correctly, with good placement on reed?
 - Check voicing/how open throat is
- If students are sharp:
 - Biting?
 - Are you overloading the reed?
 - Is the reed closed, old, limited, etc.
 - Is too much reed in the mouth?
- Use drones for training tuning

Tone

- Focus the sound
- Voice to get the desired timbre
 - "ooo" over "eee"
- The reed matters
- Model playing after great musicians
- Tone is likely the first thing people notice about double reeds—it's important to always play toward your desired sound concept
- All other fundamentals (posture, support, focus, etc.) contribute to good tone
- Vibrato warms and deepens tone
 - Oboists: vibrato starts with abdominal muscles and is controlled in throat
 - Bassoons: abdominal vibrato
- Instrument material and quality can impact tone

Response, Intonation and Tone are ultimately all determined by abdominal support, use of air, focus and embouchure!

Remember

- Have instruments checked regularly by an expert
- Oboe adjustments matter!
- Establish a thoughtful warm-up routine to improve faster
- Make sure students have great models to emulate

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