

Don't Go Claricrazy!

Teaching Your Clarinet Ensemble Through
Performance of Wind Band Literature

Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic

69th Annual Conference

Friday, December 18, 2015

10:30am

McCormick Place West, Chicago, IL

Room W184



**Mevonnie Biggins, Clarinet
Music Specialist
Peachcrest Elementary
DeKalb County School District**



**John Warren
Assistant Professor of Clarinet
Kennesaw State University**

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ABOUT THE PRESENTERS

Mevonnie A. Biggins- holds a Masters in Music Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a Bachelor of Science in Music Education from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University where she excelled in clarinet performance. She has studied with Dr. John Daniels, Wallace Clark, J. David Harris, and Dr. Kenneth Long. Mrs. Biggins is currently pursuing her Artist Certificate in clarinet performance from Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA.

Mrs. Biggins has been involved in music education at the elementary and secondary level for over ten years. As a music educator for DeKalb County School District and Fulton County Schools, her bands have received numerous honors including receiving an invitation to perform at the Kennesaw Concert Band Invitational and the Historically Black College & University Band Consortium. Moreover, Mrs. Biggins received an invitation for her clarinet choir (Stone Mountain HS) to perform as a lobby group for the 2011 GMEA In-Service Conference in Savannah, GA.

As a private instructor and clarinet coach, her students have gone on to receive placement in the Georgia Music Educators Association All-State Band and various District Honor Bands, in addition to receiving partial and full scholarships to Florida A&M University, Columbus State University, Tennessee State University, Bethune-Cookman University, and numerous other institutions.

Mrs. Biggins' research interest is in clarinet pedagogy on the elementary and secondary level. She is the author *The 30 minute Clarinetist*, a series of developmental exercises and etudes for the developing clarinetist on the concepts of embouchure development, articulation and overall technique.

Mrs. Biggins has performed as a member of the clarinet section with the Cobb Wind Symphony, which has earned a fine reputation and have performed at several national conventions and conferences including the Midwest Clinic. In addition to running her private studio, she teaches general music at Peachcrest Elementary, where she serves over 300 students a week providing positive musical experiences.

John Warren- joined the Kennesaw State University faculty in 2006. After a national search, he was selected as the Professor of Clarinet in 2011. His previous University affiliations include Armstrong Atlantic State University in Savannah, Georgia, and The University of Nebraska at Omaha. He was for fifteen years the principal clarinetist of the Savannah Symphony Orchestra and prior to that position, the principal clarinetist of the Omaha Symphony. He served as principal clarinetist of the Des Moines Metro Opera for many summers prior to arriving in Atlanta. At KSU, Mr. Warren teaches studio clarinet, wind chamber music, and Woodwind Techniques.

Mr. Warren is a member of the Atlanta Opera Orchestra, the IRIS Orchestra of Memphis, TN, as well as performing frequently and recording with the Atlanta Symphony. His playing can be heard on the Telarc, Naxos, Albany, and New World labels.

He has performed as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the IRIS Orchestra, the Curtis Institute Orchestra, and the Symphonies of Savannah, Omaha, Hilton Head, and Beaufort, SC. As a recitalist and chamber musician, Mr. Warren has appeared at the Aspen Music Festival, the Evian Festival and the Highlands Chamber Music Festival. He performed the American premiere of selections from Kurt Weill's opera *Der Protagonist* in Carnegie Recital Hall. He was a featured recitalist at the International Clarinet Association's 2005 conference.

Originally, from Shreveport, Louisiana, Mr. Warren holds degrees from the University of Cincinnati College/Conservatory of Music and The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. His most influential teachers include Donald Montanaro, L. Thomas LeGrand, and Richard Waller.

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CLINIC PROGRAM

I. Opening musical selection

- a. Excerpt from "Procession of the Nobles"- Tara Winds Clarinet Choir

II. Role of the clarinet within the wind ensemble

- a. Clarinet or Clarinetto (*Italian*)
 - i. It is a miniature version of *clarino*, the Italian word for trumpet
 - ii. Johann Walther (1732) remarked that the clarinet "sounded from afar like a trumpet", hence the name "small trumpet" or *clarinetto* (Carse, pg. 148)
- b. "A leading instrument in the wind band..." –Frederick Fennell
- c. First employed by composers in the early 18th, Mozart often remarked as the clarinet being "richer and more resourceful than any other reed instrument." (Tovey, pg. 79)
- d. The role of the clarinet ensemble in the wind band is to a leading instrument in the wind band, provide lush passages that add to the thick texture of the overall wind ensemble as a smaller "trumpet section".

III. Improving clarinet fundamentals through performance

a. Tone Clarity

- i. Musical Excerpt-*"Ammerland"* by Jacob de Haan
 - 1. Discussion-Creating tone clarity within the ensemble; matching tones with pitch tendencies within the low and middle registers

b. Blend and Balance

- i. Musical Excerpt-*"Chester"* by William Schuman
 - 1. Discussion-How to blend tones to create balanced chords that move with intensity; demonstrating how to perform with expression as a group.

c. Articulation and rapid tonguing passages

- i. Musical Excerpt- *"Italian Girl in Algiers"* by Gioachino Rossini/arr. by Lucien Calliet
 - 1. Discussion-Executing scale-like rhythmic passages with precision and blend; imitating the strings when playing an orchestral transcription

d. Performing difficult technical passages

- i. Musical Excerpt- *"Ignition"* by Todd Stalter
- ii. Discussion- The clarinet section as it relates to contemporary wind band literature; creating the clarinet "voice" within the wind ensemble

e. Pitch bending and swing style

- i. Musical Excerpt- *"Blue Shades"* by Frank Ticheli
- ii. Discussion-How to REALLY "swing" notes without sounding rudimental; creating a persona that allows your clarinets to carry the melody in a style-driven selection.

IV. Develop your clarinet choir! Get them playing!

- a. Basic clarinet sectional warmup
 - i. Where the secret to developing a flawless technique lies
- b. Sample clarinet warm-up within full band

V. Breaking Bad Clarinet Sounds

- a. The most common overlooked traits when inspecting a student's setup is surprisingly the most obvious.

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- i. Mouth/Chin/Lip Thickness
 - ii. Hand Size
- VI. Conclusion/Question & Answer
 - a. "I look at my clarinet sometimes and I think, 'I wonder what's going to come out of there tonight?' You never know." -Acker Bilk

References

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BREAKING BAD CLARINET SOUNDS: REINVENTING THE CLARINET EMOUCHURE

EMBOUCHURE GRIP DEVELOPMENT

Compensation for lip/chin differences.

- Compensation for individual differences has been seldom discussed when teaching embouchure grip. The lack of this conversation attributes to the frustration of directors teaching clarinet on a “one size, fits all” approach.
- Forget about “flattening the chin”, as that approach can lead to stretching and unnecessary tension. Most times, student will just “fold” the bottom lip over to appease your raging command ☺.
- **Engage your corners.** Make the corners of your mouth K.I.S.S. (Keep them in, sealed and secure) Now, this can’t happen realistically (unless you like making fish faces), but the student will make an effort, thus flattening the chin in the process.

NOW LET’S LOOK AT SOME LIPS!



The “ideal” balanced lip size that will create the perfect formation for the “drinking a milkshake” or “balancing a pencil” strategy.



Illustration (Ann, 2011-2015)

These lips have more difficulty getting the firmness needed to support free-flowing vibrations of the reed, in addition to sealing the lips around the mouthpiece firmly, without any slack. Here are some ideas to get the perfect embouchure grip:

- **Sour Lemons.** Imagine eating the sourest lemon (or sour candy) you have ever tasted. Imagine how dry your tongue is and you want to get the “sour taste” off it. You purse your lips together to make a “smacking” sound. This will help the student exaggerate the movement of the lips and engage the corner muscles more vividly.
- **Ooooh (or Ewww).** The beauty of social media in our student’s lives are the memes (random pictures with text that provides an alternative yet funny perspective of an event or emotion) Imagine looking at one and responding with an “Ooooh” or “Ewww”. Elongate the “U” vowel, which allows the corners to automatically engage.
- **Students with an overbite.** Use “oooh” syllable to move the jaw forward in an effort to create an even profile between the upper and lower teeth. Be careful not to jut the lower jaw ahead of the upper lip.
- **Students with an under bite.** Students with a protruding lower jaw can also even their facial profile by bringing the upper teeth forward to create evenness when developing the embouchure. Using a mirror, practice with the mouthpiece/barrel combination first to find the best grip.